



The Ramsar Convention
on Wetlands



22 May 2012
INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Marine Biodiversity

Message from the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands 22 May 2012

Every 22 May, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands joins in worldwide celebrations of the International Day for Biological Diversity – an opportunity for the Convention to reaffirm its commitment to the importance of wetlands for the planet’s biodiversity and human wellbeing, as well as its active engagement with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The theme for this year, “Marine Biodiversity”, underlines the need to actively engage in maintaining marine and coastal biodiversity in a world where pressures on coastal regions for economic development are particularly high. An estimated 60% of the world’s human population live on or close to the coast, which is directly or indirectly causing many stresses affecting sustainability in the coastal zone, such as loss of habitat, increased pollution, accelerated sea-level rise, and interruption of flow of water and sediments. Many of these problems seriously affect coastal wetlands and their capacity to continue to provide vital functions for people and biodiversity in these areas.

The vital role played by wetlands in the coastal and nearshore marine zone

The definition of wetlands adopted by the Convention includes areas "with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres", which effectively means that for the Convention most of the coastal zone around the world falls under its definition of wetland. The Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type (as approved by Recommendation 4.7 and amended by Resolutions VI.5 and VII.11 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties) takes account of 12 major types of marine/coastal wetlands, including sea bays, sea-grass beds, tropical marine meadows, mangroves, coral reefs, permanent water of estuaries and estuarine systems of deltas, and intertidal mud, sand or salt flats. Therefore, coastal wetlands have major and varied biological, socio-economic and cultural values through their provision of a wide range of goods and services to people and their livelihoods, as well as through their contribution to the maintenance of biological diversity.

Thus Parties to the Ramsar Convention have recognised the importance of securing the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the coastal zone through full engagement with Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) processes. Effective integration and maintenance of the hydrological functions of coastal wetlands into ICZM can contribute to improving coastal water quality, reducing the risk to human health and loss of human life and property, increasing the economic value of the coastal land, and maintaining coastal biodiversity.

Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management

Achieving sustainable management in the coastal zone implies taking into account the connectivity between land, inland waters and coastal areas. It is for instance crucial to undertake measures in upstream river areas or land use systems that will prevent harmful practices or developments affecting coastal wetlands, such as construction of dams, pollution discharges and excessive water abstraction. Addressing the integration of the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands in

broad-scale integrated ecosystem management is a constant area of work for the Ramsar Convention.

The Ramsar Convention Secretariat took an active part in the MedWetCoast project, which aims at conserving the biodiversity of global and regional importance in six countries in the Mediterranean basin. At a larger international scale, the Secretariat has paid a special attention earlier this month to the discussions on marine biodiversity of the working group on the review implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which resulted in the adoption of eight recommendations to be submitted to the CBD COP in October. These recommendations convey the message on the importance of sustainable development and the importance of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

The Ramsar Convention will continue to work for a better recognition of its countries' commitments to the conservation and wise use of marine and coastal wetlands. On this World Biodiversity Day, the Ramsar Secretariat reaffirms its commitment to securing the quantity and quality of fresh water that is required to sustain human well-being, especially through the implementation of the 5th Joint Work Plan between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention.

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