

Dongting Lake Declaration

On the occasion of the

International Workshop on Mainstreaming Wetland Biodiversity Conservation

Dec. 1-4, 2007, Yueyang, China

We, 130 representatives from 11 countries representing both developed and developing countries from four continents, including Australia, Cameroon, Canada, China, Egypt, India, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as from UNDP, Wetlands International and WWF, gathered by Dongting Lake from December 1st to 4th 2007, to discuss and debates the theme of mainstreaming wetland biodiversity conservation. Our consensus on this issue is reflected in this Dongting Lake Declaration.

We agree that:

Mainstreaming wetland conservation is a process, a philosophy and a mechanism by which wetlands policies, planning and implementation converge to form a comprehensive solution to wetlands biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It requires an ecosystem approach, involving all levels of government, the public and private sectors, and integrating diverse sectoral interests, so as to form a coherent and coordinated wetlands biodiversity program that balances wetlands conservation and sustainable use.

Drawing attention to the fact that:

Experience from all countries in the workshop confirms mainstreaming as an effective mechanism that helps us to address wetland conservation issues. Dongting Lake, formerly the largest freshwater lake in China, is an important example of mainstreaming wetland biodiversity conservation. Dongting Lake once covered an area of six thousands square kilometers, accommodating the vast water inflows and outflows of the Yangtze River and its four tributaries. In the past, Dongting lake and its surrounding basin was managed by sectoral agencies in an uncoordinated manner that has led to damage to the wetlands, decline in biodiversity, and loss of ecosystem functions that are critically important to the health of the lower Yangtze River system. However, through mainstreaming there is now an integrated and coordinated management program for Dongting Lake that involves all sectors and which engages the public. Mainstreaming has also led to greater balance between conservation and sustainable development and has been the key factor in the recovery of Dongting Lake.

We note the efforts and progress made with regard to the Dongting Lake conservation, including the designation of three Ramsar sites, the large-scale return of agricultural land to wetland, wetland restoration and protection programmes, the UNDP supported Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme, and the WWF supported Partnership for a Living Yangtze Programme. These actions effectively reverse the degradation trend of the Dongting Lake wetland ecosystem.

Therefore:

We confirm that:

The multi-functions and services of wetland ecosystem are the basis of sustainable socio-economic development. Of the three global ecosystems, wetland ecosystems are the link between the terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Wetlands play a critical role in global carbon cycling. They are also the ecosystem with the highest primary productivity and richest biodiversity on Earth and are the inspiration for cultural and spiritual values for millennia. Wetlands play a central economic role in areas such as flood retention and mitigation, groundwater recharge, and water purification and provide effective barriers to natural disasters like floods, droughts and storms.

We note that:

Notwithstanding the benefits of wetlands, they are the most deteriorated and biologically threatened of all global ecosystems. The cause is mainly the unsustainable, irrational and un-coordinated management of wetlands, which normally fails to integrate different purposes and interests in wetland utilization. Despite the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biodiversity, degradation of wetland ecosystems continues at the global scale, and will deteriorate further under global climate change. Wetlands, particularly peat lands, are one of the most globally important terrestrial carbon sinks; but if destroyed, they will become the largest single carbon source of global significance.

We endorse the proposal that:

International societies, governments, wetland management institutes and organizations should strengthen their efforts in communication, education and research of wetland ecosystem's functions and services, promote amongst the whole society the key role of wetlands in sustainable socio-economic development, integrate and embody principles of wetland conservation and sustainable management in the formulation and implementation of socio-economic development policies and planning at all levels, reverse as rapidly as possible wetland degradation and restore the functions and services of wetlands, so as to meet the needs of socio-economic development, to cope with global climate change, and to provide essential habitat that supports a healthy and diverse range of living species. .

Specifically, we recommend that:

A. At the International Level:

- Mainstreaming of wetland conservation be urgently integrated into the global processes of environment and development negotiation. This requires two actions: (1) The Ramsar Convention, through its Secretariat should have an official seat in United Nations fora on global issues, and (2) the Convention on Wetlands should extend its cooperation model with the Convention on Biological Diversity to other multi-lateral conventions such as UNCSD, CCD, CMS, and in particular UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), so as to include the central role that wetlands play in CO₂ emission reduction and global climate change response strategies.
- Recognising the centrality of mainstreaming to wetlands biodiversity conservation, and noting the absence of specific guidance in either the Ramsar Convention or the CBD, we recommend that (1) the UNDP on behalf both of Ramsar and the CBD develop specific guidance on mainstreaming in wetlands and related biodiversity conservation, and (2) the 10th Conference of Parties

(COP) of the Convention on Wetlands should consider adopting a resolution on mainstreaming wetland conservation.

- International NGOs should invest more in wetland conservation and facilitate the mainstreaming processes of wetland conservation at global, national, regional and site levels.

B. At the national level

- The past 20 years have demonstrated the fragility of wetland ecosystems, therefore we support the precautionary principle and recommend that all governments make this a guiding principle in wetlands mainstreaming activities.
- That governments adopt mainstreaming as the key component of wetlands management, extending from laws and regulations, to implementation practices.
- We note that the full range of economic and development instruments should be included and coordinated in wetland mainstreaming activities. This includes development policy, legislation, planning, finance and taxation, economic incentives, international trade, capacity building, and research, and technology.
- Successful mainstreaming requires an informed public, therefore we urge all governments to make special efforts to educate the public in wetlands values. We regard effective community participation as an essential element of mainstreaming and we urge all governments to adopt full disclosure and transparency in their stewardship of wetlands and wetlands biodiversity.