



Convention on Wetlands  
Convention sur les zones humides  
Convención sobre los Humedales

## Harnessing Wetland Wise Use, Protection and Restoration in Delivering Climate Change Outcomes

### *Brief on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for UNFCCC COP 26*

#### **Protecting and restoring peatlands and blue carbon ecosystems presents enormous opportunities for climate change mitigation and adaptation**

Peatland and blue carbon ecosystems (intertidal marshes, mangroves and seagrass beds) are among the most valuable ecosystems. They support water quality, livelihoods, food security and coastal protection, and are essential in regulating the global climate. They also play a vital role in maintaining local climate and water cycles and reducing temperature extremes.

Peatlands cover three per cent of the planet's land surface, but store 30 per cent of land-based carbon. This is twice as much as all of the world's forests combined. Sediment carbon burial rates in coastal wetlands are up to 55 times faster than in tropical rainforests.

Loss of peatlands and coastal blue carbon ecosystems leads to loss of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration and storage, as well as emission to the atmosphere of carbon stored. An estimated 35 per cent of the world's wetland area was lost between 1970 and 2015 — three times the rate of forest loss. Blue carbon systems are being lost at an average rate of 1.5 to 2 per cent per year. Around 50 million hectares of peatlands are currently drained globally, and this is responsible for approximately four per cent of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. At least half of these should be restored by 2030 to enable global warming to remain below 1.5 to 2.0°C.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration gives impetus for scaling up restoration to help achieve emission reduction as well as adaptation targets.

#### **COP 26 is consequential for how ecosystems are used in meeting climate goals**

COP 26 delegates will discuss how to increase the extent to which the role of ecosystems and “nature-based solutions” is integrated into implementation of the Paris Agreement. A [Synthesis report](#) presents the latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of Parties to the Paris Agreement. While most NDCs cover the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector, only 21 per cent refer to wetlands in this context.

Wetland protection and restoration are relatively cost-effective strategies that can achieve concrete mitigation outcomes while delivering significant co-benefits. This outcome can be advanced by including specific wetland targets in NDCs. The [first global stocktake](#) (GST), taking place from 2021 to 2023, will be crucial to the development of the next round of more ambitious NDCs that increasingly incorporate wetland management and restoration actions.

COP 26 is expected to make significant progress on the carbon market mechanism and climate finance – both of which can support countries to increase their ambition in and implementation of NDCs. COP 26 will discuss delivery of the USD 100 billion dollar per year finance target, and may set a new target for climate finance. The UN Environment Programme [State of Finance for Nature](#) report found that annual investments in nature need to triple by 2030. COP 26 provides an opportunity to ensure adequate climate finance for protection and restoration of peatlands, blue carbon ecosystems and other wetlands.

## **Commitments and efforts under the Convention on Wetlands can be leveraged to deliver climate action**

Several resolutions adopted by the 172 parties to the Convention on Wetlands recognize the important role of wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The 4th Strategic Plan 2016 – 2024 ([Resolution XII.2](#)) identifies climate change and wetlands as a priority area of focus, to ensure that the critical importance of wetlands for climate change mitigation and adaptation is understood. [Resolution XIII.7](#) identifies actions to enhance the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements, including the Climate Change Convention.

Further to these resolutions, Parties to the Convention on Wetlands have taken a range of measures – policy, institutional, technical and financial – that can be readily built upon to address climate change.

### *Wetlands in national greenhouse gas inventories*

[Resolution XII.11](#) and [Resolution XIII.14](#), inter alia, call on parties to the Convention on Wetlands to update National Wetland Inventories (NWIs) in order to estimate carbon storage and fluxes, including emissions from organic soils and emission reductions from restoration, and to update national greenhouse gas inventories, using the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2013 Wetlands Supplement.

Greenhouse gas inventories are important for informing climate policy, and allow countries (and other entities) to measure progress against emissions-reduction targets. National Wetland Inventories prepared by Parties to the Convention on Wetlands inform national policies and other measures to achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This is also the basis for reporting on change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time (SDG indicator 6.6.1, of which the Convention on Wetlands is co-custodian).

### *Wetlands in NDCs*

[Resolution XIII.13](#) and [Resolution XIII.14](#) call for the incorporation of peatland and blue carbon ecosystem protection and restoration in NDCs. The Convention’s Strategic Plan 2016-2024 includes a target on restoration of degraded wetlands with priority to wetlands that are relevant for biodiversity conservation, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods and/or climate change mitigation and adaptation (Target 12).

Designation and management of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) can protect carbon stock, sequestration capacity and other ecosystem services. The Convention’s Strategic Plan 2016-2024 encompasses a target on significantly increasing area of under-represented types of wetlands such as peatland and blue carbon ecosystems in the Ramsar Site network (Target 6). Guidance on identifying peatlands as Ramsar Sites for global climate change regulation as an additional argument to existing criteria was adopted in [Resolution XIII.12](#). [Resolution XIII.20](#) encourages Parties to include coastal ecosystems, including relevant Ramsar Sites, in national policies and strategies for climate-change mitigation as well as adaptation, and to promote the role of coastal ecosystems in ecosystem-based adaptation; and encourages Parties to urgently designate intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats of international importance.

Because the process for designation and management of Ramsar Sites is well established, there is high readiness to pursue climate-change mitigation and adaptation based on this. The existence of defined Site boundaries, management plans, institutional capacity, and data also provides an important basis for leveraging carbon finance. Further projects are needed that demonstrate how protection and restoration of wetland can be scaled up to generate mitigation outcomes as well as adaptation benefits. Such Site-based actions, along with broader wetland wise use strategies encompassing a combination of sectoral policy measures, can be used to advance carbon management on a landscape scale.

## Tools and knowledge products prepared through the Convention on Wetlands

[Toolkit for National Wetland Inventories](#) (NWI) supports parties develop and use NWI.

Tools and guidance specific to peatlands:

[Guidance](#) on identifying peatlands as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) for global climate change regulation as an additional argument to existing Ramsar criteria;

[Policy Brief 5](#): Restoring drained peatlands: A necessary step to achieve global climate goals;

[Briefing Note 9](#): Guidelines for inventories of tropical peatlands to facilitate their designation as Ramsar Sites;

[Briefing Note 11](#): Practical peatland restoration;

[Technical Report 11](#): Global Guidelines for Peatland Rewetting and Restoration.

Other relevant publications include:

[Briefing Note 10](#): Wetland restoration for climate change resilience;

[Briefing Note 12](#): The contribution of blue carbon ecosystems to climate change mitigation; and

[Global Wetland Outlook](#) 2018 (a Global Wetland Outlook – Special Edition 2021 will be published late 2021).

## Wetlands at COP 26

Numerous events during COP 26 will address the important role of nature and wetlands in tackling climate change.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands is co-organizing events including

*Financing Wetlands Conservation and Restoration for Climate Benefits – Challenges and Opportunities* at the [Republic of Korea Pavilion](#);

*Leveraging MEA synergies: Peatland protection and restoration for climate outcomes* at the [Peatlands Pavilion](#) and;

*Partners for Wetlands: Decade for Wetland Restoration* at the [Peatlands Pavilion](#);

as well as contributing to a number of other events at the [European Union](#), [Water and Climate](#), Peatlands and Korean pavilions.

The official [side event programme](#) includes some wetland and blue carbon related events. In the [COP 26 Presidency programme](#), 6 Nov has the theme “Nature”. The [Marrakesh Partnership Climate Action Pathway](#) events for [Water](#) and [Ocean](#) will take place on 5 Nov. A list of [blue carbon events](#) has been compiled by the [International Partnership for Blue Carbon](#).

