WORLD WETLAND NETWORK

A global network of Civil Society Groups & NGOs working on wetland conservation

Report on the thirteenth Ramsar Conference of Parties (Ramsar COP13)

Dubai UAE, 21-29 October 2018

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The thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP13) was held from 22-29 October 2018, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The theme was "Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future." There were more than 1360 participants representing 143 of the 170 parties to the Convention, as well as the International Organization Partners (IOPs) of the Ramsar Convention, UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin summary report for the COP is available here.

Overview of WWN activities at Ramsar COP 13

WWN coordinated 5 activities at Ramsar COP 13:

- NGO Pre-COP Meeting
- NGO Opening Statement
- Youth Forum and visioning workshop
- Youth closing statement
- WWN Exhibition Stand and display

In addition, we partnered with NGO colleagues to participate in 2 side events:

- Citizen Science research on the Status of Wetlands led by the Society of Wetland Scientists
- Natural Flow of water led by Ramsar Network Japan

NGO Pre-Cop Meeting, 9-12 noon Monday 21st October 2018, Admiral Plaza Hotel Dubai

WWN submitted a request to host an NGO Pre-COP meeting as an official side event to the COP. While the meeting was endorsed, we were not given a venue nor promoted in the program. WWN therefore managed booking the venue and promoting the event through our networks. The outcome was a wonderful opportunity to meet and collaborate with NGO colleagues.

The meeting attracted 58 delegates representing NGOs from 23 countries across every region of the world. Republic of Korea and Japan were very well represented and highly active through the COP.

It was convened by WWN Chair Louise Duff, supported by 4 WWN Regional and Sub-regional representatives:

- Chris Rostron – Deputy Chair and Regional Representative, Europe
- Minoru Kashiwagi – Regional Representative Asia
- Jacky Judas – Sub-regional Representative UAE
- Mitsuhiro Nagai – Sub-regional Representative Japan

For the first time, youth delegates were invited to the meeting. The YEW coordinating team in attendance included Elise Allély-Fermé and Lucia Gamarra.

The meeting opened with a presentation by Lew Young, explaining the business of the meeting and the best ways NGOs could engage.

There was a networking activity to meet fellow NGO colleagues, and Louise Duff presented the draft Opening Statement for comment.

Five talks were presented, giving a good understanding of NGO and community of interest activities and context for the COP:

- Wetlands and NGOs of the Middle East – Jacky Judas, Emirates Nature – WWF
- Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW) – Elise Allély-Fermé, Leader, Youth Engagement Thematic Group (Ramsar Culture Network)
- Global Wetland Survey Results – Chris Rostron, WWN and WWT
- 10-years of achievement for biodiversity in rice paddies – Mr. Kurechi, RNJ
- 10-years of success engaging NGOs in the Ramsar Convention – Louise Duff, WWN

We concluded the meeting by sharing a cake to celebrate WWN's tenth anniversary since our formation at Ramsar COP 10 in Changwon, ROK, 2008.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Naomi Goto and Ramsar Network Japan for assisting and coordination, and for funds supported by Japan Funds for Global Environment.

NGO Opening Statement

WWN's written request to the Conference Chair to make an Opening Statement was accepted. It was presented on Tuesday 23 October after the admission of observers. Our thanks go to Maia Sarrouff Willson, Research and Conservation Director, Environment Society of Oman, who stepped up to deliver the statement with great poise.

World Wetland Network called on parties to engage with NGOs, local communities, indigenous peoples, and young people, at all levels, including Ramsar Site assessment and management, National Wetland Steering Committees and through active involvement at the COP.

Noting that the Ramsar Convention will turn 50 in 2021, we called for bold action, asking, "What will be our legacy?" For a full copy of the Opening Statement in English, French, Spanish and Arabic visit WWN's web site.

Maia Sarrouf Willson presented the WWN Opening Statement.
Photo: Franz Dejon-IISD Reporting Services

Side event: A vision for YEW - Youth Engaged in Wetlands! Wednesday 24th October 2018

Tweets:

@RamsarConvention: #youthengagedinwetlands team has energised us all!

@worldwetnet: so much energy, creativity and courage in the room and so many good ideas for practical ways young people can support conservation and wise use of wetlands.

The "YEW" Forum was an official side event of Ramsar COP 13, and was one of the few occasions youth had been formally involved since the "Children's COP" in Uganda 2005. The purpose of the Youth Forum was to engage youth and young professionals in the Ramsar Convention, establishing a program for on-going, meaningful participation at all levels. The forum was initiated by the Youth Engagement Thematic Group of the Ramsar Culture Network. WWN provided a platform to support the YEW activities, as well as mentoring, administrative and fundraising support.

The Forum was a tremendous success, attracting a lot attention at the COP. A full room of 71 people participated, including high school students from Dubai, young international delegates and others who work in youth engagement.

It was convened by Elise Allély-Fermé. Lucia Gamarra facilitated the discussion session. Gab Mejia looked after photography and communications. The forum showcased inspiring examples of youth wetland projects, and engaged participants in group discussion on the challenges and opportunities that young people face in wetland conservation practices and decision-making.

Speakers included:

- Aysha AlRemeithi from the Dubai Youth Council
- Elise Allély-Fermé from the Youth Engagement Thematic Group on youth engagement
- Samantha Kwan from YouthCAN Samoa on youth in conservation and policy-making
- Manouore Njoya Awawou from the Réseau Africains des Jeunes sur les Zones Humides on youth capacity building and International Youth Program For Wetlands
- Takuma Satoh and Sreeya Patnaik from Youth Ramsar Japan on youth participation in wetland conservation from Ramsar COP9 to COP13

It was followed by a strategic planning workshop held on Thursday 25/10 at the Emirates nature office Dubai to develop a strategic plan to progress the role of youth in the Convention, consolidate partnerships and secure funding for future youth activities.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Alison Flaherty, Tamara Withers and Maitha Darwish at Emirates Nature who organised Dubai high school students to attend the side-event and organised the room for the strategic workshop.

The Youth Engaged in Wetlands team at Ramsar COP13.

Back L-R: Elise Allély, Gab Mejia, Sreeya Patnaik, Takuma Satoh, Manouore Awa Njoya, Samantha Kwan

Front: Lucia Gamarra, Anne Valentina Bourbon

Youth Closing Statement

As well as visibility and support from the official Ramsar Twitter account, even the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention herself Martha Rojas Urrego tweeted praise:

> **Tweet**
>
> *@martharojasu1: When young people take an interest in wetland conservation it means there is a future for #wetlands. Very nicely done @worldwetnet for getting #youthengagedinwetlands and making sure they share their ideas here at #RamsarCOP13.*
>
> *@WWFLeadWater: Great to see youth being given a voice at the world's oldest environmental convention #RamsarCOP13 @RamsarConv*

As an outcome of the youth forum and workshops, the youth team's request to make a closing statement at the closing plenary was supported by the Conference Chair. Anne Valentina Bourbon of Emirates nature-WWF presented the statement.

The YEW team called on the parties to fully commit to implementation of the resolutions, and to involve youth in policy making and implementation of the convention. Their statement proposed the theme for Ramsar COP 14 as *Youth and Wetlands*.

This proposal was supported by Chile, Japan, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Tunisia.

The full Youth Statement to Ramsar COP 13 is available on WWN's web site here.

Anne Valentina Bourbon from Emirates Nature-WWF did a fantastic job reading the Youth Closing Statement, accompanied by Takuma Satoh from Youth Ramsar Japan. Photo: Denis Landenbergue

Side Event: Reporting on the status and trends of the health of the world's wetlands: the value of "citizen-science" surveys. Wednesday 24th October 2018.

This side event was led by the Ramsar Section - Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS), in partnership with WWN and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), UK.

The side event presented findings of a global citizen science survey on the status of wetlands run in 2017 by SWS, WWN and WWT, which was distributed by WWN to our members. The survey received 541 complete responses from 92 countries covering all Ramsar Regions. 33% of

respondents were NGOs. Respondents demonstrated a long association with the wetland they reported on: the average length of connection to the site was 17 years, while the longest association was 68 years.

The survey covered both Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, with 44% of reports being for wetlands wholly or partly designated as Ramsar Sites. These wetlands represented 10.4% of all Ramsar Sites globally, covering 239 sites with more than 32.5 million hectares in area.

Reported losses of wetland area were as widespread for Ramsar Sites as for all wetlands. Although there was no area change reported for almost 70% of wetlands, area losses (22%) were more widespread than area increases (8%).

It is encouraging that a large proportion (over 75%) of wetlands were reported to be in a Fair or Good current state. However, one-third of Ramsar Sites were reported in Poor state, primarily in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. Small wetlands were reported in better state than large wetlands.

The survey identified both positive and negative drivers for the state of wetlands. Significantly for WWN, the number one positive driver associated with wetlands being in a good state is local community awareness. Other positive drivers identified by the survey were implementing conservation measures, cultural values/traditions and tourism.

The most widely reported drivers negatively affecting wetland state were species introduction, agricultural run-off, urban/industrial pollution, agricultural intensity, urban development/infrastructure and erosion.

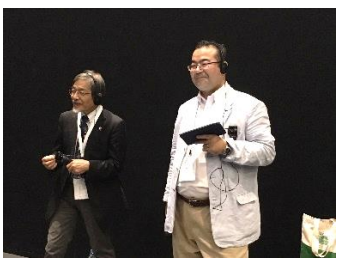
***Acknowledgments**: Nick Davidson and Rob McInnes from the Society of Wetland Scientists led the global citizen science state of wetlands survey. Chris Rostron led for WWN, and Matthew Simpson for WWT.*

Side Event: Natural Flow of Water – Are the Resolutions and Guidelines Implemented Effectively? Friday 26th October

Lead Organization: Ramsar Network Japan (RNJ) in partnership with Korea Wetland NGO Network (KWNN), World Wetland Network (WWN) and Wetlands and Birds Korea (WBK)

This side event was chaired by Mitsuhiro Nagai, WWN's Sub-regional Representative Japan. Panellists included James Robinson from Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust UK, Deputy Mayor Seong-Tae Hwang of Hwaseong City, Republic of Korea, and Kyungcheol Kim from Korea Wetland NGO Network (KWNN).

Resolutions and guidelines of the Convention reiterates the importance of maintaining the natural flow of water in stipulating river basin management and intensive coastal management. The side event presented case studies of wetland destruction by halting the natural flow, and positive cases succeeded in restoration of wetlands by recovering the natural flow of water.



Other WWN activities

WWN committee members supported NGOs participating at the COP to advocate for wetland conservation.

Chair Louise Duff signed a letter acknowledging the Municipal Government of Busan, ROK, for announcing their intention to designate Nakdong Estuary to the Ramsar list. This has been a long, hard-fought campaign by the Korean Wetland NGO Networks.

We also provided a platform for Tunisian NGO Réseau Enfants de la Terre (RET) to advocate for protection of Sebkhet Sejoumi wetland.

WWN had an exhibition stand for the first time, where we hosted daily meetings for NGO delegates. The stand provided a networking space for members and guests, and was a hive of activity throughout the COP.

We had 26 new members register to join WWN.

The Global Wetland Outlook

The Ramsar Convention released its Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) ahead of Ramsar COP 13. The report was presented on Tuesday 23 October by Royal Gardner and Max Finlayson from the STRP.

As reported by IISD, the GWO provided a touchstone for discussions on challenges ahead to ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands. The report provides a current overview of global wetlands: their extent, trends, drivers of change and the responses needed to reverse the historical decline in wetland area and quality. It found that since the 1990s, water pollution has worsened in almost every river in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Major threats include untreated wastewater, industrial waste, agricultural runoff, erosion and sedimentation.

Secretary General Martha Rojas described the GWO as a “distress signal and a wake-up call” and urged delegates to rise to the challenge, highlighting that COP13 is a moment for decisive action to protect wetlands.

The Global Wetland Outlook is available on the Ramsar Convention website here.

Wetland Cities

On Thursday 25 October, the first 18 cities to receive accreditation as Ramsar Wetland Cities were announced. These are Municipal Governments demonstrating strong and positive relationships with wetlands. The Republic of Korea and China said the Wetland City Accreditation programme will raise the Convention’s visibility at the local level and is a useful tool for further implementation (IISD).

The wetland cities are: Changde, China; Changshu, China; Dongying, China; Haerbin, China; Haikou, China; Amiens, France; Courteranges, France; Pont Audemer, France; Saint Omer, France; Lakes by Tata, Hungary; Changnyeong, Republic of Korea; Inje, Republic of Korea; Jeju, Republic of Korea;

Suncheon, Republic of Korea; Mitsinjo, Madagascar; Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Ghar el Melh, Tunisia (photo: Denis Landenbergue).

Ramsar Resolutions

Draft Resolutions 1 and 2 dealt with improving the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention. World Wetland Network recommended exploring mechanisms that directly engage grass roots NGOs to complement the important contribution of the IOPs.

We supported Draft Resolution 16's premise that effective integration of cultural values and local knowledge is vital.

Draft Resolution 18 on rapid assessments affirmed the long-term value of a participatory approach. WWN would welcome accredited training to enable NGOs to undertake Rapid Assessments.

The resolutions adopted at Ramsar COP 13 are available on the Ramsar Convention web site here.

Ramsar site Field Trip

Big thanks to Jacky Judas from Emirates Nature-WWF who organised a field trip for WWN representatives and our colleague Phil Straw. We visited Wadi Waruya, a Ramsar-listed wetland in Fujairah, UAE. Jacky and his team informed us about the comprehensive citizen science wetland monitoring program involving HSBC Bank's corporate sponsorship and volunteers. The wetland has permanent water fed by a spring, a very precious asset in this harsh desert country. We also visited a traditional Falaj irrigation system. Incredibly, it rained while we were there, one of three falls during the COP. The risk of a flash-flood had us jumping back into the car to return to Dubai.

Minoru, Louise and Jacky visit Wadi Waruya

Thank you to our donors

- WWN: Phil Straw through Avifauna Research and Services, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group, Tunisian NGO Réseau Enfants de la Terre (RET)
- Youth Forum: MAVA Foundation for Nature, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Korean Wetlands NGO Network

For information on WWN's achievements visit www.worldwetnet.org
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