



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
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**on the occasion of
WORLD WATER DAY
“WATER COOPERATION”
22 MARCH 2013**

Water is fundamental to basic human needs. This includes not only safe drinking water and decent sanitation for all, but also food security. Water is central to socio-economic development, poverty reduction and sustainable economies. And water is fundamental to sustaining all terrestrial, wetland, coastal and marine ecosystems, the life they support and the benefits they deliver to people.

The hydrological cycle involves interaction between water, the physical landscape and the ecosystems they support. The functioning of ecosystems determines the flow, storage and quality of water. Therefore, sound ecosystem management and water management are intricately linked. Accordingly, we are seeing increasing emphasis on the role of ecosystems as solutions to addressing water related challenges. Ecosystems are being considered as “natural infrastructure” because of the way they can deliver water management outcomes similar to those of man-made infrastructure, sometimes by substituting built infrastructure but, more usually, by augmenting it to make the most efficient use of both approaches. Examples include using the water storage abilities of wetlands to help manage flood risk, using forested catchments to deliver clean drinking water supplies and to reduce erosion risks and, in farming systems, improving the vegetation on soils, and the biodiversity within them, to improve water availability for crops, increasing resilience to droughts and reducing run-off.

These attributes of biodiversity, and the ecosystem services underpinned, are well recognised in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, especially Target 14 that, by 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, are restored and safeguarded. Natural infrastructure approaches also deliver other significant benefits, in addition to those relating to water; such as to tourism and recreation, fisheries and helping to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes. For example, restoring a wetland to protect people and assets in cities from



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flooding brings benefit to water-birds, fish and other fauna and flora that in turn bring added benefit to people.

The theme of World Water Day this year is Water Cooperation. We are all water managers. Each time we turn on a tap or buy food we are responsible for a small element of the much larger water management cycle. The responsibility to manage water extends across sectors, governments, countries and individual citizens and should be considered as an activity that requires cooperation and integration from local to international levels. Similarly, the appropriate management and protection of biodiversity is a shared responsibility. The relationship between management of water and biodiversity should not be one of conflict: there are significant win-win outcomes to be gained.

It is well established that sound water management is complex and requires an integrated, multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach. A wide range of government agencies, civil society organisations, private sector concerns and individuals are involved. But water resources and biodiversity are usually managed in separate sectors, each focused on meeting specific objectives, rather than as part of an overarching framework that balances different water or biodiversity uses to optimize and share their various benefits across society and the economy. Cross-sectoral and systematic approaches are needed to consider and initiate the use of natural infrastructure in order to achieve water security, including gaining climate resilience and rebalancing water distribution.

We are, however, seeing a significant shift to cooperation at the water and biodiversity interface, facilitated by a focus on the mutual objective of sustainable development. Biodiversity specialists have learnt to better understand the real and immediate problems being faced by water managers and users and, by offering solutions to such problems, there is a reciprocated understanding of the role and importance of biodiversity planning and management. Water managers and users are increasingly recognizing that the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity are indeed relevant to them and to the problems they address.

Recognition of the common interests of various stakeholders is a cornerstone of effective cooperation. Let us further build on this, not only today, but tomorrow, and until we achieve the future we want.
