



## 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

“Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future”  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 21-29 October 2018

### Resolution XIII.14

#### Promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue-carbon<sup>1</sup> ecosystems

1. RECALLING:

- a. Resolution VIII.4 on *Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)*, which urges Contracting Parties to ensure that coastal wetlands and their values and functions and their importance for the conservation of biological diversity, including their vital role in mitigating the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise, are fully recognized in their policies, planning and decision-making in the coastal zone;
- b. Resolution X.24 on *Climate change and wetlands*, which urges Contracting Parties to manage wetlands wisely to increase their resilience to climate change and take urgent action to reduce the degradation, promote restoration and improve management practice of wetland types that constitute significant greenhouse gas sinks;
- c. Resolution XI.14 on *Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, which urges Contracting Parties to maintain or improve the ecological character of wetlands to promote the ability of wetlands to contribute to nature-based climate change adaptation;
- d. Resolution XII.11 *Peatlands, Climate Change and Wise Use: Implications for the Ramsar Convention*, which recognizes the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the primary multilateral forum on addressing climate change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as the leading international body for the scientific assessment of climate change; and
- e. Resolution XII.13 on *Wetlands and disaster risk reduction*, which welcomes initiatives that support the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands and encourages engagement in such activities;

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<sup>1</sup> In this Resolution, blue carbon is defined as “The carbon captured by living organisms in coastal (e.g. mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrasses) and marine ecosystems and stored in biomass and sediments”. However, not all Contracting Parties endorse this definition or recognize the Ramsar Convention as the competent forum to address mitigation reporting and accounting arrangements.

2. RECOGNIZING:
  - a. the UNFCCC as the international environmental treaty that seeks to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system;
  - b. the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC, which aims at, among other goals, strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, including by holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;
  - c. the IPCC as the primary international body for assessing the science related to climate change, providing policy-makers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation; and NOTING that some countries are currently testing the methodology in the *2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands*; and
  - d. the IPCC as the entity that has developed internationally recognized guidelines for national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions and removals, used by Parties to the UNFCCC for national inventory reporting; and ALSO RECOGNIZING that the IPCC requires complete and coherent analysis for every sector considered in carbon capture;
3. RECOGNIZING that Contracting Parties will take action to manage the impact of climate change and its mitigation, and to support the adaptation and resilience of critically important and fragile coastal wetland ecosystems, in the context of their own national legislative and policy frameworks;
4. NOTING that the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in Resolution A/RES/71/257 on *Oceans and the law of the sea*, notes the vital role that coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, including mangroves, tidal marshes<sup>2</sup> and seagrasses<sup>3</sup>, play in climate adaptation and mitigation through carbon sequestration, and in increasing the resilience of coastal ecosystems to ocean acidification, and the range of other benefits that these ecosystems provide including sustainable livelihoods, food security and biodiversity conservation, and coastal protection, and encourages States and relevant international institutions and organizations to work collaboratively to protect and restore coastal blue-carbon ecosystems;
5. NOTING that the Ramsar Convention represents a relevant policy framework for conserving and managing coastal wetlands, including coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, and that the restoration of degraded wetlands, with priority to those relevant for climate-change mitigation and adaptation, is included within Target 12 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024;

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<sup>2</sup> UNGA Resolution A/RES/71/257 uses the term “tidal marshes”, but the UNEP Assessment Report (2009) and other scientific papers (e.g. Macleod *et al.*, 2011; see footnote 5) use “salt marshes”. The term “salt marshes” is used in the subsequent text of the present Resolution.

<sup>3</sup> Unvegetated mudflats and intertidal marshes are also important blue-carbon ecosystems. Freshwater marshes and freshwater forested wetlands are important stores of carbon but fall outside the definition of blue-carbon ecosystems.

6. NOTING that the territories of 151 countries contain at least one coastal blue-carbon ecosystem (seagrass, salt marshes or mangroves) and that 71 countries contain all three, and that many of these countries have included anthropogenic emissions and removals resulting from human impacts on coastal wetlands in the communication of their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement<sup>4</sup>; and
7. DEEPLY CONCERNED that about one-third of the area covered by mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass has already been lost over the past several decades<sup>5</sup>, and that current dredging practices, decreased input of freshwater in estuaries and deltas, as well as poor water quality and land reclamation practices, may negatively impact coastal blue-carbon ecosystems;

#### THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

8. REAFFIRMS the importance of the Ramsar Convention in the conservation and wise use of all wetlands and their resources, including coastal blue-carbon and associated ecosystems, and maintenance of their ecological character;
9. FURTHER AFFIRMS the significant value of coastal wetlands for climate-change mitigation and adaptation, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to pursue policies and projects to conserve and restore these ecosystems;
10. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with coastal blue-carbon ecosystems in their territories to identify and raise awareness of the benefits of these ecosystems and promote actions at appropriate scales and levels within their countries, especially for sustainable development and climate-change mitigation and adaptation;
11. ALSO encourages Contracting Parties with coastal blue-carbon ecosystems in their territories to collect and analyse data (including from citizen science and indigenous knowledge), map these ecosystems, and make this information publicly accessible with a view to:
  - a. updating their coastal wetland inventories and their threats;
  - b. determining the range of ecosystem services that they support;
  - c. informing international awareness of the global extent of these ecosystems, potentially through the *Global Wetland Outlook*;
  - d. estimating the carbon storage and fluxes of their coastal wetlands; and
  - e. updating their national greenhouse gas inventories to better reflect data for wetlands;

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<sup>4</sup> Herr, D. and Landis, E. (2016). *Coastal blue carbon ecosystems. Opportunities for Nationally Determined Contributions. Policy Brief*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and Washington, DC, United States of America: TNC

<sup>5</sup> Mcleod E. et al. (2011). *A blueprint for blue carbon: toward and improved understanding of the role of vegetated coastal habitats in sequestering CO<sub>2</sub>*. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 2011; 9(10): 552-560, doi:10.1890/110004

12. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with coastal blue-carbon ecosystems in their territories to:
- a. apply ecosystem-based and integrated approaches in managing their ecosystems, consistent with the *Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)* annexed to Resolution VIII.4, in order to ensure recognition of their values, functions and services, including their role in climate-change mitigation and adaptation;
  - b. promote participation, dialogue, information sharing, and collaboration in the management of these ecosystems from a range of stakeholders, including indigenous people and local communities, private sectors, national and local governments, non-governmental organizations and research institutes;
  - c. facilitate information sharing, among Ramsar Sites and other wetland sites with coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, on the values and benefits of these ecosystems, including ecological resilience, carbon sequestration and other services, and experiences in conservation, restoration and sustainable management of these ecosystems;
  - d. apply the developed or updated guidance by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) as per paragraphs 15.c and 15.d below to prioritize coastal blue-carbon ecosystems and develop and implement plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of these ecosystems, as appropriate; and
  - e. maintain and restore coastal blue-carbon ecosystems alongside coastal infrastructure to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts that detrimentally affect these ecosystems and lead to significant greenhouse gas emissions and reductions in ecosystem services;
13. REQUESTS the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources:
- a. to survey interested Contracting Parties to determine their requirements in relation to managing coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, which could include assessing ecosystem components, benefits and services (including for climate mitigation and adaptation), conservation, restoration, sustainable management, capacity-building needs, and learning from others;
  - b. based on the outcomes of the survey referred to in paragraph 13.a, to facilitate capacity building for interested Contracting Parties to:
    - i. apply the guidance under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement (including the 2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC *Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories [Wetlands Supplement]*);
    - ii. implement policies on conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems; and
    - iii. promote the establishment of regional training courses aimed at enhancing knowledge and capacities of Parties and promoting regional cooperation;
  - c. to facilitate, where identified as a priority for a Contracting Party, the use of existing Ramsar regional communication networks, and other relevant initiatives such as the

International Partnership for Blue Carbon, the International Ocean Carbon Coordination Project and Integrated Carbon Observation System, for sharing:

- i. data, toolkits and information on values and benefits of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, including carbon sequestration, climate-change adaptation and mitigation and other services; and
  - ii. information and experiences on the development of inventories of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration associated with coastal blue-carbon ecosystems;
14. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to liaise with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as appropriate, to provide relevant information produced by the STRP in relation to coastal blue-carbon ecosystems;
15. REQUESTS that the STRP, if resources are available, consistent with its scope, mandate and priority thematic work areas for 2019-2021, in developing its proposed work plan for presentation at the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee, consider continuing its work on climate change and wetlands, including coastal blue-carbon ecosystems, as a high priority, consistent with the relevant IPCC guidelines, *inter alia* by:
  - a. undertaking a desktop study of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems across the Ramsar Sites of those Contracting Parties that express their interest in participating (noting that some countries have data that are more highly publicized or accessible than others), including:
    - i. assessing the spatial extent, the ecological characteristics and condition of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems across the network of Ramsar Sites; and
    - ii. where practical, identifying coastal blue-carbon ecosystems of greatest abundance and at most risk (including from vulnerability to climate change, conversion, infrastructure development, drainage, invasive species, fire or natural disasters) in each Ramsar region;
  - b. reviewing and analysing regional modelling of carbon stocks, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics in coastal blue-carbon ecosystems and providing information, as appropriate, to the IPCC to inform future updates to the *Wetlands Supplement*;
  - c. developing guidance for prioritizing coastal blue-carbon ecosystems for conservation and restoration that includes *inter alia*: climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits; the range of other potential ecosystem benefits and services; and assessment of costs relative to benefits; and
  - d. reviewing and, as appropriate, updating existing guidance on the preparation of plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems at Ramsar Sites where such a review could include development of case studies with regional experts to illustrate how guidance has been applied;
16. INVITES interested Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners and others as appropriate to support the work of the STRP identified in paragraph 15, including through the provision of financial resources and/or in-kind technical support, capability development and information; and

17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties that are in a position to do so, to substantially increase support, including financial support, to projects and research aimed at the conservation and protection of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems.