Ramsar and Wetland NGOs

A Report of the World Wetland Network for Ramsar CoP12

Ramsar y ONG de humedales

Un informe de la Red Mundial de Humedales para Ramsar CoP12

Ramsar et les ONGs des Zones Humides

Un rapport du Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides pour la CoP12 de Ramsar

WWN

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Executive Summary **4**
WWN Recommendations for Ramsar Parties 4

Resumen Ejecutivo **6**
Recomendaciones de WWN para las Partes Contratantes de Ramsar 6

Sommaire **8**
Recommandations du Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides pour les parties prenantes de Ramsar 9

The emerging role of NGOs in international conservation **10**
The Evolving Relationship between Ramsar and NGOs 10

NGO responses to Ramsar and the Ramsar Agenda **12**
Results of WWN's global survey of NGOs 12
Illustrating the role NGOs can play 17
WWN Recommendations for Ramsar Parties 19

Annexes **20**
Annex 1: Survey Questions 20
Annex 2: NGO response coverage 21

References **22**

The World Wetland Network (WWN)

The World Wetland Network (WWN) raises awareness of the role of local people in wetland conservation, supports their active involvement and builds their capacity to deliver effective wetland conservation.

WWN is a global network of over 2000 wetland nongovernmental organisations (NGO) initiated on the eve of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties meeting, November 2008, in Changwon, South Korea.

It arose from the need for NGOs to maintain contact with each other at and between Ramsar meetings, but also helps with information exchange, sharing of best practice and lobbying on specific wetland issues. Previous Ramsar meetings also saw wetland NGOs working on this, and WWN is a direct result of their efforts.

WWN enables smaller NGOs to arrive at Ramsar meetings well prepared, and enables them to participate more effectively. The network supports members in their broader wetland conservation activities, making a positive contribution to delivery of the Ramsar Convention.

WWN currently has a relatively informal membership process, open to both groups and individuals involved in civil society wetland conservation activity. A committee of 8 members, drawn from the membership, oversees a broader mailing list of over 2000 interested NGO representatives. This has grown through the following Ramsar Conference of the Parties (CoP), via our website, and through the voting process of the Wetland Globes during the first two rounds.

Executive Summary

In 2014 the World Wetland Network (WWN) conducted a survey of WWN's members and the broader wetland conservation community. The purpose of the survey was to explore the relationship nongovernmental organisations (NGO) and civil society organisations have with Ramsar and delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals.

WWN is an international network of NGOs and civil society organisations, many of whom are focused on one or two wetlands in their local area. These organisations reflect their local cultures and communities and represent a considerable force for improving delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals. Many of these organisations have focused on specific wetlands for decades. NGOs often create a longer-term and more continuous link for Ramsar than Government Representatives.

The WWN survey was open for seven weeks in English, Spanish and French. 190 responses were received from 52 counties. This is a significant response from a finite group of issue-focused NGOs.

The survey overwhelmingly showed that NGOs are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. The creation and continued existence of WWN is testament to this. WWN and the broader NGO community understand that human and financial resources for wetland conservation are scarce and that greater collaboration is important.

Developing a greater understanding of the role, the commitment and the potential of wetland NGOs is an important first step.

The WWN survey findings are offered in this review so that Ramsar Parties can consider the deployment of all resources - governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental - to ensure the greatest gain for wetlands, wildlife and people.

The respondent comments and survey findings focused on similar themes:

- the relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat is generally good, although many NGOs rely on WWN for access. Harnessing WWN's role is important.
- the relationships with National Focal Points are generally less positive. There is little contact with National Focal Points between each Ramsar Conference of the Parties and a belief was often expressed that governments did not respect the value of NGOs. Establishing a more robust mechanism for greater involvement and active communication between NGOs and National Focal Points would be welcomed.
- supporting and enabling volunteers and staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources, but these resources lead to better programs and outcomes for Ramsar sites.
- Ramsar's Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) programme activities require greater advocacy and technical / financial support. Many NGOs have skills that could be more actively used in this process.
- some governments appear to actively discourage efforts to achieve strategic Ramsar site designations. Important wetlands are eligible for Ramsar listing but nominations are stalled by bureaucracies or government policy. A means for civil society to highlight these potential nominations would be welcomed.

A sentiment was also expressed that some governments did not actively use Ramsar as a tool to protect wetlands, with observations of government inactivity, reduced financial resources and reduced involvement of public officials. In some cases more needs to be done to enforce site protection.

WWN Recommendations for Ramsar Parties

Wetland NGOs around the world are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. The NGO community would welcome the opportunity to explore how increasing NGO contributions can be embraced by Ramsar Parties, National Focal Points and the Ramsar Secretariat. Based on the broad findings of this first survey, the WWN committee offers the following recommendations for Ramsar consideration:

a) Recognize that NGOs often create a longer-term and more continuous link for Ramsar than Government Representatives.

b) Develop more structured guidance for Ramsar Parties, and National Focal Points, on how to engage civil society, possibly as part of a CEPA programme.

c) Explore options to expand on the International Organisation Partners status to include more NGOs and civil society organisations in the decision-making process for Ramsar at international, regional and country levels.

d) Explore options for inviting NGO and civil society input into reporting on the state of wetlands, as well as having input to the Ramsar wetland nomination process and the Montreux Record.

e) Prioritize funding and support for NGOs and civil society organisations that are working on Ramsar listed wetlands.

WWN would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with Ramsar Parties and the Ramsar Secretariat.

Resumen Ejecutivo

En el año 2014 la Red Mundial de Humedales (WWN) realizó una encuesta entre los miembros de WWN y la amplia comunidad de conservación de humedales. El propósito del estudio fue explorar la relación que las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC) tienen con Ramsar y la transmisión de objetivos Ramsar de conservación de humedales.

WWN es una red internacional de ONG y organizaciones de la sociedad civil, muchas de las cuales se centran en uno o dos humedales en su área local. Estas organizaciones reflejan sus culturas locales y sus comunidades, y representan una fuerza considerable para mejorar la transmisión de objetivos Ramsar de conservación de humedales. Muchas de estas organizaciones se han centrado en humedales específicos durante décadas. Las ONG suelen crean un vínculo a largo plazo y más continuo para Ramsar, que los representantes del gobierno.

La encuesta WWN estuvo abierta durante siete semanas en Inglés, Francés y Español. Se recibieron 190 respuestas de 52 países. Esta es una respuesta significativa para un grupo finito de ONG orientadas a un tema.

La encuesta demostró abrumadoramente que, las ONG están comprometidas con Ramsar y quieren hacer más. La creación y existencia de WWN es testimonio de esto. WWN y la amplia comunidad de ONG entienden que son escasos los recursos humanos y financieros para la conservación de humedales y que una mayor colaboración es importante.

Desarrollar una mayor comprensión de la función, el compromiso y el potencial de las ONG de humedales es un primer paso importante.

Los resultados de la encuesta WWN se ofrecen en esta revisión para que las Partes Contratantes de Ramsar puedan considerar la implementación de todos los recursos – gubernamentales, intergubernamentales y no gubernamentales – que aseguren la máxima ganancia para los humedales, vida silvestre y las personas.

Comentarios de los encuestados y resultados de la encuesta centrados en temas similares:

- la relación con la Secretaría de Ramsar es generalmente buena, aunque muchas ONG dependen de WWN para acceso a aquella. Es importante aprovechar la función de WWN.
- las relaciones con los Puntos Focales nacionales son generalmente menos positivas. Hay poco contacto con los Puntos Focales nacionales entre cada Conferencia de las Partes Ramsar, y se expresó una creencia frecuente que los gobiernos no respetan el valor de las ONG. Establecer un mecanismo más robusto para una mayor participación y comunicación activa entre las ONG y los Puntos Focales nacionales sería bien recibido.
- apoyar y facilitar la participación de personal y voluntarios en la conservación de humedales requiere de recursos, pero estos recursos conducen a mejores programas y resultados para los sitios Ramsar.
- las actividades del programa Ramsar de Comunicación, Educación, Concienciación y Participación (CECoP) requieren mayor apoyo y soporte técnico / financiero. Muchas ONG tienen habilidades que podrían utilizarse más activamente en este proceso.
- algunos gobiernos parecen desalentar activamente los esfuerzos para lograr designaciones estratégicas de sitios Ramsar. Los humedales de importancia son elegibles para la lista Ramsar pero las nominaciones están bloqueadas por la burocracia o políticas del gobierno. Un medio para que la sociedad civil pueda resaltar dichas candidaturas potenciales sería bien recibido.

Se expresó también el sentimiento que algunos gobiernos no utilizan activamente a Ramsar como herramienta para proteger los humedales, con observaciones a la inactividad del gobierno, reducción de recursos financieros y reducción de participación de funcionarios públicos. En algunos casos se necesita hacer más para reforzar la protección de sitios.

Recomendaciones de WWN para las Partes Contratantes de Ramsar

ONG de humedales alrededor del mundo están comprometidas con Ramsar y quieren hacer más. La comunidad de ONG acogería la oportunidad de explorar cómo el aumentar de la contribución de las ONG puede ser acogido por las Partes de Ramsar, los Puntos Focales nacionales y la Secretaría de Ramsar. Basados en los resultados generales de esta primera encuesta, el Comité WWN ofrece las siguientes recomendaciones a consideración de Ramsar:

a) Reconocer que las ONG suelen crean un vínculo a largo plazo y más continuo para Ramsar, que aquel de los representantes del gobierno.

b) Desarrollar orientación más estructurada para las Partes de Ramsar, y Puntos Focales nacionales, sobre cómo involucrar a la sociedad civil, posiblemente como parte de un programa CECoP.

c) Explorar opciones para ampliar el estatus de Organizaciones Internacionales Asociadas (IOP) para incluir más ONG y organizaciones de la sociedad civil en el proceso de toma de decisiones para Ramsar a nivel internacional, regional y en cada país.

d) Explorar opciones para invitar a las ONG y sociedad civil que aporten en informes sobre el estado de los humedales, así como tener aportes para el proceso de nominación de humedales Ramsar y el registro de Montreux.

e) Dar prioridad a la financiación y apoyo a ONG y organizaciones de la sociedad civil que están trabajando sobre los humedales en la lista Ramsar.

WWN acogería la oportunidad de discutir estas recomendaciones con las Partes de Ramsar y la Secretaría de Ramsar.

Sommaire

En 2014, le Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides a effectué un sondage auprès de ses membres, et de beaucoup d'autres praticiens de la conservation des zones humides. L'objectif de cette enquête était d'évaluer la relation qu'entretiennent les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) et les organisations de la société civile en général avec la Convention de Ramsar et l'atteinte des objectifs de Ramsar pour la conservation des zones humides.

Le Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides est composé d'ONGs et d'organisations de la société civile, ayant à charge la gestion d'une ou deux zones humides sur leur territoire. Ces organisations sont le reflet de leurs cultures et communautés locales et représentent la cheville ouvrière pour l'effectivité de l'atteinte des objectifs de Ramsar pour la conservation des zones humides. Bon nombre de ces organisations ont travaillé pendant des décennies dans des zones humides spécifiques. Très souvent, et contrairement aux entités gouvernementales, les ONGs créent et développent un partenariat plus solide et plus durable avec la Convention de Ramsar.

L'enquête a été réalisée sur sept semaines en version anglaise, française et espagnole. 190 réponses ont été reçues venant de 52 pays. Ce qui constitue un bon retour de la part d'un groupe déterminé d'ONGs spécialisées.

Dans l'ensemble, les résultats de l'enquête ont montré que les ONGs sont véritablement engagées avec Ramsar et voudraient en faire plus. La création et la pro activité permanente du Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides en est la preuve. Le Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides et toute la communauté des ONGs sont conscients de la rareté des ressources humaines et financières pour la conservation des zones humides d'où la nécessité d'une large collaboration.

Développer une meilleure connaissance du rôle, de l'engagement et du potentiel des ONGs spécialisées dans la conservation des zones humides est une première étape très importante.

Les résultats de l'enquête sont présentés dans cette note afin de permettre aux parties prenantes de la convention de Ramsar la possibilité de la mise à disposition de toutes ressources - gouvernementales, intergouvernementales et non gouvernementales - pour assurer le meilleur avantage pour les zones humides, la faune et les communautés.

Les commentaires des répondants et les résultats de l'enquête se recoupent en ceci :

- La relation avec le Secrétariat de Ramsar est bonne dans l'ensemble, même si de nombreuses ONGs y accèdent par le biais du Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides. Il est important de promouvoir ce rôle du Réseau.
- Les relations avec les points focaux nationaux sont généralement moins bonnes. entre deux Conférences des Parties de Ramsar, il y a pas ou peu d'échanges avec les Points Focaux Nationaux et la perception générale est que les gouvernements ne respectent pas la valeur des ONGs. Mettre en place donc un mécanisme plus solide pour une plus grande implication et une communication active entre les ONGs et les points focaux nationaux serait nécessaire.
- Soutenir et permettre aux volontaires et personnels dédiés à la gestion des zones humides d'être engagés exige des ressources, et ces ressources contribuent à améliorer les programmes et résultats sur les sites Ramsar.
- Les activités du programme Communication, Éducation, Sensibilisation et Participation (CESP) de Ramsar exigent un plaidoyer et un soutien financier / technique importants. De nombreuses ONGs ont des compétences avérées qui pourraient être mises au profit plus activement dans ce processus.
- Il apparait aussi que certains gouvernements semblent décourager activement les efforts visant à la désignation des sites Ramsar. Bon nombre de zones humides d'importance sont éligibles sur la liste de Ramsar, mais les désignations sont bloquées par la bureaucratie ou des politiques du gouvernement. Un appui à la société civile pour mettre en évidence ces éventuelles désignations serait nécessaire.

Il est également apparu que certains gouvernements n'utilisent pas effectivement la Convention de Ramsar comme outil pour protéger les zones humides, et ceci serait dû à l'inactivité des gouvernements, la réduction des ressources financières, et le faible engagement des fonctionnaires. Dans certains cas, il faut prendre plus d'initiatives pour faire respecter la protection des sites.

Recommandations du Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides pour les parties prenantes de Ramsar

Les ONGs de conservation des zones humides dans le monde sont engagées avec la convention de Ramsar et voudraient en faire davantage. Cette communauté d'ONGs accueillerait favorablement la possibilité d'identification de nouvelles pistes, par les parties prenantes à la convention, les points focaux nationaux et le secrétariat de Ramsar, favorisant l'amélioration de l'implication des ONGs auprès de la convention de Ramsar. Considérant dans leurs globalités les résultats issus de cette première enquête, Le réseau mondial des zones humides propose à la convetion de Ramsar les recommandations suivantes:

a) Reconnaître que les ONGs créent et développent un partenariat plus solide et plus durable avec la Convention de Ramsar que les entités gouvernementales.

b) Développer une orientation plus structurée pour les parties prenantes de Ramsar, les points focaux nationaux, sur l'implication réelle de la société civile, éventuellement dans le cadre du programme CESP.

c) Envisager les possibilités d'expansion du statut de l'Organisation Internationale des Partenaires pour y inclure davantage d'organisations non gouvernementales et des organisations de la société civile dans le processus de prises de décisions au niveau de Ramsar sur le plan international, régional et national.

d) Envisager la possibilité d'inviter les ONGs et les membres de la société civile à contribuer aux rapports sur l'état des zones humides, et à participer également au processus de désignation des sites Ramsar et à contribuer au Registre de Montreux.

e) Prioriser le financement et l'appui aux ONGs et organisations de la société civile qui travaillent sur les sites Ramsar.

Le Réseau Mondial des Zones Humides serait heureux d'avoir l'occasion de discuter de ces recommandations avec les parties prenantes à la Convention de Ramsar et le Secrétariat de Ramsar.

The emerging role of NGOs in international conservation

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been a significant contributor to international conservation work since the 1960s, when conservation was projected onto the world stage. The many NGOs that exist today have grown on the foundations of older national NGOs such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Sierra Club, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the quasi-NGO the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Greater access to information and a growth in NGO networks has also seen a dramatic growth in local civil society organisations connecting with each other across the world.[1-4]

In the period between the Stockholm Conference and the Earth Summit, NGOs were also a driving force in the development of key multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) including the three flagship wildlife related biodiversity conventions: the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar) in 1971, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1976 and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in 1979.[5]

Much has transpired since the 1960s and 70s and the conservation policy agenda has also grown considerably. The sheer number of individual instruments and accords has emerged as a complicated policy field that places pressure on governments to encompass and implement an expanding range of international enviro-political issues.[6-8]

At the core of these discussions is the availability of financial resources. MEAs such as Ramsar, CITES and CMS are a low order political priority, with financial contributions minimal compared to other international efforts such as trade, aid or humanitarian services.[9-14] Many developing country governments lack basic implementation budgets, let alone having sufficient capacity for progressive work. Funding for the Secretariats charged with implementation of MEAs is limited.[5]

Given that human and financial resources are scarce, it seems prudent that Ramsar Parties carefully consider the deployment of all resources – governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental – to ensure the greatest gain. Developing a greater understanding of the role, the commitment and the potential of wetland NGOs is an important first step in beginning that consideration.

The Evolving Relationship between Ramsar and NGOs

It is a well established practice for NGOs seeking involvement in international policy to participate in intergovernmental processes. Some processes make formal provisions for NGO consultation. Others have evolved the practice over time. [3] In a formal sense therefore it is not surprising that the relationship between Ramsar and NGOs has been iteratively articulated through the formal process of the Ramsar agenda setting and policy direction – the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (CoP). There are a number of ways that the Convention has involved the civil society sector.

Ramsar has recognised a small group of NGOs as International Organisation Partners (IOPs) since 1999, conferring an additional participation status to these organisations (Birdlife International, Wetlands International, IUCN, WWF and the International Water Management Institute).[15]

An important element of the IOP relationship is agreement that the relationship is important, that both the Secretariat and the IOPs have a responsibility to maintain the relationship and the implicit expectation that progress will be reported upon. This is evidenced in the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the IOPs in 2011 and the reports to the Ramsar Standing Committee in 2006 and 2011. An important element of this is the developing sense that the partnership is between all of the organisations, seeking to progress a shared direction.[16-18]

IOPs play an active role, able to contribute directly to discussions and meetings. They also work together to produce statements from the IOPs as a group.

IOPs are permitted as observers in all activities of the Convention including the CoP, Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) as well as regional and sub-regional meetings.

In practice the IOPs often act as facilitators between governments, donors, foundations and other bodies and they can, upon request from the Ramsar Secretariat, intervene on its behalf at specific meetings where/when Ramsar Secretariat can't be directly represented. Importantly, the IOPs provide

advice and recommendations on Ramsar processes such as the Montreux Record.[19]

The STRP is a very important body for progressing policy implementation and developing advisory work for the Parties, including the role and operation of the Montreux Record. For the 2013-2015 triennium, STRP is composed of a Chair and 13 members appointed for expertise in their own right as well as a representative from each of the five IOPs as a Panel member.[20]

Ramsar's recognition and involvement of the IOPs is progressive and very important, although IOP status is restricted to large international NGOs.

Ramsar stands alone amongst the MEAs for the commendable focus on the development of communication, education, participation and awareness programmes (CEPAs) aimed at capacity building and increasing community participation in on-ground wetland conservation. The Ramsar Administrative Authorities are the key implementers of the CEPA Programme. National Focal Points are tasked to work with the country's CEPA Focal Points, NGOs and other civil society organizations and wetland visitor centres, often through National Ramsar Committees. They also liaise with the Ramsar Regional Centres and the Ramsar Secretariat. CEPA Focal Points are encouraged to work with others to develop national and local CEPA action plans.[21]

More broadly, NGOs are invited to attend Ramsar CoP meetings, and are usually present in small numbers, often from the host country/region. They are not given a formal role, but are invited to participate by working through the IOPs or Ramsar Parties. This allows some limited recognition of their role. During CoP11, mention was made in several resolutions of the role of WWN and civil society in delivering wetland conservation. However, formal engagement of NGOs in Ramsar policy development remains more limited than with CMS or CITES.[22, 23]

While the IOP and CEPA focus is certainly leading the other MEAs, Ramsar has not moved as far as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), CBD and CMS in articulating broader participation of NGOs in the policy work of the convention and its Parties. The intent of the UNEP, CBD and CMS decisions is greater than merely ensuring information is available. The decisions in these bodies are calling for active and tangible participation in the policy work of the conventions. [24-29]

Participation is a strong thread in UNEP. The UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its first universal session agreed to progress more active participation of civil society in environmental governance. The newly formed United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) has struck a working group to develop modalities of participation for discussion at the next UNEA. [24] The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has also been building this area for a number of years, with CBD CoP12 in 2014 placing an emphasis on 'active participation of stakeholders' in the development of policies and plans.[25, 26] CMS has similarly recognised the value of the NGO community in resolutions since 1994[27] and during CMS CoP11 in 2014 decided to investigate modals and modalities to increase the participation and recognition of the work of civil society, and specifically NGOs in implementing the convention.[28, 29] The intent of the UNEP, CBD and CMS decisions is greater than merely ensuring information is available. The decisions in these bodies are calling for active and tangible participation in the policy work of the conventions.

This is an area that has come through quite strongly in WWN's global survey of NGOs, and is especially pertinent because the restrictions to IOPs at present precludes greater involvement of many more NGOs with local character and expertise.

NGO responses to Ramsar and the Ramsar Agenda

The WWN is an international network of over 2000 NGOs and civil society organisations, many of whom are focused on one or two wetlands in their local area. These organisations reflect their local cultures and communities and represent a considerable energy force that could be better incorporated into the work of the convention as prioritized by the Parties.

In 2014 the World Wetland Network (WWN) conducted a survey of WWN's members and the broader wetland conservation community. The purpose of the survey was to explore the relationship nongovernmental organisations (NGO) and civil society organisations have with Ramsar and delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals.

The WWN survey was open for seven weeks in English, Español Français. 190 responses were received from 52 counties. This is a significant response from a finite group of issue-focused NGOs.

The survey overwhelmingly showed that NGOs are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. The creation and continued existence of WWN is testament to this. WWN and the broader NGO community understand that human and financial resources for wetland conservation are scarce and that greater collaboration is important.

Results of WWN's global survey of NGOs

WWN is taking the opportunity of Ramsar CoP12 to report on WWN's global survey of WWN members and broader wetland focused NGOs. The survey explored the relationship NGOs and civil society organisations have with Ramsar as well as areas that can be developed further.

The survey was open for seven weeks in English, French and Spanish, available via a web-based survey, or a word document version for those with limited internet access. Notification was distributed through WWN email lists as well as the WWN facebook site, the Ramsar Secretariat's Digest and CEPA email forums, and through the networks of WWN's regional representatives. When looking at the results, the use of these Ramsar-focussed mailing lists should be taken into account.

190 responses were received from 52 counties in three languages (English, Spanish and French). This is a significant response considering the difficulty involved in reaching local NGOs at a global scale.

The following sections report on the survey data. From this data the WWN committee discussed findings and developed recommendations.

The NGO respondents

The first two parts of the survey set out to characterize the respondents by identifying their relationship to WWN and the Ramsar convention, and some basic information about their size, governance structure and key areas of work.

The vast majority of respondents identified themselves as being part of the NGO community, with a small number of independent individuals participating; some from governmental departments answering as individuals and others from academic institutions.

Most respondents (62 percent) reported knowing about the World Wetland Network. Just over half of the respondents were WWN members (52 percent).

About half of the respondents (53 percent) reported receiving Ramsar mailing lists.

The survey sought to understand the relative size of the NGOs responding to the survey. Small, medium and large NGOs all participated. 60 percent of responses were from smaller organisations (see Graph 1) with fewer than 20 staff or volunteers; however a significant number of larger NGOs also participated.

Across all organisations, over 50 percent of the respondents reported being solely volunteers with

the balance being either paid employees (10 percent) or serving in both paid and unpaid capacities (31 percent).

Organisations were spread across the spectrum from practical conservation, community engagement, lobbying and campaigns, to conservation fundraising, education, species and habitat monitoring and science. (see Graph 2). Most organisations were engaged in more than one of these areas.

A number of respondents run wetland information centres. Others are responsible for environmental management, including surveillance and regulation compliance. Some respondents focused on community empowerment and the promotion of economic activities that raise living standards. Others were focused on wetland and mangrove restoration and the promotion and protection of ecosystem services. A few identified their role as promoting cultural, artistic and social aspects of wetland conservation, and some focused on ecotourism development.

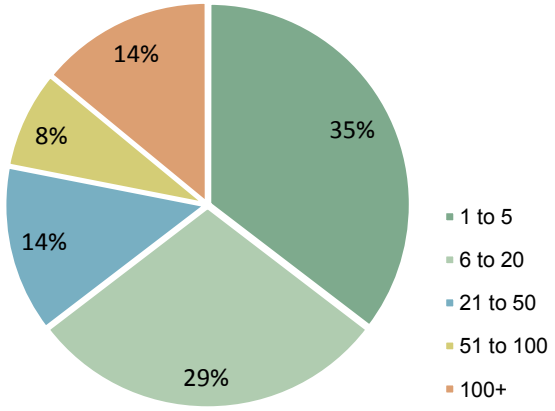
Perspectives about the Ramsar Convention

Section three of WWN's survey asked NGOs about the Ramsar Convention's influence on their work.

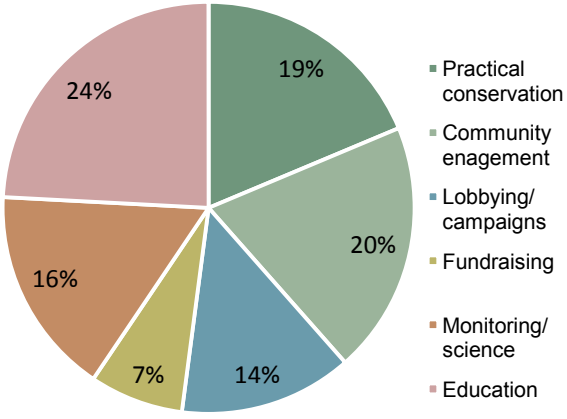
When asked if they were aware of the Ramsar Convention and its key messages, 86 percent answered positively that they were. Nearly 70 percent were also aware that the Ramsar Convention was created with the active participation of NGOs. When compared against a similar survey of Convention on Migratory Species NGOs this is a high level of awareness.

This level of awareness is contrasted then by responses to the next question that asked if they thought the Ramsar Convention was helping wetland conservation, 38 percent of respondents said yes. Perspectives included that Ramsar has helped to raise the profile of wetlands, and in some cases has helped to leverage conservation action and funding. Where wetlands are listed they have a high level of global credibility. The intergovernmental nature of Ramsar has helped to maintain pressure for change and in some cases the experiences of other countries have enriched the processes for some governments.

Graph 1: Relative size of participating NGOs measured by number of staff/volunteers



Graph 2: Organisation focus



A similar percentage felt the Ramsar Convention was helping wetland conservation to some extent but could do better, while 16 percent felt that Ramsar was failing. Several concerns contributed to this perception. Some respondents felt that there was a poor level of understanding in many governments about the importance of migratory birds. In many cases, government officials do not appear to attend to Ramsar commitments between meetings and contact between them and NGOs is poor. In a number of countries, legislation to implement Ramsar commitments is very weak of ineffective. Internationally there is no legal enforcement, and Ramsar has no sanctions for non-observance of commitments.

Some respondents expressed concern that the listing process is problematic, precluding proposals being progressed or even discussed without national government support. The situation is similar for consideration of wetland status information.

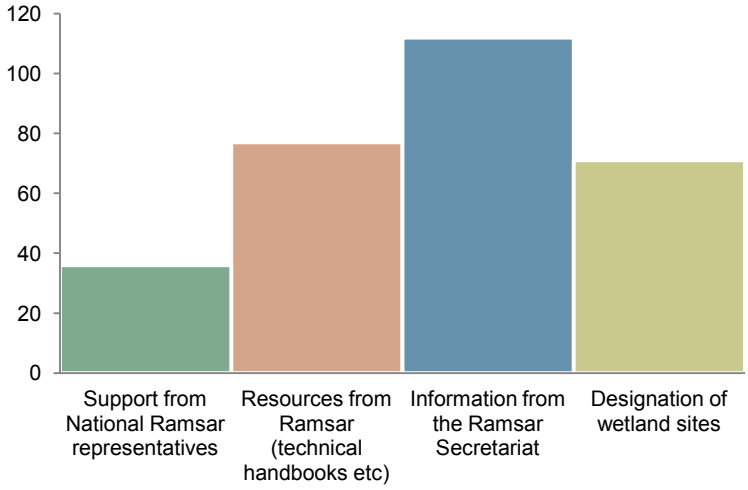
A number of respondents highlighted that the Ramsar process seems biased towards larger NGOs when it is often smaller NGOs and civil society organisations who are responsible for grassroots work. These groups are equally important and represent a resource opportunity. Finding ways to increase funding to the grassroots levels would greatly increase Ramsar's impact.

When asked what benefits NGOs receive from Ramsar to support their work, information and resources from the Secretariat rated most highly (see Graph 3). Other benefits included the political influence that wetland listing provided, including occasional support from the Secretariat where advocacy was needed. Ramsar listing also helped NGOs attract investment funding. There were negative perspectives as well, mostly centred on poor delivery of support from Focal Points and the Secretariat, however these were a smaller percentage of the total.

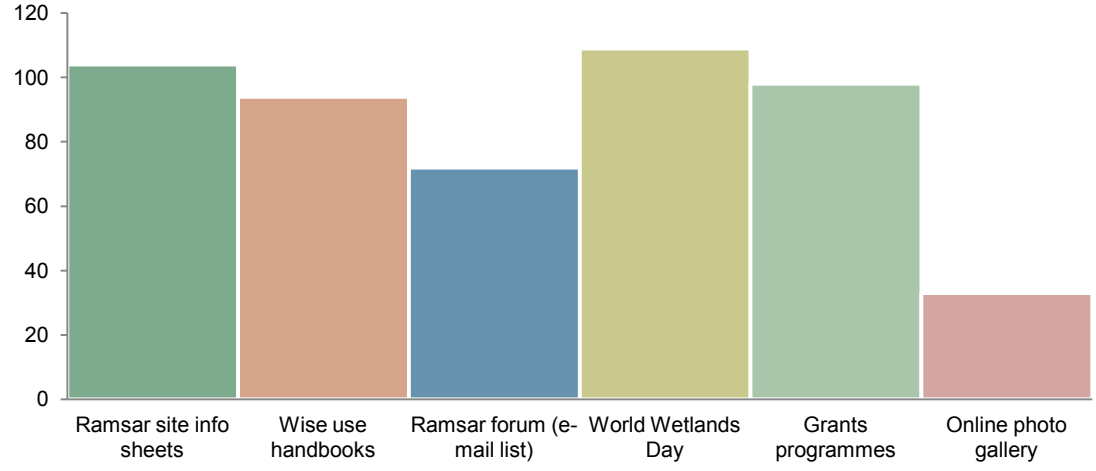
Corresponding to the high level of perceived benefit, respondents also identified their knowledge and use of key Ramsar resources (see Graph 4), with many respondents making use of 3 or 4 resources. In addition other Ramsar resources identified were global waterfowl numbers reports, Ramsar's technical reports, the STRP web-platform and CEPA materials. Respondents valued the opportunity to join in World Wetland Day initiatives as part of a global community, helping to raise the profile of wetland issues in particular regions.

Approximately two thirds of the respondents felt that Ramsar recognised the role of NGOs in delivering wetland conservation. Areas for improvement included communications from their National Focal Point and increased funding and infrastructure support from Ramsar and governments. Two thirds of respondents felt that Ramsar does recognise the significant contribution NGOs make to wetland conservation.

Graph 3: Benefits NGOs receive from Ramsar to support their work



Graph 4: Ramsar resources used by NGOs



Perspectives about NGO commitment to Ramsar

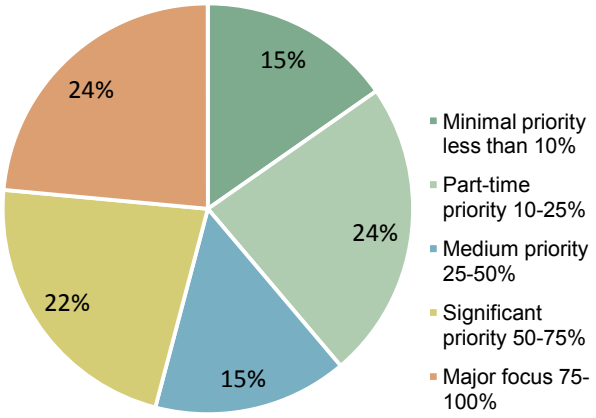
WWN believes that in order to support the mobilisation of NGOs, it is important for the Ramsar Secretariat and governments to better understand their current and potential capacity. Section Four of the survey investigated the level of time and resources NGOs devote to wetland conservation, what influences this commitment and whether or not they specifically promote the Ramsar ethos.

We found that 46 percent of respondents identified Ramsar as a major focus for their organisation, committing more than 50 percent of their volunteer and staff time to Ramsar or wetland related activities. In contrast 39 percent considered Ramsar related activities to be a small component of their overall work plans (see Graph 5).

Two thirds reported that the time allocation was in line with the aims and objectives of their organisation. Some identified the decisions being based on the personal interest of staff and volunteers, and others reported that the decision was led by funding and/or national legislation.

For some the decision to commit substantial time was because a local Ramsar site is the focal point for a local organisation, either because of a positive conservation agenda or because of sharp focus on a damaging development. Some reported receiving funding which enabled them to commit substantial time. Others reported the important role of WWN, which helped to focus their effort and increase their time commitment to Ramsar-related activities.

Graph 5: NGO time investment in Ramsar relates acttivities



More than two thirds of the NGO respondents consciously used the Ramsar messages, resources and ethos in their work. Many used the materials in communications with their members. Others used Ramsar materials as a tool for communication with governments about site designations or site protection measures. Frequently the tools were used for community engagement and education materials. Some were being used in tertiary education settings as well.

Some commented that the resources were too general for their use, but that the resources were used as background information for their own materials.

Almost all NGOs reported that they were strongly in favour of increasing their working relationship with Ramsar. More than half were prepared to increase their role in monitoring of wetland habitats and species, undertaking practical conservation work to improve wetlands and sharing of resources and information. 76 percent were keen to participate more in education and outreach work to raise awareness of wetlands.

NGOs offered to promote implementation of legislation; support management and policy groups; administer regional and national NGO networks; support preparation of new Ramsar designations and increase their involvement in wetland CEPA.

Other means of providing support were NGO promotion of implementing legislation, providing support to management and policy councils and bodies; administering NGOs networks in regions or counties; support in the preparation of new Ramsar site designations; increasing involvement in CEPA.

This section of the survey clearly expressed the capacity of NGOs to support delivery of the Ramsar Convention and their strong commitment to conserve wetlands.

The relationship between NGOs and Ramsar Parties

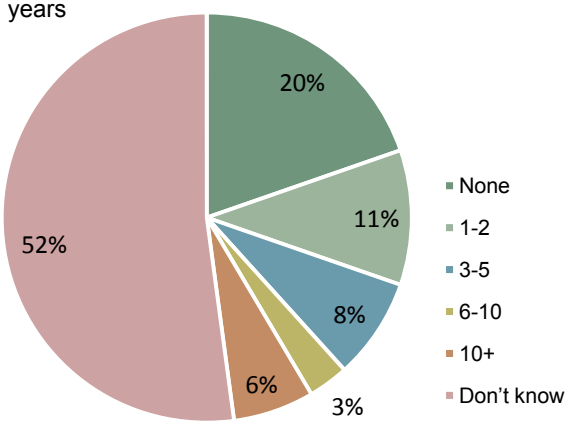
Section Five of the survey investigated the relationship between NGOs and the government sector.

A comparatively small 37 percent of respondents knew the name of their National Focal Points, with a significant number of these naming the ministry rather than the individual. This correlates rather sharply with the number of meetings Ramsar Focal Points had with their NGO community in the last 2 years. The majority (52 percent) did not know how many meetings had been held, if any at all. 20 percent thought that none had taken place. The remaining 28 percent reported a range from 1 to more than 10 meetings (see graph 6). The cohort of solid meetings (10+) was focused on a few countries – Algeria, Columbia, Japan, Mexico and Rwanda.

Less than a third of respondents believed that their governments encourage NGO involvement in wetland conservation and management. In a number of cases this was represented through funding of wetland conservation work.

The remaining two thirds either didn't know or were strong in their belief that their government did not respect the value of NGOs. Comments were made that government officials never contacted

Graph 6: Number of meeting between NGOs and Focal Points in the previous 2 years



NGOs working on key wetlands. Some governments appeared to discourage efforts to achieve strategic Ramsar site designations.

Interestingly, more than half of the respondents did not believed that their government colleagues used Ramsar as a tool to protect wetlands, with observations of government inactivity, reduced financial resources and reduced involvement of public officials. Some commented that governments needed constant reminders by NGOs and by individuals of their Ramsar obligations.

Where positive comments were made they focused on the effective use of Ramsar to newly declare a wetland either through Ramsar or other regional mechanisms.

Given the strong capabilities and commitment to wetland conservation expressed by NGOs in Section Four of the survey, there is opportunity for Contracting Parties to improve their delivery of the Ramsar Convention by collaborating more effectively with their NGO communities.

General NGO comments and conclusions

NGOs are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. Many of the general comments focused on similar themes.

NGOs are seeking more active communication and involvement from their National Focal Points.

The relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat is generally good, although many NGOs rely on WWN for access. The current relationships with National Focal Points are generally less positive.

There is little contact from National Focal Points between Ramsar CoPs, and Party activities often focus on reporting at meetings, rather than investing in wetland management action. The majority of NGOs believed that their governments did not respect the value of NGOs. In some cases, National Focal Points focus on only a few larger NGOs, limiting wider involvement of smaller local groups, communities and towns.

A more regular and active dialogue between local NGOs and their National Focal Points is crucial. Establishing a more robust mechanism for this would be welcomed.

A more determined focus on messaging to governments in Asia is important. Raising awareness and understanding in this region is lagging behind other regions.

Supporting and enabling volunteers and staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources. Additional resources are needed to lead to better programs and outcomes for Ramsar sites.

The CEPA and STRP platforms are well received, but CEPA activities require greater advocacy and technical / financial support. Many NGOs have skills that could be more actively used in this process. Many smaller NGOs need support with capacity building to enable them to more actively engage in Ramsar site protection. A programme to help facilitate local NGO and civil society organisation involvement is needed.

Some governments appeared to discourage efforts to achieve strategic Ramsar site designations. Important wetlands are eligible for Ramsar listing but the nominations are stalled by bureaucracies or government policy. A means for highlighting these potential nominations would also be welcomed.

The majority of respondents also felt that governments did not actively use Ramsar as a tool to protect wetlands, with observations of government inactivity, reduced financial resources and reduced involvement of public officials. In some cases more needs to be done to enforce site protection

WWN acknowledges the NGO representatives who answered our global survey. We hope the insight provided by our respondents will help the Ramsar Secretariat and Contracting Parties to understand the concerns and needs of this sector. These findings are offered so that Ramsar parties can provide effective support to maximise the contribution NGOs are making to conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Illustrating the role NGOs can play

One of the ways WWN has expressed its views has been through the Wetland Globe Awards. The Wetland Globes were developed by WWN to encourage best practice in wetland management. The non-financial awards, and were given to the wetland itself, to demonstrate wetlands either in good condition (blue globe) or wetlands under threat (grey globe).

WWN is proud of the momentum that has been built through the Wetland Globes, but also recognises that it is important to increase the depth of communication with Ramsar Parties and the Secretariat. For Ramsar CoP12, the Wetland Globes process is being used to showcase how civil society groups are contributing to delivery of wetland conservation, and many of the Ramsar convention's aims.

The following four case studies showcase some of this learning.

Developing momentum for Lake Tota, Columbia: Fundación Montecito

Fundación Montecito is a small environmental NGO in Colombia that has been working for the past three years to draw conservation attention to a very special tropical wetland called Lake Tota, the biggest lake in the country. One of Fundación Montecito's key achievements was to set up a civil society movement called Causa Tota made up of various stakeholders. Through this network and its various activities (education and academic forums, legal actions, community engagement, international visits from scientists and academics, plus recent developments around sustainable tourism) it has been possible to draw the attention of important decision-makers in the region and get more conservation action for Lake Tota.

Fundación Montecito became part of WWN in 2011 and began to explore what Ramsar meant for us in the local context, engaging stakeholders on some of the key themes: wise use of wetlands, sustainability, maintenance & improvement of ecological characteristics, and the need for protection at an international level.

In 2012 the organisation conducted a formal civil society request before the National Government and Regional Environmental Authority, asking them to declare Lake Tota as a Ramsar site. It was signed by more than 6,000 local inhabitants, as well as some national and international supporters, and eventually led to the Government considering the possibility.

More recently Fundación Montecito has conducted a survey with local communities to understand more fully how a new conservation status for Lake Tota might impact on local people, including farmers, fishermen and other stakeholders reliant on lake. They survey found that most people hadn't heard of Ramsar and few understood what international protection would mean in real terms. There is a big task ahead to engage and educate both local communities and government representatives. Fundación Montecito has found that many of those involved including politicians at the national level are either unaware of the Ramsar Convention, or do not understand its policies and implications. As a result there is misinformation being delivered to stakeholders and the general public, such as stating that Ramsar sites cannot have agriculture per-se, or don't allow human activity. Improving understanding of the Ramsar convention is no easy job, and Fundación Montecito needs support to make their vision a reality.

Making connections for the Hunter Estuary Wetlands, Australia: WetlandCare Australia

Australia has a long history of involvement in the Ramsar Convention. In 1974, the Cobourg Peninsula was designated as the world's first Ramsar Site. A year later, Australia became the first Contracting Party to the Convention.

WetlandCare Australia is a Non-Government Organisation that has been working with communities to protect, restore and promote wetlands since 1991. Their Hunter Office is located at the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site, one of 65 Ramsar-listed wetlands in Australia. The Hunter Estuary Wetlands are the most significant migratory shorebird habitat in the state of New South Wales. They are home to over 30 species of shorebirds, migrating from as far afield as Alaska, Siberia and northern China to feed on the rich mud-flats over summer.

For the past two years, WetlandCare Australia has been working on a project called Newcastle Wetland Connections, with funding from the Australian Government. The project aims to rehabilitate creeks and wetlands flowing through the urban city of Newcastle into the Ramsar site.

WetlandCare Australia is working with partners from local and state government agencies, the local University and community Landcare groups to undertake a range of on-ground works in the project area. Activities include stabilising erosion, reducing sediment and nutrients, treating weeds & planting native vegetation.

Local families and students are engaged through wetland walkabouts, workshops, and Landcare field days. Two indigenous trainees are employed through the project, and have completed accredited qualifications in bush regeneration. Indigenous field workers from the Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council have also been engaged for on-ground works.

To date WetlandCare Australia and their partners have planted over 22,000 native trees and shrubs to create buffers that protect the creeks and wetlands in the Hunter Estuary from urban impacts. Over 11 hectares of remnant urban bushland are being restored. They have held 21 community events attracting over 500 participants who learn about the value of urban waterways, and what they can do to protect them.

The Newcastle Wetland Connections project is a great example of what Contracting Parties can achieve when they build the capacity of local NGOs to engage their community on the ground.

Reducing threats to Lake Natron, Tanzania: Birdlife International

Birdlife International has worked with the Lake Natron Consultative Group for the last 7 years to protect the ecologically sensitive wetlands of Lake Natron, Tanzania. The lake is the only regular breeding area in East Africa for a population of 2.5 million lesser flamingoes.

The initial work revolved around advocacy to save the lake from a development proposal by Tata Chemicals Ltd to extract and process soda ash. As a result of NGO campaigning, Tata Chemicals withdrew from the project, although the threat of development remains. Follow up efforts involved building the capacity of the local communities, including women, youth and village leaders to protect and conserve the wetlands. The women were given experience-sharing training on how to run micro-ecotourism businesses and the youth in tour guiding. Water User Associations were formed to ensure a balance between the need for irrigation water and continued inflow into the Lake.

Birdlife International collaborated with the Wetlands Unit of Tanzania's Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism to carry out a robust Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) around the Lake, involving district level leaders, local community leaders, school children, Wildlife clubs and the press. As a result of enhanced stakeholder collaboration involving government agencies, local community and Birdlife International, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation nominated Lake Natron as a "Destination Flyway" – one of only 8 such sites globally, to demonstrate the link between tourism and wetland conservation.

Coordinating effort for Nosivolo River, Madagascar: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Madagascar's Nosivolo River and surrounding watershed is the country's most important region for freshwater biodiversity including 19 endemic species of fish.

In 2011, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands declared the Nosivolo River as the country's seventh 'Wetland of International Importance', an area encompassing 358,500 hectares (almost 886,000 acres).

The Ramsar status encourages wise use of wetland area in a way that balances conservation and development. It encourages local communities to be engaged in conservation of their natural resources and to recognize their value for sustainable development. After establishing the conservation zones, rules have been

developed regarding access and use of the river and its fish to manage the river and its resources.

Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and Conservation International have been working with local partners and international funders since 2005 to conserve biodiversity on the river. Local community associations have been formed to monitor the river, manage resources and sanction behaviours, setting rules to reduce the impact of fishing. Training and community development activities have helped local people to diversify their livelihoods and conserve river diversity. Many former fishing families have now become farmers, herders, beekeepers and artisans.

Enduring partnerships between the government, non government and local community sectors have been key to the success of conservation efforts on the Nosivolo River. The partners recognize that water is an essential element that must be managed in a sustainable way by all sectors rather than just environment. Education, health, forestry, agriculture and other sectors are working together to protect biodiversity on the Nosivolo River. The success of conservation efforts on the Nosivolo River were recognized with the award of a Blue Globe for best practice management awarded by World Wetland Network in 2012.

WWN Recommendations for Ramsar Parties

NGOs would like to contribute more to the work of Ramsar, but need this contribution to be welcomed and acknowledged by Ramsar Parties, National Focal Points and the Ramsar Secretariat.

The relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat is generally good, although many NGOs rely on WWN for access. Harnessing WWN's role is important.

The relationships with National Focal Points are generally less positive. There is little contact with National Focal Points between each Ramsar Conference of the Parties and a belief was often expressed that governments did not respect the value of NGOs. Establishing a more robust mechanism for greater involvement and active communication between NGOs and National Focal Points would be welcomed.

Supporting and enabling volunteers and staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources, but these resources lead to better programs and outcomes for Ramsar sites.

Ramsar's CEPA programme activities require greater advocacy and technical / financial support. Many NGOs have skills that could be more actively used in this process.

Some governments appear to actively discourage efforts to achieve strategic Ramsar site designations. Important wetlands are eligible for Ramsar listing but nominations are stalled by bureaucracies or government policy. A means for civil society to highlight these potential nominations would be welcomed.

The NGO community would welcome the opportunity to explore how increasing NGO contributions can be embraced by Ramsar Parties, National Focal Points and the Ramsar Secretariat. Based on the findings of WWN's global survey of NGOs, the WWN committee offers the following recommendations for Ramsar consideration:

a) Recognize that NGOs often create a longer-term and more continuous link for Ramsar than Government Representatives.

b) Develop more structured guidance for Ramsar Parties, and National Focal Points, on how to engage civil society, possibly as part of a CEPA programme.

c) Explore options to expand on the International Organisation Partners status to include more NGOs and civil society organisations in the decision-making process for Ramsar at international, regional and country levels.

d) Explore options for inviting NGO and civil society input into reporting on the state of wetlands, as well as having input to the Ramsar wetland nomination process and the Montreux Record.

e) Prioritize funding and support for NGOs and civil society organisations that are working on Ramsar listed wetlands.

WWN would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with Ramsar Parties and the Ramsar Secretariat.

Annexes

Annex 1: Survey Questions

Section 1

1. Are you an NGO?
2. Do you know what WWN is?
3. Are you a member of WWN?
4. Do you belong to any Ramsar lists?

Section 2

2a. Do you work as a paid employee or a volunteer?

2b. How many employees does your organisation have?

2c. What are your main areas of your organisation's work?

2d. Are you aware of the Ramsar convention and its messages?

Section 3 - the Ramsar convention's influence on your work

3a. Do you think that the Ramsar convention is protecting wetlands?

3b. What benefits does the Ramsar convention bring?

3c. Which Ramsar resources do you know about and/or use?

3d. Did you know that the Ramsar convention was in part created by NGOs?

3e. In your opinion, does Ramsar recognise the role of NGOs in delivering wetland conservation?

Section 4: Your organisation, Ramsar and Wetlands

4a. What percentage of your time is spent working on wetland conservation

4b. What influenced your organisation's decision to work on wetlands?

4c. Do you use the Ramsar ethos in your work?

Section 5 - Government

5a. Do you know the name of the government Ramsar Focal Point

5b. How many meetings has the government had with NGOs in the last 2 years?

5c. Does the government support NGOs working on wetlands?

5d. Does the government use Ramsar to protect wetlands?

Section 6 - How can your organisation support Ramsar's aims?

6a. What activities could your organisation carry out to help deliver Ramsar objectives?

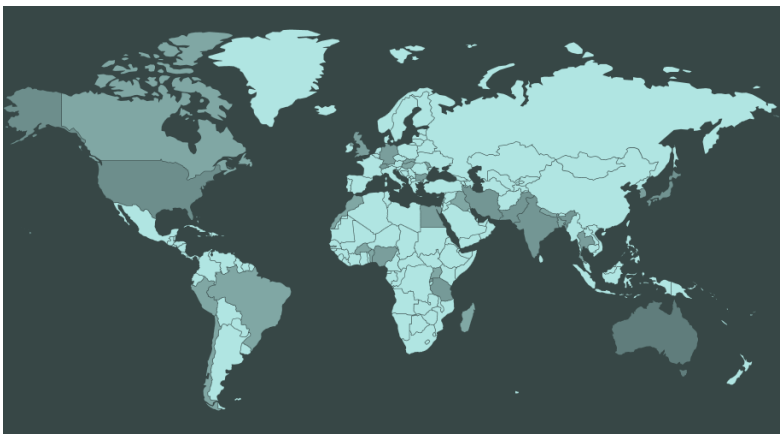
Annex 2: NGO response coverage

Country coverage

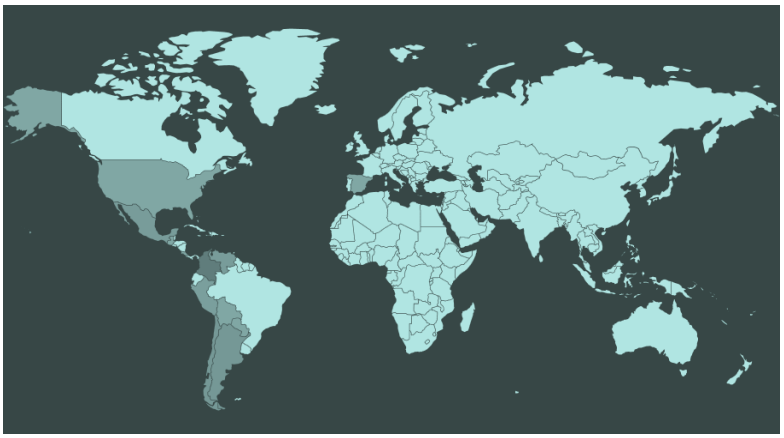
Algeria	Colombia	Korea	Rwanda
Argentina	Costa Rica	Madagascar	Slovakia
Australia	District of Columbia	Mali	Spain
Bangladesh	Egypt	Mexico	Switzerland
Benin	Fiji	Moldova	Tanzania
Bolivia	France	Morocco	Thailand
Brazil	Germany	Namibia	Togo
Bulgaria	Guatemala	Nepal	Trinidad and Tobago
Burkina Faso	Hungary	Nigeria	Tunisia
Cameroon	India	Pakistan	Uganda
Canada	Iran	Paraguay	United Kingdom
Cape Verde	Iraq	Peru	United States of America
Chile	Japan	Puerto Rico	Venezuela

Geographical language responses

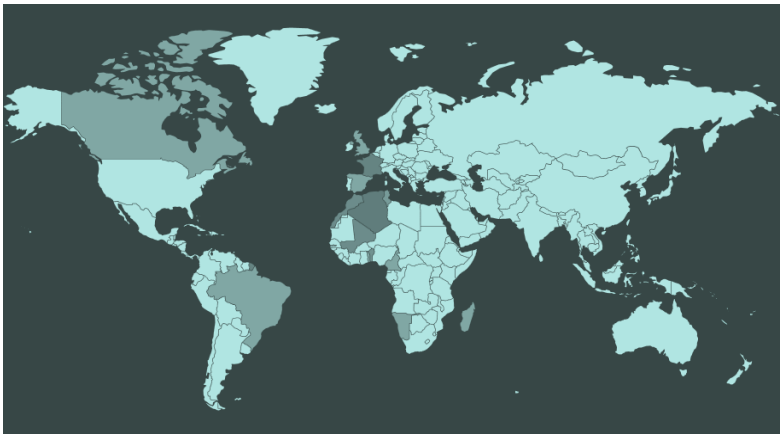
English language



Español language



Français language



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