



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS  
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES  
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES  
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)



## PRESS RELEASE

### Global actions needed to restore and protect the world's natural wetlands

*Over 800 delegates from 160 countries are meeting in Uruguay to attend the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.*

**Punta del Este, Uruguay | 2 June 2015-** The 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP12) opened today in Punta del Este to assess the progress of the Convention, consider emerging issues and decide on priority actions.

According to a Ramsar Briefing Note, prepared by the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel, coastal, marine and inland wetlands are declining fast. Approximately 40% have been degraded in just over 40 years according to the Wetland Extent Trend and this decline is continuing at an accelerated rate of 1.5% annually.

The theme for COP12 "*Wetlands for Our Future*," seeks to highlight the great value of wetlands for humanity and calls for urgent action from countries to preserve and restore wetlands. Delegates meeting in Punta del Este from 1 to 9 June 2015 will decide on priority actions that will prevent, stop and reverse the drivers of wetland loss and degradation.

The continued loss and degradation of inland and coastal wetlands is due to the increasing demand for water and land to cater for agriculture, industry and housing. For instance, large areas of mudflats are being reclaimed to create cities. Coral Reefs, often called the rainforests of the sea, are equally suffering from dredging, reclamation and overfishing. Latest estimates show that 75% of the world's coral reefs are at risk and 10 % have been damaged beyond repair.

"Uruguay is honoured to be hosting COP12. We hope this meeting will as it has in the past, be a fruitful exchange of opinions, experiences, knowledge, interests and alliances among the groups in an ambiance of relaxed comradery. We eagerly expect the contribution of all participants to contribute to improve natural resources of wetlands and the challenging task ahead to preserve them." Hon. Eneida de León, Minister of Housing, Territorial Ordinance and Environment.

Reversing the current trends will require political will from decision-makers at all levels, who need to recognize the value and benefits wetlands provide for humanity, and to demonstrate this commitment through policy and actions that promote sustainable development.

"64% of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900 and the trends point to continued decline of the world's wetlands. There is a link between declining wetlands and reduced water availability and the resulting impacts on the economy and stability of the world. The ecosystem services we get from wetlands are fundamental for life. It is therefore critical that we use wetlands in a wise manner that sustains life and meets our development goals. Therefore urgent actions that lead to restoration and preservation of wetlands are a priority." said Dr. Christopher Briggs, Secretary General Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Over 660 million people around the world depend on wetlands for fish and many more for irrigating our crops and for water and fodder. Wetlands naturally filter waste and remove harmful chemicals from water and can therefore represent a cost effective complement to built infrastructure. Coastal wetlands such as mangroves can protect coastal people from disasters, but are also home to numerous fish, during their life cycles and offer homes to other species such as birds, insects, mammals and plants with value for humanity. The continued decline of natural wetlands may mean the total extinction of species that depend on them.

The meeting comes at a historic and opportune time when the international community is mobilized and preparing for change with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals later this year in September and for a new climate change deal in Paris in December.

Member states congregating in Punta del Este have an opportunity to approve a new Strategic Plan to guide the implementation of the Convention for the next six years from 2016 to 2021, one that is relevant and offers solutions to pressing issues such as food security, water security and climate change and all of these functions will help us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Among some of the priority actions delegates will be addressing include - How to reverse the drivers of wetland loss, measures to conserve and better manage the Ramsar sites network and identifying actions that will lead to wise use of wetlands. Some of the specific actions needed to reverse current trends are- Taking account of wetlands within integrated water resources management, city planning and agricultural expansion. The Convention also seeks to gather momentum towards landscape level wetland restoration.

## **Note to editors**

### **About COP12.**

The 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP12) is being held in Punta del Este at the Conrad Resort, Uruguay, from 1 to 9 June 2015. It is the decision-making body of the Convention and meets every three years to assess the progress of the Convention, consider emerging issues and approve the Secretariat's work plan.

### **About the Ramsar Convention**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the global framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and entered into force in 1975. Since then, 168 countries, almost 90% of UN member states from the entire world's geographic regions have acceded and become Contracting Parties. The State of Kuwait will become the 169th Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands in 2015.

Under this treaty, member states undertake to protect and sustainably use all the wetlands on their territory by undertaking local measures and collaborate through international cooperation to maintain the ecological characteristics of wetlands. Each Member State upon adopting the Convention designates at least one site considered to be of high value to the country and the world because of the ecosystem services they provide. These sites are added to the network of Ramsar Sites of International Importance. Currently there are over 2100 designated Ramsar sites around the world, covering an area of 208 million hectares, an area larger than Mexico.

### **About wetlands**

The definition of the word 'wetland', under the Convention, is any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Inland wetlands include aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, peatlands, ponds, flood plains and swamps. Coastal wetlands include all coastlines, mangroves, saltmarshes, estuaries, lagoons, seagrass meadows and coral reefs.

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