



CBD

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

MESSAGE FROM MR. AHMED DJOGHLAF, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD WETLANDS DAY

2 February 2007

22 May 2007
International Day for Biological Diversity



Biodiversity and Climate Change



“Fish for Tomorrow?”

Marking the date of the adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and celebrated each year on 2 February, World Wetlands Day is an important event for the biodiversity family as whole and for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in particular. The Ramsar Convention is the lead partner for wetlands under the CBD, and cooperation between the Ramsar Convention and the CBD is recognized as a model upon which multilateral agreements can work together towards achieving common goals.

This cooperation was recently enhanced by the finalization of a joint programme between our two conventions on 9 January 2007, during the visit of the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention to the Secretariat of the CBD.

The theme of this year's World Wetlands Day is as much a reminder of the need for urgent action as it is a wake-up call—will we really have fish for tomorrow?

Both the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and the CBD second Global Biodiversity Outlook report confirm that the rate of biodiversity loss from inland and coastal wetland ecosystems is one of the fastest of all major biomes. The most threatened fish species, for example, are those that are freshwater-dependent. This is not surprising. The usual drivers of biodiversity loss are to blame—but for wetlands these are accelerated by the stresses imposed by the unsustainable and increasing demands we place on water and our activities on the surrounding land. Our mismanagement of land and water is reflected in the decline we see today in the extent and quality of wetlands and the important biodiversity they support. This is an opportunity for us to address these problems effectively and make a significant contribution towards the target of achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

How can fisheries contribute to this?

The public perception of “fisheries” is generally negative. But today is an opportunity to think more broadly. The appalling state of many marine fisheries is driven primarily, if not exclusively, by unsustainable exploitation of stocks, even in defiance of

economic logic – for most wetland dependent fisheries the primary driver of loss is arguably environmental degradation. Wetland-dependent fisheries also tend, overall, to operate through smaller-scale activities, which translates into increased socio-economic benefits relative to the amount of fish produced.

In many developing countries wetland fisheries underpin local, and often regional, food security and livelihoods, particularly for the rural poor. The value provided by wetlands cannot be expressed in weight of produce alone. Wetlands also provide fisheries for sport and recreation. Values placed on this service provided by wetlands vary greatly. The MA, for example, notes that in the United States alone 35–45 million people take part in recreational fishing (the majority wetland-based) spending a total of US\$ 24-37 billion each year on their hobby—similar to, or in excess of, the global net economic benefits of coral reefs.

I highlight this because recreational fisheries interests have driven the clean-up of rivers and wetlands in North America and Europe, and elsewhere. Likewise, there are many local examples where wetland fisheries for food, when coupled with good governance and environmental foresight, have already driven improvements in the overall benefits of wetlands, and biodiversity has profited alongside this. Therefore, while the news from fisheries is sometimes good, it is a sad reflection that globally, poverty and livelihood considerations still lag behind as drivers of policy change.

These examples serve to illustrate that with public lobbying political will can be influenced and translated into action. Fisheries, although not without their negative impacts, are in general an ally of wetlands and the biodiversity they support. They provide a strong argument to manage wetlands and biodiversity better and, in turn, the wider water and land management practices that impact upon them. Recognizing these linkages is an important step in promoting policies that will achieve both human development and biodiversity targets.

This year's theme of World Wetlands Day, "Fish for Tomorrow?", will help to raise awareness specifically of the importance of wetland fisheries. Despite the complexities of their problems, wetlands can be managed in such a way as to guarantee the sustainability of inland and coastal fisheries well into the future.

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, I wish all those involved a happy and productive World Wetlands Day.