

Handbook 6

# People and Wetlands: The Convention on Wetlands CEPA Programme



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### **About the Convention on Wetlands**

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation to conserve and wisely use wetlands and their resources.

### **What are wetlands?**

Wetlands are areas seasonally or permanently saturated by water and encompass a variety of ecosystems. The Convention defines wetlands broadly to include lakes, rivers, deltas, tidal flats, wet grasslands, swamps, marshes, peatlands, mangroves, oases, estuaries, underground aquifers and coral reefs. It also includes human-made areas like rice paddies, reservoirs, salt pans and fishponds.

### **About the Wise Use Handbook Series**

The Convention's Wise Use Handbook Series aims to assist Contracting Parties in implementing the Convention at sub-national, national, regional and international levels. It provides actionable guidance and valuable resources for wetland wise use, management and effective policy making. The handbooks summarise key aspects of guidance adopted by Contracting Parties over the years and are available in the Convention's three official languages - English, French and Spanish.

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# About this handbook

## Overview

If you're reading this handbook, you likely already understand the essential role that wetlands play in sustaining life on Earth. Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems, offering invaluable services such as water supply and purification, flood control, food and raw materials, and climate change mitigation. Their wise use, conservation and restoration are critical for a sustainable future.

However, wetlands are disappearing and degrading at unprecedented rates, three times faster than forests – estimates suggest that about 64% of the world's wetlands might have been lost since 1900.<sup>1</sup> This alarming trend makes it urgent to conserve and wisely use these valuable ecosystems. Yet, many people still need to learn about the importance of wetlands and the need for their conservation and wise use.

This is where the Convention's CEPA Programme and your role as a CEPA practitioner become crucial. Recognising the need for strategic and targeted communication, the Convention's Contracting Parties adopted the Programme on Communication, Capacity Building, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) in 2015<sup>2</sup>. This program aims to raise awareness and mobilise action for wetland conservation.

CEPA is not a standalone initiative; instead, it complements other activities and supports conservation and wise use efforts. With a growing emphasis on a whole-of-government and society<sup>3</sup> approach to wetland conservation,

empowering a wide range of stakeholders to act is essential.

## How to make the most out of this handbook?

You are in the driver's seat to raise awareness about wetlands and the Convention, spread the word about their full range of values, and enable affirmative action for wetlands conservation and wise use. The Convention's CEPA Programme will equip you with tools to communicate effectively, raise awareness and foster engagement.

CEPA processes and activities involve many stakeholders from multiple sectors. These stakeholders and sectors often hold diverse views on what wetlands are and how these ecosystems should be conserved and managed. Think of yourself as a spokesperson, a communicator, or an advocate for wetlands, and an enabler for wetlands conservation and wise use, and of CEPA as your toolbox to convey your message.

This handbook is your blueprint for navigating and implementing the Convention's CEPA Programme. It summarises guidance adopted by Contracting Parties and includes examples of successful CEPA activities. You can help disseminate its contents within your country – beyond the usual environment and water sectors – to anyone interested in or impacting the wise use and conservation of wetlands.

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- 1 Davidson, Nick. (2014). How much wetland has the world lost? Long-term and recent trends in global wetland area. *Marine and Freshwater Research*. 65. 936-941. 10.1071/MF14173. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266388496\\_How\\_much\\_wetland\\_has\\_the\\_world\\_lost\\_Long-term\\_and\\_recent\\_trends\\_in\\_global\\_wetland\\_area](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266388496_How_much_wetland_has_the_world_lost_Long-term_and_recent_trends_in_global_wetland_area).
  - 2 Contracting Parties adopted the Programme through [Resolution XII.9, The Ramsar Convention's Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness \(CEPA\) 2016-2024](#). Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-xii9-ramsar-conventions-programme-communication-capacity-building-education>.
  - 3 Whole-of-society refers to an ideal state in which nature and biodiversity conservation are supported and actively embraced by all sectors and groups across society. See [https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/\\_eng\\_multistakeholderprocesses\\_wwfdiscussionpaper.pdf](https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/_eng_multistakeholderprocesses_wwfdiscussionpaper.pdf).

## Is this handbook for me?

This handbook is for anyone seeking to implement the CEPA Programme at the subnational, national and international levels. You don't need to be an expert or an academic to get the most out of it. Whether you are new to CEPA, experienced in CEPA matters – looking for guidance on specific issues or case studies – or want to make a difference, this handbook is for you.

This handbook is structured into four sections:

**Part one** provides a list of CEPA-related key terms and definitions.

**Part two** provides an overview of the Convention's CEPA Programme, including background, strategic areas, key implementers (including practitioners), roles and alignment of CEPA with other Convention processes.

**Part three** showcases CEPA in action, including select examples of World Wetlands Day events and information about CEPA action plans and networks.

**Part four** rounds things up with an overview of where to find relevant CEPA guidance and important resources.

# A common CEPA language

Before delving into the CEPA Programme, it is essential to have a common vocabulary and understanding of the definitions and principles underpinning it. The following terms have been drawn from a selection of authoritative sources and field practitioners and are the programme's official terms.

We will define CEPA in terms of various processes for specific purposes and specific audiences.

## Key definitions

**Communication** is the exchange of information, knowledge and skills about the conservation and wise use of wetlands to facilitate informed decisions.

**Capacity building** is the organisation and enhancement of resources, systems and knowledge to strengthen a person's or an organisation's skill or ability.<sup>4</sup>

**Education** is the learning process – in formal and informal settings – that supports wetland conservation by fostering operational, institutional and lifestyle changes.

**Training** is the development of a person's knowledge, abilities, skills, behaviours and attitudes for the workplace or beyond in formal and informal settings.

**Participation** is the engagement of stakeholders in developing, implementing and evaluating

strategies and actions to use and conserve wetlands wisely.

**Awareness raising** is bringing the importance of wetland issues to the attention of stakeholders through agenda-setting and advocacy to encourage action.<sup>5</sup>

**Stakeholder:** is any individual, group, or community either affected by the site or capable of influencing its management, especially those who rely on the site for their livelihood.<sup>6</sup>

**Ecological character** is the ecosystem components, processes, and services that define the wetland at a specific point in time.<sup>7</sup>

**Wise use** is the maintenance of a wetland's ecological character through ecosystem-based approaches within the sustainable development context.<sup>8</sup>

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4 OECD (2006). *DAC Guidelines and Reference Series Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment: Good Practice Guidance for Development Co-operation*. OECD: Paris.

5 Based on Richard Sayers (2006). *Principles of awareness-raising: Information literacy, a case study*. UNESCO: Bangkok. ISBN 92-9223-082-4. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001476/147637e.pdf>.

6 Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (2010). *Managing wetlands: Frameworks for managing Wetlands of International Importance and other wetland sites*. Ramsar handbooks for the wise use of wetlands, 4th edition, vol. 18. Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, Gland, Switzerland. Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/handbook-18-managing-wetlands>.

7 Resolution IX.1, Annex A. *A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character* (2005). Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-ix1-annex-conceptual-framework-wise-use-wetlands-maintenance-their-ecological>.

8 *Idem*.

## Principles underpinning the CEPA Programme

The principles below, derived from the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) *CEPA Toolkit for CBD National Focal Points*,<sup>9</sup> can assist you in developing your CEPA-related activities, strategies and policies. They are not meant to be exhaustive, and you can use them as a guide and adapt them depending on your needs and context.

### Communication principles

**Know your audience** and target your message's content, tone and style accordingly. This is significant for developing trust and mutual respect, which is paramount for effective communication. You would not speak to a student, a policy maker or a wetland site manager in the same way.

**Use clear and straightforward language.** Avoid jargon and buzzwords unless the context and your audience require it.

**Keep it short.** Less is often more. Communicate a little at a time.

**Shake things up.** Each audience has its own needs. Present information differently and use various communication techniques.

**Do your homework.** In addition to knowing your audience, you should know your subject matter and the purpose behind your message. Be prepared to back it up with facts or stories instead of opinions.

**Be a good listener.** Listen to the message rather than your assumptions. Personal ideas and opinions can be a significant barrier to communication.

**Focus on the receiver.** The meaning of the message is in the receiver of the message, not in the sender.

### **Learn to give and receive feedback.**

Giving and receiving feedback is an important component of effective communication. Develop practical and useful ways to get feedback, including careful listening.

**Be patient.** Implementing and disseminating new ideas is a time- and effort-consuming process.

### Capacity building and education

**Do not force it.** Capacity building is an internal process. You should not impose it on others.

**Be patient.** Adults are more likely to reject information that contradicts their life experiences or beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

**Use different techniques for different needs.** Everyone learns in their own way. Effective capacity building requires different strategies, methods and techniques to serve diverse needs.

**Foster a conducive learning environment.** Your learning environment can significantly impact capacity development. For example, include a variety of inclusive and interactive activities to create a stimulating learning environment.

**Think big.** People need to understand the big picture to recognise the value of information.

**Create connections.** Capacity building is more effective if you connect new information to existing knowledge.

**Focus on the feedback.** Participants' feedback is important to build capacity effectively.

9 Frits, Hesselink, Wendy Goldstein, Peter Paul van Kempen, Tommy Garnett and Jinie Dela. *Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA). A toolkit for National Focal Points and NBSAP coordinators (2007)*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and IUCN: Montreal, Canada. Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/cepa-toolkit-national-focal-points-nbsap-coordinators>.

10 Sayers, 2006.



## Participation

**Enhance or improve systems.** Create or enhance legal, policy and institutional systems at all levels, as appropriate, to foster stakeholder engagement in decision-making for the wise use and conservation of wetlands.

**Recognise the importance of stakeholder participation.** Human and wetland well-being go hand in hand with the wise use of wetlands; stakeholder participation is vital to achieving this.

**Integrate Indigenous Peoples and local communities.** The participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities with a cultural, spiritual, historical and/or economic interest in wetlands is integral to developing sustainable management systems.

**Include traditional knowledge in wetland management.** Traditional knowledge and experience of wetland systems should assist in the management of wetlands and complement scientific knowledge.

**Participation is the core.** Participation supports building awareness, knowledge and management skills over time.

## Awareness-raising

**Do more than just inform.** Raising awareness about wetland issues or challenges addresses people's core beliefs and convictions. Merely telling them about something is not enough.

**Keep your target group specific.** More focus often has a more significant impact.

**Create or find incentives.** Awareness-raising alone does not necessarily lead to action. Long-lasting change requires skills and incentives.

**Plan, evaluate and facilitate.** Continued planning, monitoring, evaluation and facilitation are necessary to move from raising awareness to encouraging action.

**Follow these seven steps** to progress from raising awareness to acting for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands:

- Knowledge: your target group knows there is an issue
- Desire: your target group imagines and desires a different future
- Skills: your target group knows what to do to achieve that future
- Optimism: your target group has confidence or belief in success
- Facilitation: your target group has the resources and supportive infrastructure to act
- Stimulation: your target group receives compelling stimuli that promote action
- Reinforcement: your target group receives messages that reinforce the original message or messages regularly.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Robinson (1998), cited in Sayers (2006).



# The CEPA Programme

## Background

CEPA is embedded in all Convention activities, reinforcing the mission and the three pillars that guide the Parties' primary commitments: conserving and wisely using all wetlands, designating and managing at least one Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site), and fostering international cooperation on transboundary and shared wetlands and species.

Since 1999, Contracting Parties have recognised the importance of CEPA for the wise use and conservation of wetlands and implementation of the Convention at every level (site, local and national), and it has adopted four programmes through Resolutions.<sup>12</sup>

The Convention's CEPA Programme is meant to complement existing activities, including wetland management and monitoring, and be

implemented in sync with them. The latest CEPA Programme, which includes nine goals and 43 targets, runs for nine years and aligns with the Convention's Fourth Strategic Plan.

Recognising CEPA's cross-cutting nature and lessons learned from past programmes, the Convention encourages a strategic and holistic approach to bringing CEPA alive,<sup>13</sup> calling for closer alignment with the Convention's core activities to better deliver its mission and goals.

In summary, CEPA should be strategic and complementary to ongoing initiatives. This approach guides the Convention's CEPA activities, and you should consider it when developing or enhancing your country's CEPA plan.

## A strategic and streamlined approach

The Convention's approach to CEPA is designed to be strategic, streamlined, and fully integrated into activities of the Convention at all levels – from site-based actions to national and sub-national initiatives.<sup>14</sup> The following characteristics guide the CEPA approach and apply at the national and sub-national levels:

### Focus on high-priority activities

- Concentrate on a smaller number of high-priority activities directly linked to the Strategic Plan.

### Make CEPA more strategic, integrated and effective

- Identify and implement CEPA activities that support the delivery of the Strategic Plan.
- Integrate CEPA activities into site-level, local, national, and international Convention planning and initiatives, as appropriate. At the site level, CEPA is a vital tool that should be embedded throughout the entire management planning and monitoring processes, with mechanisms in place to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation in wetland management.

<sup>12</sup> See Resolutions VII.9 (1999), VIII.31 (2002), X.8 (2008).

<sup>13</sup> As adopted in Resolution XIV.8, *The new CEPA approach* (2022). Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-xiv8-new-cepa-approach>.

<sup>14</sup> In 2022 (COP15), Contracting Parties adopted guidance through Resolution XIV:8, which is the blueprint for the Convention's new CEPA approach. The guidance presented in this Handbook is based on this new approach.

## Support National Focal Points and build partnerships

- Inform and empower National Focal Points (NFPs) and CEPA NFPs to guarantee a coordinated national approach.
- Recognise CEPA NFPs as key implementers, providing them with the necessary tools and training.
- Encourage Contracting Parties with similar CEPA needs to collaborate on activities, share experiences and develop joint communication materials.
- Promote coordination between CEPA NFPs of the Convention and of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
- Increase engagement with other sectors, consistent with priorities identified in the Strategic Plan at the national level. Adapt messaging to emphasise themes that matter to the target audience.
- Build, through the Secretariat, international networks and partnerships with other MEAs to identify and share complementary CEPA activities, tools, resources and best practices.

- Encourage Contracting Parties to engage with other sectors in alignment with the Strategic Plan's priorities.
- Tailor messaging to resonate with target audiences.

## Strategic support by the Secretariat

- Provide advice and information to Contracting Parties, including introduction materials for new CEPA government and non-government (NGO) NFPs, and share successful examples from other countries.
- Offer learning opportunities about CEPA tools through meetings, such as Conference of the Contracting Parties (COPs) or regional gatherings and online resources.

## Efficient governance of global CEPA work

- Clearly define mandatory and voluntary tasks for the Convention's CEPA working groups.
- Establish a clear modus operandi for these groups to effectively improve workload distribution and engage more Contracting Parties.

## CEPA implementers and stakeholders

Wetlands have a wide range of stakeholders whose actions can significantly influence their conservation. CEPA serves as a tool to empower these stakeholders – through targeted interventions – to adopt positive behaviours that promote wetland conservation and wise use. Additionally, various individuals, bodies, and partners at site-level, regional, national, and international levels play key roles in effectively delivering the CEPA Programme, ensuring its goals reach and engage all relevant stakeholders.

The CEPA Programme's implementers may include:

### Regional level

- Ramsar Regional Initiatives and Centres endorsed by the Convention

### National level

- The Administrative Authority in each country
- The Convention's CEPA government and NGO NFPs
- National wetlands committees (or equivalent bodies), where they exist
- Wetland education centres



## International level

- The Convention's Secretariat
- The Convention's CEPA Oversight Panel
- The Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its CEPA Expert, and its network of STRP National Focal Points
- International Organisation Partners (IOPs) of the Convention, including BirdLife International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Water

Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)

Regardless of your background or role, you can make a difference. Know who the key implementers (including practitioners) are at every level and their roles in the context of the Convention. This will allow you to determine how you can best help deliver the CEPA programme in your country.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Who are the CEPA National Focal Points (NFPs)?

Contracting Parties to the Convention are asked to nominate a CEPA government NFP and an NGO NFP. Ideally, these NFPs are communication, education, participation and awareness experts within governments and NGOs. Nominating both CEPA NFPs ensures the inclusion of a broad range of skills and views necessary to implement CEPA effectively.

CEPA government NFPs are individuals that the Administrative Authority appoints either from within the government or outside of it.

CEPA NGO NFPs serve as representatives from the NGO sector, ideally from engaged organisations. They involve the wider NGO community in the CEPA Programme. These individuals are generally highly active and frequently contribute additional resources to the Programme.

CEPA government and NGO NFPs should communicate and collaborate regularly to maximise efforts and ensure the streamlined and efficient implementation of the CEPA Programme.

### What are my responsibilities as a CEPA NFP?

As a CEPA NFP, you are a key implementer of the CEPA Programme. Think of yourself as a liaison between the Convention (international level) and your country (national level) on CEPA matters, and as a spokesperson for wetland wise use, conservation and the Convention.

While each Contracting Party is responsible for precisely defining the role of CEPA NFPs, the Convention suggests roles and responsibilities for government and NGO NFPs.<sup>15</sup> These can serve as a starting point.

To facilitate the work of wetland CEPA planners and practitioners, you should, as a CEPA NFP:

- **Lead:** spearhead the development and implementation of a wetland CEPA Action Plan at an appropriate level (national, sub-national, local)
- **Liaise:** be the primary contact point on CEPA matters between the Secretariat and the Contracting Party, and NGOs, and between Contracting Parties

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<sup>15</sup> See Resolution XII.9.

- Participate: be a key member of your country's national wetland committee (if one exists) or a similar body<sup>16</sup>
- Roll up your sleeves: help with practical CEPA implementation within your country, including World Wetlands Day activities, CEPA Action Plans, etc.
- Report: assist the Administrative Authority with national reporting on CEPA activities to the COP (every three years)
- Wave the wetland flag: help raise the profile for the Convention and its conservation and wise use goals
- Speak up: be an active spokesperson for wetland CEPA
- Network, network, network: establish and maintain the contacts, networks, structures and mechanisms needed for effective communication among all relevant actors across all levels and sectors
- Inspire: motivate others (especially younger generations) to get involved through your actions.

Above all, remember that as a CEPA NFP, your actions matter and can have a profound and lasting impact on wetland conservation and the legacy of the Convention's CEPA Programme.

### The Philippines experience: together is better

The Philippines' experience provides a good example of synergy and collaboration between the government and NGO NFPs – and a glimpse of what the job entails.

Being a CEPA government NFP in the Philippines involves using skills to protect wetlands, building networks nationally and internationally, making connections, and enjoying conserving these vital ecosystems.

Working within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB), the government agency responsible for the conservation, management, development and use of the country's environment and natural resources, government CEPA NFPs have diverse responsibilities which reflect the variety of wetland ecosystems they aim to protect.

These responsibilities include collaborating with NGOs on CEPA-related activities such as World Wetlands Day events, conducting Rapid Assessments of Wetland Ecosystem Services (RAWES), engaging in public speaking, and coordinating with NGO CEPA and regional focal points on wetland conservation issues. The CEPA Gov't and NGO NFPs regularly meet to ensure that their priorities and activities are aligned to save on resources and reach a wider audience.

According to the government NFP, the role is "all about being adventurous and creative, listening to and learning from others' stories, and enjoying the CEPA journey."

The role of the NGO NFPs includes drafting position papers for Convention-related meetings, coordinating World Wetlands Day activities with local communities and organisations, and fostering partnerships to support CEPA activities. Raising awareness of wetland issues, particularly water security, and engaging with local communities, including youth, are also key aspects of their work.

Though often unnoticed, the work of CEPA NFPs is extremely valuable. Their efforts in raising awareness and advocating for the wise use and conservation of wetlands are crucial to fulfilling the Convention's mission. By fostering a deeper understanding of wetland ecosystems, CEPA NFPs play an indispensable role in ensuring the protection of these ecosystems for future generations.

16 For information about the diversity and benefits of national wetland committees, read this practical publication by the Secretariat: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/national-ramsarwetlands-committees-across-six-ramsar-regions>.

## Possible target groups and stakeholders of CEPA

Building on the idea that wetlands stakeholders hold the power to influence conservation outcomes, the CEPA Programme is designed to cultivate ambassadors for the Convention on Wetlands and its values by empowering these key stakeholders. Engaging them meaningfully can create a ripple effect, expanding the Programme's reach and impact. Supporting CEPA is a long-term investment to involve decision-makers and mobilise local and national efforts for the wise use and conservation of wetlands.

Due to CEPA's cross-cutting nature, a wide range of stakeholders exists. Understanding who they are is critical to ensuring that CEPA-related activities are impactful and resonate with those involved. Contracting Parties have highlighted key civil society groups that play a vital role in wetland conservation and wise use. While this list is not exhaustive, it provides a starting point for identifying priority target groups when developing CEPA strategies and actions.

### Civil Society

- Children, youth
- Women, Indigenous communities
- Landowners
- Wetland and Ramsar Site managers (or those responsible for their management)
- National and local NGOs
- Media outlets
- Community leaders and high-profile individuals

### Government at all levels

- Members of parliament (or equivalent body)
- The Convention's national Administrative Authority
- Environment, sustainable development and education ministers

- Ministers responsible for environmental conventions
- National Administrative Authorities and focal points of other environmental conventions
- Environmental policymakers and planners
- National wetland committees (or similar bodies)
- Wetland site managers
- National aid agencies and bilateral donors
- Ambassadors and overseas mission staff

### Education sector and learning institutions

- Education ministries, curriculum development authorities, university and examination boards
- Teachers' associations
- Environmental education councils, associations and networks
- Wetland/ environment education centres, aquaria, botanic gardens and zoos
- Library networks

### Businesses

- Potential donors and supporters
- Key business sectors (for example, water, sanitation, water supply, mining, forestry, fishing, tourism, waste disposal and energy, etc.)
- Professional associations

### International and regional organisations

- Intergovernmental organisations
- International Organisation Partners of the Convention and other international and regional NGOs
- The Secretariats of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements
- Regional organisations

## CEPA and other Convention bodies and processes

Recognising the importance of CEPA in delivering the Convention, Contracting Parties recommend integrating CEPA processes into all areas of implementation and levels of policy development and planning. CEPA does not exist in a vacuum and must be considered by other Convention bodies and processes, such as the work of the Secretariat, STRP, Wetland City Accreditation's Independent Advisory Committee and the Youth Working Group.

### ***Standing Committee***

The Standing Committee established the CEPA Oversight Panel in 2006. The Panel reports annually to the Standing Committee, and the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee serves as the CEPA Oversight Panel Chair.

### ***Secretariat***

The Secretariat supports Contracting Parties on CEPA implementation matters. It is the daily contact point for CEPA NFPs and delivers CEPA-related information, training materials, examples, and learning and networking opportunities.

### ***Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)***

The STRP's work should be developed in alignment with the CEPA programme. Its outputs should be targeted to the appropriate audiences and include CEPA inputs. To ensure this, the Secretariat provides CEPA expertise to any guidance and materials developed by the STRP. Additionally, a member of the STRP is a member of the CEPA Oversight Panel to ensure coordination between the activities of the two bodies.

### ***Wetland City Accreditation Independent Advisory Committee***

The Independent Advisory Committee, responsible for administering and implementing the Convention's Wetland City Accreditation scheme, includes a representative of the CEPA Oversight Panel. The STRP and the CEPA Oversight Panel should cooperate with the Wetland City Network and seek opportunities to raise awareness about wetlands, the Convention and its mission.

### ***Youth Working Group***

As part of the Convention's efforts to engage and maintain youth participation in its work, the Parties created a Youth Working Group, with a member invited to join the CEPA Oversight Panel.

### ***Gender and Wetlands***

The Convention is dedicated to integrating gender issues into wetland conservation, promoting gender equality and empowering women through its implementation efforts. Contracting Parties have encouraged the Secretariat to actively support incorporating a gender perspective in the CEPA Programme.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Wetland management***

Integrating CEPA into wetland management plans can help raise awareness of wetland values, build public support and foster ownership. The Convention offers guidance on incorporating CEPA into management planning processes.<sup>18</sup>

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17 See Resolution XIII.18, Gender and wetlands (2018). Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-xiii18-gender-wetlands>

18 See: The Ramsar Sites Management Toolkit. Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/resources/capacity-building/ramsar-sites-management-toolkit>.



### ***CEPA Oversight Panel***

The CEPA Oversight Panel is an advisory body that monitors the Convention's CEPA work at the international level. Contracting Parties created this body<sup>19</sup> to ensure a more streamlined approach to CEPA.<sup>20</sup> It sets the CEPA priorities and reports on the implementation of the CEPA Programme.

What you need to know about the CEPA Oversight Panel:

The CEPA Oversight Panel is responsible for:

- Delivering results from CEPA requests in Resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the Strategic Plan
- Examining CEPA needs and gaps in implementation to identify CEPA activities to be integrated into the Strategic Plan
- Monitoring and reporting on CEPA issues and the progress of implementing current CEPA Priorities, especially CEPA activities included in the Strategic Plan and Resolutions

- Advising the Standing Committee and the Secretariat on CEPA work priorities at the national and international levels, including the CEPA priorities of STRP
- Liaising with other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to improve CEPA synergies among Conventions

The Oversight Panel includes 10 to 15 members with diverse expertise and balanced regional representation appointed for a three-year term within a triennium. The Panel includes at least one CEPA NGO NFP, one CEPA government NFP, an IOP representative, a youth representative and a member of an Indigenous community. A Standing Committee member from each region and an STRP representative also serve on the Panel.

The CEPA Oversight Panel is significant because it ensures an efficient and streamlined implementation of the CEPA Programme. It provides an accountability mechanism for Contracting Parties (including yourself) on how activities are being implemented.

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19 See Resolution IX.18 (2005). Available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/resolution-ix18-establishment-oversight-panel-cepa-activities-convention>.

20 They updated the Panel's terms of reference in 2022 and will do it again at COP15 (2025). See Resolution XIV.8.





# CEPA in action

So far, we have delved into the CEPA programme, its key implementers and stakeholders, and its vital role within the Convention's framework. But what does CEPA look like in practice, and how can you effectively bring it to life?

This section explores World Wetlands Day, the most significant and impactful manifestation of CEPA in action. We also examine the significance of CEPA Action Plans, which are instrumental in mobilising global efforts for wetland conservation and sustainable use, and the importance of integrating CEPA into wetland management plans and monitoring. Through these initiatives, we see how the principles of CEPA are translated into tangible actions, engaging communities, influencing decision-makers and fostering a global network of wetland advocates.

## World Wetlands Day

World Wetlands Day commemorates the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran. Each year, on 2 February, governments, NGOs and local groups worldwide celebrate World Wetlands Day to highlight the importance of wetlands and raise awareness about the Convention.

In 2021, the United Nations (UN) declared World Wetlands Day a UN International Day. This expanded the number of countries and organisations invited to observe and raise awareness about wetlands to include all UN Member States, organisations of the United Nations system, and other global, regional and sub-regional organisations, including civil society, national and international NGOs, and individuals.

There are over 1,000 events each year. You can find the events (by region and country) and reports on the World Wetlands Day website.<sup>21</sup> Activities range from lectures, seminars, nature walks and children's art contests to community clean-up days, media interviews, and launching new wetland policies and Ramsar Sites.

The Secretariat of the Convention provides event organisers with materials, including social media cards, logos, infographics, posters, toolkits, videos and PowerPoint presentations featuring a different wetland theme each year. The Convention encourages organisers to customise and translate these materials into local languages.

You can join the celebration by disseminating materials, participating in or organising an event, and submitting a wetland pledge (to the wall of pledges)<sup>22</sup> and photos of your wetlands.

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<sup>21</sup> *World Wetlands Day*, The Convention on Wetlands: <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/events>.

<sup>22</sup> The Wall of Pledges is available at: <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/pledges>.

## Key examples

### A country-wide celebration: World Wetlands Day in France (2023)

Showing that it is more than just a date on the international community's calendar, France takes the meaning of World Wetlands Day to a whole new level. They celebrate for an entire month – from the end of January through the end of February – holding a range of activities and events organised by associations (including hunting and fishing federations), wetland and natural area managers, and local authorities.

While most of the activities are aimed at the public, there are also events for schoolchildren and local elected officials, like the 2023 wetland awareness-raising and training day for local councillors in the Livradois-Forez Regional Nature Park.

After concerted efforts by a diverse group of actors at national and local levels for more than a decade, France reported that in 2023, over 900 events were held across 95 French departments and overseas communities, organised by 350 different groups, reaching more than 37,000 people.

### When NGOs come together for Wetlands: World Wetlands Day in the Mediterranean

What happens when CEPA National Focal Points, Ramsar Site Managers and over 400 NGOs join forces to celebrate World Wetlands Day in the Mediterranean? The result is impressive: over 1,400 events organised by more than 700 groups, reaching over 62,000 people.

However, the significance of the Mediterranean Region's 2024 World Wetlands Day experience, as MedWet – a Ramsar Regional Initiative – reported, goes beyond these numbers. It highlights the far-reaching impact that collaboration can have when key players come together to drive and implement CEPA activities.

Some of the events for 2024 included classroom activities for high school students, translation of WWD's material into Arabic, educational visits and outdoor activities. On the day, MedWet launched the #Wetlandforhumans social media campaign, inviting people to express their feelings about wetlands through images and words. The goal was to capture people's connection to wetlands.

## CEPA Action Plans

CEPA Action Plans are strategic frameworks that promote CEPA activities for the wise use and conservation of wetlands. These plans are critical tools and should provide clear guidelines and objectives to empower stakeholders at all levels – from local communities and wetland managers to international bodies. These instruments can be site-specific, local or national in scope.

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for CEPA Action Plans. Their structure and approach depend on the legal, social, political and economic conditions of each Contracting Party. Several Contracting Parties have developed Plans, which are available on the CEPA Resources webpage.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *CEPA Resources and Activities*, The Convention on Wetlands: <https://www.ramsar.org/cepa-resources-activities>.



Some of these Action Plans, like France's, include CEPA activities ranging from the national to the sub-basin levels, and others, like Mexico's, promote the participation of Indigenous Communities to foster and preserve traditional knowledge for wetland use and conservation.

CEPA Action Plans should be aligned with broader policy instruments and mainstreamed into relevant programmes. By outlining specific actions and setting measurable goals, they help mobilise resources, coordinate efforts and track progress in wetland management.

Participatory planning should be at the core of effective CEPA Action Plans. This involves collaborating with various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, local communities, and other relevant actors. By involving these groups in the planning process, your CEPA initiatives will consider diverse perspectives, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among participants. These plans should also employ a range of effective techniques for facilitating what may be diverse multi-stakeholder groups.

Whether you seek to create or enhance your CEPA Action Plan, the guidance prepared for the Convention, *A Guide to Participatory Action Planning and Techniques for Facilitating Groups*, can be helpful.<sup>24</sup>

Tracking the progress of CEPA Action Plans involves regular monitoring and evaluation, using indicators to assess the impact of activities and adjust strategies as needed. This includes assessing how people appreciate wetland values, their challenges, and the steps they can take to conserve and use wetlands wisely. This dynamic, inclusive approach ensures that CEPA efforts remain relevant, effective and aligned with the overarching goals of the Convention.

## Networking for CEPA

Wetland education centres are an important element of the CEPA Programme and its networking possibilities. They are outreach hubs that promote the Convention's mission and connect people with wetlands and their wise use and conservation.

These centres vary widely in scope and sophistication, from advanced facilities designed to accommodate large numbers of visitors to modest, unstaffed sites offering intimate and impactful CEPA experiences.

The CEPA Programme highlights the global Wetland Link International (WLI) network as an important platform for these centres. WLI connects over 300 member centres, advancing the exchange of experiences, resources and innovative ideas for displays and engagement. Through its regional networks, WLI enhances the ability of wetland centres to educate and inspire communities worldwide.

## CEPA for effective wetland management

Integrating CEPA activities into wetland management plans is important for effective wetland conservation. The Convention encourages a participatory approach involving multi-stakeholder and education to raise awareness and a better understanding of wetland values. Management plans should convey site information, management goals, and processes in a structured, accessible format. CEPA components, such as community participation and education, should be included from a plan's inception to implementation and help guide public engagement. This approach helps build support for conservation involving communities, leveraging participatory techniques and integrating best practices to maintain ecological character and promote wise wetland use.

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<sup>24</sup> *A Guide to Participatory Action Planning and Techniques for Facilitating Groups* (2008), available at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/guide-participatory-action-planning-techniques-facilitating-groups>.

## Examples

### A participatory approach to site management planning

In Western Australia, the Peel-Harvey Catchment Council, in partnership with over 27 stakeholders, developed the *Wetlands and People Plan: A CEPA Action Plan for the Peel-Yalgorup System Ramsar Site*. This participatory approach actively involves government, community, and industry to conserve the Peel-Harvey Catchment's wetlands. The plan establishes a collaborative framework to protect and restore the site's ecological character, promote wise use and empower local stewards. It also includes a CEPA strategy to raise awareness of the site's international significance and support Australia's commitments to the Convention.<sup>25</sup>

### Education and knowledge-sharing for wetland management and conservation

In Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park, CEPA activities at the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Whooping Crane Summer Range Ramsar Sites use education and collaboration to enhance conservation. The annual Sweetgrass School Trip immerses local students in Indigenous culture and park ecology, building connections to conservation. The Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program combines Indigenous knowledge with scientific research to assess ecosystem health, guiding park management and emphasising cultural values and community involvement.<sup>26</sup>

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25 Peel-Harvey Catchment Council (2017). *Wetlands and People Plan: A CEPA Action Plan for the Peel-Yalgorup System Ramsar Site*. Available at: [https://peel-harvey.org.au/phcc\\_publications/ramsar/](https://peel-harvey.org.au/phcc_publications/ramsar/).

26 The Convention on Wetlands, *How CEPA activities carried out within Ramsar Sites contribute to their successful management and conservation*, <https://www.ramsar.org/news/how-cepa-activities-carried-out-within-ramsar-sites-contribute-their-successful-management>.

# Relevant guidance and resources

The Convention's CEPA webpage contains the Convention's CEPA guidance and Programmes and a wealth of resources, including action plans and guidelines, CEPA methods and educational materials from other organisations.<sup>27</sup> Whether you are looking for guidance on a specific CEPA issue, training materials or inspiration to update, enhance or create your activities, this page is a hub for the latest CEPA resources and information.

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<sup>27</sup> *CEPA Resources and Activities*, The Convention on Wetlands: <https://www.ramsar.org/cepa-resources-activities>.

# Learn more and get involved

The Secretariat publishes guidance and information to help the Contracting Parties and others manage wetlands and ensure their wise use.

The Secretariat maintains a comprehensive web site with information on wetlands, Wetlands of International Importance, and Convention processes. A series of online handbooks presents the guidelines adopted by the Conference of the Parties.

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Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands  
Rue Mauverney 28  
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland  
Tel. +41 22 999 0170  
[ramsar@ramsar.org](mailto:ramsar@ramsar.org)  
[www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)