

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Deputy Secretary General Statement to the GEF Assembly

Healthy, natural wetlands are critical for human survival. They include some of the world's most productive ecosystems leading to countless benefits. Wetlands include permanently or seasonally inundated freshwater habitats - including lakes, rivers and marshes - along with coastal and marine areas, such as lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs.

Almost all of the world's consumption of freshwater is drawn either directly or indirectly from wetlands. More than a billion people depend on wetlands for a living. Wetlands are used for transport and hydropower. They help to mitigate floods, protect coastlines and store and sequester carbon. Importantly, they play a critical role in the 'Focal Area Strategies' of 'Biodiversity', 'Climate change' and 'International waters' financed by the GEF.

The GEF has taken into account the importance of wetlands since its inception, leading to direct GEF investments totalling some USD 2 billion in grants, leveraging over USD 11 billion in co-financing towards projects entirely focused on wetlands, or as part of projects with significant wetland components. These projects have been funded out of the 'Biodiversity', 'Climate change', 'Land degradation' and 'International waters' Focal Areas, highlighting that wetlands are pivotal for securing multiple environmental services and supporting a range of terrestrial and marine systems.

As much as wetlands are vital to us and our survival, they face many challenges. The remaining natural wetlands cover only a fraction of their original area, as a result of drainage and land conversion. Up to 87% of the global wetland resource has been lost since 1700. We lose wetlands three times faster than natural forests. These are the latest findings of the Global Wetlands Outlook, which will be released in October this year, in the weeks leading to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

The Ramsar Convention provides a platform like no other to foster collaboration and partnership in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and other global initiatives and processes, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework, through providing the best available data, advice and policy recommendations to enable national governments to realise the benefits of rich, functional wetlands. The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 and its targets link to the Sustainable Development Goals and to at least 75 of the associated SDG targets. Critical to this is the Convention's role in reporting on wetland extent, drawing on information from national reports, and its designation as a co-custodian, with the UN Environment Programme, of SDG indicator 6.6.1.

One of the obligations of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention is cooperation across national boundaries on transboundary wetlands and shared wetland systems. There is therefore a strong correlation with the GEF's Programme on the International Waters, through which GEF helps countries jointly manage their

transboundary surface water basins, groundwater basins, and coastal and marine systems.

In GEF-7 Programming Directions, the 'International waters' Focal Area Investments will support the work of the UN Water Courses Convention and the UNECE Water Convention, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. In this regard, the alignment of the Ramsar Strategic Plan with the SDGs, Aichi Targets and the four-year framework of programme priorities (2018-2022) for the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund represent an important opportunity for countries to invest in improved management, restoration and best use practices for wetlands, through national and regional actions, to ensure they continue to provide a range of social and economic benefits.

We believe that, through the collective effort, determination and shared ambition of Contracting Parties and our partners, the political awareness and global recognition of wetlands can be significantly improved, and the need for their protection and sustainable use will attract unprecedented political, financial and technical support in the coming years, to reverse the trend of wetland loss. We trust that GEF 7 will serve as a mechanism to ensure this valuable resource is conserved, restored when needed and used wisely.

Thank you.