

IOP Opening Statement at Ramsar COP12

Delivered by Jane Madgwick, CEO Wetlands International on behalf of Wetlands International, WWF, IUCN, Birdlife International and IWMI

We would like to start by thanking Uruguay for hosting the COP and together with the Secretariat team for all the preparations. We also welcome the strong participation of countries and Observers here. We anticipate that, following the excellent example of Romania at COP 11, Uruguay will seize this opportunity to announce a substantial increase in the number and area of their Wetlands of International Importance. This is a region is tremendously rich in wetlands but also has its' fair share of wetland challenges. I would like to mention the "Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin", as a major challenge due to the many projects of big infrastructure and dams that are planned for the basin, which represent a threat to wetlands from Pantanal in the north to the Parana Delta in the south. We are hopeful that with good consideration, this tremendous wetland wealth will not be squandered, but instead be conserved and nurtured as a basis for sustainable development.

The five IOPs are here in good number to participate fully in this COP in the spirit of partnership with all Parties. We make, separately and together, significant contributions to the shaping and implementation of the Ramsar Convention. Each IOP contributes and invests through our own teams in all regions, and in partnership with governments, private sector and wider civil society. We look forward to the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust adding to our strength. The real value of the IOP group is that we apply and share our knowledge and experience in wetland science, policy and practice in helping to shape Resolutions and Regional Initiatives. We also develop and implement our own programmes, which can be seen as major vehicles for implementation of the Conventions' Strategic Plan. This level of commitment made by IOPs and our close dialogue with the Secretariat and Parties, does make us special partners to the Convention, while there is also a much broader field of NGOs and civil society groups who are at the front line in wetland conservation and wise use whose work and advice is also vital to achieve the Conventions' goals. Between us, we are leading 15 side events and we are supporting many

more through our active participation. These events are central to the success of any COP since they serve the purpose of progressing vital understanding and dialogue, leading to adoption of Resolutions that are better fit for purpose.

I feel it important to highlight the fact that this COP is very timely in relation to a number of global policy processes where wetlands are given significant attention. It follows the global Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan which agreed a Framework for action for the next 15 years and underlined the need for ecosystem-based approaches to prevent and reduce disaster risk. Soon after that the 7th World Water Forum in Korea emphasized the vital role of wetlands as natural infrastructure in the quest for water security and equitable access. And this COP precedes the Sustainable Development Goals summit in September where the UN General Assembly will set out the worlds' development agenda – within which conserving and restoring wetlands for their biodiversity and ecosystem services is recognized for the first time as being relevant and worthy of investment. And last but not least, this COP precedes the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21 in December, which seeks a universal agreement on climate, that is needed to guarantee any prospect for harmony between people and nature in the long term.

In these and other policy fora, the call for urgent action to restore and maintain the fabric of wetlands in the landscape in all regions of the world is getting louder and louder. Importantly, safeguarding and restoring wetlands is much less seen as a marginal activity for the better off countries – and more and more seen as a universal need. In Sendai and Korea, governments from around the world recognized that loss and degradation of wetlands has been exacerbated by poor development planning and is a root cause of the growing devastating impacts of floods and droughts. And that policy adjustments and investments are needed in the public and private sector to reverse this trend. Examples of successful wetland solutions to store water, to increase food security and to mitigate and adapt to climate change have multiplied – and the discussion has turned around to the issue of how to bring such examples to scale. It's quite a signal that some of the biggest companies in the world are working with NGO's like ours to find ways to make wetland conservation, wise use and restoration part of normal business - they do this not out of goodwill, but because it makes good economic sense.

Of course, the actual mainstreaming of wetlands into development and climate solutions on the ground is complex and there are many obstacles and challenges to overcome. Inter-disciplinary approaches are needed to understanding the complex bio-physical and socio-economic dimensions of water security in the context of wetlands and water management. In this respect, the complimentary expertise and experience of the IOPS can help to connect science, policies and practices, provide partnerships and demonstrations that help to catalyse and scale up effective application . Our active participation in the development and execution of the scientific work programs of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), is another mechanism by which we can help to ensure that high-quality scientific information and understanding of wetlands is incorporated into policy-making.

In particular, the IOPs want to highlight that the outcomes of this Ramsar COP should inform negotiations on the final texts and indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals in the coming months. In this context, we welcome the new approach, Goals and Targets set out in the Strategic Plan which reflect this opportunity quite well. We do though see need for clear indicators to stimulate and track progress– and are concerned that the current ones are focused more on process than on conservation and wise use outcomes. We suggest to follow the successful model adopted by CBD and CMS, using a working group mechanism. We are ready to support the Convention in this work.

There are a number of key Resolutions under consideration during this COP. There is room for improvement in some of these. In our view, DR11 on *“Peatlands, climate change and wise use”* should reflect the reality that stepping up action to conserve, wisely use and restore peatlands, representing around half the worlds’ wetlands, is vitally important for climate change mitigation and adaptation. We think this should properly be dealt with by the Ramsar Convention, in full alignment with decisions taken by UNFCCC. We want to particularly welcome DR12 submitted by Mexico regarding *“Protecting the water requirements of wetlands for the present and the future”* and the focus on wetlands as natural infrastructure in this as well as the timely DR11 *Wetlands and Disaster Risk Reduction*, submitted by The Philippines. We also commend and urge your support for DR 10 on *“Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation”*, which is the first Ramsar

Resolution ever to be submitted jointly by Contracting Parties from two different Regions : Tunisia in Africa, and Republic of Korea in Asia.

Finally, we welcome the proposal from the Secretariat for an ambitious initiative for Wetland Restoration, and further advise Parties to ensure that the initiative moves forward in a way that breaks new ground and develops new and more powerful mechanisms that can catalyse wetland restoration at a large scale, building on and adding to the work of others, rather than simply replicating small scale actions. The IOPs are very active in this field and each have significant experience and examples on successful wetland restoration and rehabilitation programmes. We look forward to share our ideas and experiences in discussion with Parties further during the COP on this matter.

I would like to wish you all an inspiring, productive and enjoyable COP and to encourage you to do what you can to help set the Ramsar Convention on a course that will bring hope and real benefit to all, by increasing the prospects for wetlands worldwide.

Thank you for your attention.