

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

15th Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 23-31 July 2025

Recommendations from the International Organisation Partners (IOPs) of the Convention on Wetlands: Birdlife, IUCN, IWMI, Wetlands International, WWF and WWT

Key strategic recommendations from the IOPs

- During COP15, Contracting Parties will adopt the Convention on Wetlands 5th Strategic Plan, which will guide the Convention for the next decade. The IOPs call on Parties to approve a robust Strategic Plan, which includes clear goals and targets, a strong, measurable indicator framework (including global headline and component indicators) aligned with other international reporting frameworks, and clear actions for Parties.
- The 5th Strategic Plan should align the Convention with the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This should also be reflected in the adoption of draft resolution 23.15 on the restoration of freshwater wetlands, which is linked to Target 2 of the GBF, and draft resolution 23.18 on wetland protected areas and OECMs, which is linked to Target 3 of the GBF.
- Contracting Parties and other stakeholders should take note of all the critical deliverables produced by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) over the last triennium, which have played a significant role in advancing global knowledge and guidance on wetland protection, restoration and wise use. Parties and other stakeholders should reflect on the need to adequately resource the tasks of the STRP so that it can continue to deliver this essential support in implementing the Convention.

Recommendations on selected draft resolutions:

The following draft resolutions are included in this document. For IOP input on other draft resolutions, please get in touch. Contact details are provided on page 10.

- 23.4 Draft resolution on enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions
- 23.9 Draft resolution on implementing the Institutional Strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands
- 23.10 Draft resolution on future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention 2025-2028
- 23.11 Draft resolution on establishment of the Waterbird Estimates Partnership and delivery of the 2027 edition of Waterbird Population Estimates
- 23.15 Draft resolution on restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems to support ecological character biodiversity and ecosystem services
- 23.16 Draft resolution on strengthening national actions for the conservation and restoration of waterbird flyways
- 23.18 Draft resolution on achieving the equitable governance and effective conservation of wetlands as protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)
- 23.19 Draft resolution on youth empowerment and integration: driving engagement in and the longevity of the Convention on Wetlands
- 23.20 Draft resolution on promoting sustainable lifestyles for the wise use of wetlands

23.4 Draft resolution on enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.4](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome this draft resolution as an opportunity to strengthen the synergies between the Convention and other multilateral processes – in particular strengthening the linkages with international climate and biodiversity objectives.

Recommendations:

- **Add paragraph on climate synergies** to strengthen synergies with climate within this draft resolution, in particular with the [Climate-Nature Coordination Platform](#) (CNCP) established in support of the UNFCCC COP28 Joint Statement on Climate, Nature and People, and with the High Level Champions [Breakthrough Initiatives](#). The following text is proposed:

INVITES the Climate-Nature Coordination Platform (CNCP) established in support of the UNFCCC COP28 Joint Statement on Climate, Nature and People, and INVITES the Breakthrough Initiatives established by the High Level Champions, to consider the critical importance of wetlands and the role of the Convention on Wetlands in efforts to accelerate and integrate action and finance for climate, nature and sustainable development.

- **Paragraph 33** on international cooperation should be amended to include a focus on maximizing the Convention's existing regional cooperation/coordination spaces, notably the 21 Ramsar Regional Initiatives that are already in place, in addition to the establishment of new mechanisms, by the addition of the following text:

33. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to continue to implement the Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention (Resolution VII.19), including by establishing cooperative mechanisms for the management of shared wetlands and hydrological basins to enhance transboundary cooperation, and the establishment of transboundary Wetlands of International Importance; **and by taking full advantage of existing Ramsar Regional Initiatives operating in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands.**

- **Paragraph 35** currently refers to 'principles and guidelines for wetland restoration contained in Resolution VIII.16' adopted in 2002. Relevant principles and guidelines can also be found in more recently developed best practice guidelines (for example on [mangroves](#), [saltmarshes and mudflats](#)). This paragraph would be improved through the addition of the following text related to these more recent publications:

35. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to integrate the Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration contained in Resolution VIII.16, **and in other best-practice restoration guidelines as appropriate**, into their national wetland policies and plans, in undertaking national wetland inventories of wetlands with the potential for restoration, and in applying the Convention toolkit for national wetland inventories, and to report their progress on these matters in their triennial National Reports to the COP as a contribution to the implementation of the Convention's Strategic Plan and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration;

23.9 Draft resolution on implementing the Institutional Strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.9](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome the work of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening since COP14. IUCN confirms its readiness to continue to work with the Ramsar Secretariat to identify improvements in the hosting arrangements relating to human resources, facilities, and administrative arrangements, in consultation with the Executive Team and the Management Working Group.

23.10 Draft resolution on future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention 2025-2028 ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.10](#))

Position:

The IOPs would like to thank the STRP for all the work and guidance it has produced over the last triennium, which has considerably advanced wetland conservation and the awareness of the Convention internationally, with particular thanks to the leadership of the STRP Chair and Vice Chair, as well as National STRP Focal Points. We look forward to continuing to support and contribute to the work of the STRP over the next triennium and we welcome the forthcoming STRP workplan.

Some tasks will be particularly important for the Convention to ensure wetlands are adequately represented in efforts to achieve global climate, biodiversity and sustainability goals, including:

- **Task 1.2.** Global assessment of gaps in the network of Wetlands of International Importance, and synergies with global climate, biodiversity and sustainable development goals.
- **Task 2.2** Advancing the development and use of technology for wetland mapping and inventories.
- **Task 4.2.** Strengthening wetland restoration for climate resilience and biodiversity recovery: Building on STRP outputs and global frameworks.

- **Task 5.2.** Improved global reporting on wetlands: synergies in development of indicators and methods for the Convention's 5th Strategic Plan and other global processes.
- **Task 5.3.** Review of policy and legal frameworks for wetland conservation and wise use.

23.11 Draft resolution on establishment of the Waterbird Estimates Partnership and delivery of the 2027 edition of Waterbird Population Estimates ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.11](#))

Position:

The IOPs strongly support the adoption of this draft resolution on the establishment of the Waterbird Estimates Partnership and delivery of the 2027 edition of Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE2027), prepared by the STRP.

The production of up-to-date estimates of waterbird populations is essential for the designation and management of Ramsar sites, and the delivery of multiple aspects of the Convention, including its founding objective. Waterbird Population Estimates are also an important information source that underpins multiple international and national waterbird and wetland agreements and conservation processes. Building on the resolution adopted by Contracting Parties at COP14 in 2022, time is of the essence for this critical work to update the previous WPE from 2012.

We note that adequate financial resources are essential for the timely production of WPE2027, and for the Waterbird Estimates Partnership to commence operations rapidly and to become fully functional by COP16. Therefore, we encourage Parties to proactively support the use of surplus funds to cover a significant proportion of the total budget that is urgently needed, in addition to exploring alternative sources and voluntary contributions. Whilst the remit of the Waterbird Estimates Partnership includes longer-term resource mobilisation, it cannot begin this until it has been established. We welcome the efforts of many Parties to identify additional contributions, and the commitment of Wetlands International to co-funding.

Wetlands International stands ready to lead this vital work in service to the Convention, in close collaboration with BirdLife International, other IOPs, Contracting Parties, flyways initiatives and other partners.

Recommendation:

- In order to avoid confusing terminology and acronyms between the Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) and the Waterbirds Estimates Partnership (WEP), the new partnership should be referred to as the "**Global Waterbird Estimates Partnership (GWEPP)**" in the title and each paragraph of this DR where it is mentioned (paragraphs 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17-21) and in annex 1.

23.15 Draft resolution on restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems to support ecological character biodiversity and ecosystem services ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.15](#))

Position:

The IOPs strongly support this draft resolution on the restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems, including references in the text to the Freshwater Challenge, green and blue water, and the hydrological cycle.

We support the specific focus on freshwater wetlands, such as rivers and lakes, which are vital

for water, food, livelihoods, climate resilience, and biodiversity. Covering less than 1% of Earth's surface, freshwater wetlands have long been overexploited and are experiencing the worst declines of all ecosystems globally. Only one-third of large rivers still flow freely, and freshwater species populations have dropped by 85% on average since 1970. Progress towards freshwater-related targets is alarmingly off track.

We strongly welcome operational paragraphs 18, 19 and 20, which contain references to the Freshwater Challenge. These will help realise the potential of the Freshwater Challenge, as a voluntary initiative, to support the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands in a way that enhances efficiency, alignment, and the Convention's visibility and synergies with other Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) and international institutions.

Three IOPs are founding partners of the Freshwater Challenge: IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF. They can provide further comment on the elements of this DR that relate to the Freshwater Challenge and how the Freshwater Challenge can support the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands.

Recommendations:

- **Paragraph 5:** Add text as follows to reflect the inclusion of the 6th joint work plan of the CBD and the Convention on Wetlands in CBD COP16 [decision 16/35](#), and recognise the Convention on Wetlands' role as the implementing partner for inland waters for the CBD.

*5. WELCOMING the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework provisions relating to wetland restoration, in particular the inclusion of inland water ecosystems in Target 2: "Ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity", alongside Target 1 (spatial planning) and Target 3 (area-based conservation through protected areas and OECMs) and NOTING that this is further reflected in the 6th Joint Work Plan, 2024-2030, of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Wetlands, **which is welcomed in decision 16/35 of CBD COP16 on Cooperation with other conventions and international organisations.***

- **Paragraph 12:** Add references to the Baku [Declaration on Water for Climate Action](#) as a key wetland related outcome of UNFCCC COP29 and the [Riyadh Action Agenda](#) of UNCCD COP16:

*12. [WELCOMING] [NOTING] the outcomes of the Ministerial Roundtable on the Freshwater Challenge during the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP28) in December 2023; and the status of the Freshwater Challenge as one of the official outcomes of the United Arab Emirates COP28 Presidency's thematic focus on water, nature and climate; **the reference to the Freshwater Challenge and the vital role that protecting and restoring rivers, lakes and other water related ecosystems play in climate mitigation and adaptation in the COP29 Baku Declaration on Water for Climate Action; and the references to wetlands and to the Freshwater Challenge in the Riyadh Action Agenda, launched at UNCCD COP16 by the COP16 Presidency.***

- **Paragraph 16:** Retain this paragraph by removing brackets, including the important references to nature-based solutions (NbS) and ecosystem-based approaches; landscape and river basin approaches; and connectivity.
- **Add a new paragraph referring to Article 3.2 of the Convention** to recognise and encourage the use of the Montreux record – an important element of the Convention on Wetlands – to contribute to the identification of sites that could be prioritised for restoration:

17. bis. "ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to use the Montreux Record to identify priority freshwater wetland sites for restoration action and investment".

23.16 Draft resolution on strengthening national actions for the conservation and restoration of waterbird flyways ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.16](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome this draft resolution, which draws attention to the importance of the national implementation of the Convention on Wetlands for the conservation of migratory waterbirds at a flyway scale. It draws important links with the Convention on Migratory Species and its daughter agreements, and recalls the roots of this Convention, seeking to encourage Parties to take national level actions for migratory waterbird species, enhance cooperation with other MEAs, and strengthen partnerships at multiple scales.

Recommendations:

- **Title:** Amend Waterbird Flyways to **critical waterbird flyway network sites**
- **Paragraph 4:** include '**and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network**' to ensure regional representation that includes the Americas.
- **Paragraph 15:** Add text to support the collation of waterbird data to inform reviews and action at a national and international scale in critical flyway network sites.

*15. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other governments to conduct migratory waterbird census **surveys** and/or waterbird population estimates, with wetland habitat assessments when **ever possible** ~~capable~~, ensuring this data **from all relevant national schemes** is collated at national level and incorporated into the global data collated by the Waterbird Estimate Partnership to inform **reviews of flyway population conservation status at national and international level and the identification, management and restoration of internationally important flyway sites** and review of flyway conservation status at national level;*

- **Paragraph 16** invites Parties to coordinate their action or implementation plans related to migratory birds and wetlands. Amend the text to support the inclusion of references to relevant flyway initiatives or plans.

*16. INVITES Contracting Parties and other governments to develop a National Action/ Implementation Plan **for the** ~~on~~ Conservation and Restoration of Migratory Waterbird Flyways, **with reference to relevant flyway initiatives**, particularly **securing ecological networks and connectivity of internationally important** ~~critical wetlands flyways sites~~, **and ensure the coordination between relevant instruments**;*

- **Paragraph 17:** Add text to demonstrate how National Flyway partnerships may support cooperation with range states through the protection, management and restoration of critical waterbird flyway network sites.

*17. CALLS ON Contracting Parties to establish and strengthen a National Flyway Partnership including with **a** participative and inclusive national stakeholder coordination mechanism, **inter alia to facilitate the protection, effective management and restoration of national waterbird flyway site networks, and also to facilitate cooperation with such Partnerships in other range states**;*

- **Paragraph 19:** Add text to facilitate bilateral engagement between Parties / range states on the same flyway.

*19. INVITES Contracting Parties and other governments to support **and engage with** their flyway*

initiatives relevant to their geography, and accordingly the development and implementation of their Flyway Strategic Plans, ~~and~~ including also provisions for technical and financial support, and delivery of capacity building, including through bilateral relationships between countries which share, for example, the same waterbirds and transboundary wetlands to least developed countries on a voluntary basis and mutually agreed terms;

23.18 Draft resolution on achieving the equitable governance and effective conservation of wetlands as protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.18](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome this important draft resolution, which seeks to integrate and align the Convention on Wetlands with other national and international conservation frameworks, notably the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This alignment aims to improve access to nature finance mechanisms for Wetlands of International Importance and accelerate their mainstreaming into national policies and actions, promote enhanced information on governance and management for the purposes of coherent MEA reporting, support the development and implementation of concepts, global standards and tools on equitable governance and effective management, notably OECMs, within the Convention, and emphasise the importance of robust monitoring and reporting.

As the majority of Parties of the Convention on Wetlands have adopted the GBF, it is highly valuable that this draft resolution emphasises the critical role that Wetlands of International Importance play in the delivery of Target 3 (or the “30x30 target”). The IOPs also welcome the alignment of this draft resolution with the targets of the 5th Strategic Plan, which is also under development, particularly Targets 2 and 3 of the GBF and their related indicators.

Recommendations:

- **Paragraph 10** is essential in recognising the links with the 5th Strategic Plan and the importance of the Convention on Wetlands undertaking its role as an implementing partner for inland water in relation to the CBD and the GBF targets. Target 3, to ‘ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, **inland water**, and of coastal and marine areas...are effectively conserved and managed’ should be well reflected here and in the targets of the 5th Strategic Plan.
- **Paragraph 15:** Retain this paragraph to refer Parties to the important briefing note on OECMs and the Convention on Wetlands, which was published by the STRP during Standing Committee 64.
- **Paragraph 21:** Retain all sub paragraphs.
- **Paragraph 22.ii:** Retain this sub paragraph in line with the guidance of the STRP in Briefing Note 14. It would also benefit from referencing other global guidelines relating to the GBF monitoring framework, indicators, and effective management and equitable governance, such as the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas, the Key Biodiversity Areas Criteria and R-METT assessments for identifying and managing critical wetland sites, to improve clarity on guidelines.
- **Paragraph 22.iii:** Retain this sub paragraph to ensure the alignment of the Ramsar Information System and the World Database on Protected Areas and OECMs, thus reducing the reporting burden on Contracting Parties to update both databases.

23.19 Draft resolution on youth empowerment and integration: driving engagement in and the longevity of the Convention on Wetland ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.19](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome advances over the last triennium in the engagement of youth in the work of the Convention, notably the Youth Working Group that has brought forward this draft resolution. We welcome this important draft resolution to continue to empower and integrate the work and perspectives of youth into the Convention to ensure it remains a robust and effective mechanism for future generations.

Recommendations:

- **Paragraph 17:** Add reference to the potential of mentoring, as well as budget, for engaging young people in actions related to wetlands.

*17. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to allocate budget, where possible, and **time and capacity for mentoring activities**, for youth engagement and capacity-building opportunities in wetlands-related projects and programmes at national and local levels;*

- **Paragraph 18:** Should refer to the need to create an enabling environment where young people can actively contribute to the work of the Convention through their participation in meetings.

*18. CALLS UPON all Convention working groups and subsidiary bodies to include at least one youth representative member (whether a Youth Focal Point or youth representative of the International Organization Partners of the Convention (IOPs)), [either as a member of the delegation or as an observer,] and ENCOURAGES **parties to create an enabling environment for youth to enable** their active participation in meetings;*

- **Paragraph 19** should be retained as the STRP is strongly encouraged to invite expertise from young experts and aspiring academics and people working in the field of wetlands.

23.20 Draft resolution on promoting sustainable lifestyles for the wise use of wetlands ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.20](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome this resolution recognizing how voluntary behavioural changes can support wetland conservation, requiring actions at all levels through a whole-of-society approach. The draft resolution's focus on creating favourable conditions through public-private partnerships and educational initiatives tailored to national contexts offers a favourable pathway to achieve multiple objectives that align with many MEAs.

The IOPs further support the potential compilation by the STRP (subject to resource availability) of methods and case studies demonstrating how sustainable lifestyles can be integrated into wetland management, offering transformative approaches that promote harmony with Nature or Mother Earth, as recognised in various countries and regions.

23.23 Draft resolution on assessing pressures on and risks to wetlands ([Link to document COP15 Doc.23.23](#))

Position:

The IOPs welcome this draft resolution to enhance assessment of the threats to wetlands and their ecological character, which can strengthen the evidence base to drive effective conservation and restoration. We welcome the focus on understanding and addressing the drivers and root causes of wetland loss and degradation.

The DR introduces the Wetland Vulnerability Assessment Tool (WETVAT), a participatory risk-based approach developed in the Greater Himalayas and expanded through the Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia, with successful testing across diverse regional sites. WETVAT complements existing tools like the Rapid Assessment of Wetland Ecosystem Services (RAWES) and Ramsar Site Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (RMETT). The Contracting Parties are encouraged to voluntarily adopt WETVAT and, where possible, allocate resources or form partnerships with Ramsar Regional Initiatives and international organisations to support training, workshops, and resource sharing that will strengthen technical capacity for risk assessment.

The Convention on Wetlands' International Organisation Partners (IOPs) are six global non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work closely with the Convention to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands. IOPs are formally recognised by the Contracting Parties and provide crucial support through expert advice, field implementation assistance, and financial resources. They are BirdLife International, IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Water Management Institute, Wetlands International, WWF and WWT.

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