

Protection of natural flows of water for the conservation of wetlands

NOTING that the Global Wetland Outlook 2018 published by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands states that “wetlands are declining fast, with 35% loss since 1970”, and that “quality of remaining wetlands is also suffering, due to drainage, ..., disrupted flow regimes and climate change”;

CONCERNED that a major driver of disruption and reductions to flow regimes of rivers from their headwaters to the coast, including estuaries, and from river main channels to floodplains, has been the construction of water management infrastructure, including dams, water diversion channels, coastal or estuarine barrages, double-dyke reclamations, and mega tide banks;

CONSIDERING that ground water is essential to maintain the natural flow of water because it allows rivers and lakes not to dry completely between precipitation events, hence supporting biodiversity and other ecosystem services;

NOTING that while construction of such artificial structures may provide short-term benefits to some people, they lead to deterioration of riverine, floodplain and coastal wetlands and their ecosystems through preventing the natural flow of water, and that this threatens the lives of indigenous people and local communities through impacting on traditional and sustainable use, and blocking migratory routes of fauna;

RECOGNISING that Resolution 5.089 *Dams and hydraulic infrastructure* (Jeju, 2012) and Resolution VIII.2 of the 8th Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on *The Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention* (COP8, Valencia, 2002) address the long-standing efforts of IUCN to overcome controversies over large dams and their impacts, including through WCD, and that the Ramsar Convention has in its resolutions and guidelines repeatedly emphasised the importance of maintaining the natural flow of water through Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), including Resolutions VIII.1 *Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands* (COP8, Valencia, 2002) and XII.2 *The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016–2024* (COP12, Punta del Este, 2015);

RECALLING the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai that emphasised the role of ecosystems in disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR); and

WELCOMING recent efforts, including the removal of the Arase and Vezins Dams in Japan and France, respectively, the proposal by the Republic of Korea for re-naturalisation of rivers, and the European Union's Water Framework Directive linking water and ecosystem services;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:

1. REQUESTS that the Director General, in collaboration with the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), draws from the Global Wetlands Outlook to highlight the present situation of the loss and deterioration of wetlands in river basins and coastal regions, as well as the construction of artificial structures that prevent the natural flow of water;
2. ALSO REQUESTS the Director General, in collaboration with the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), to ensure that IUCN programmes protect remaining natural wetland habitats and restore functioning wetland ecosystems, promote wetland habitats as nature-based solutions to flood mitigation and carbon sequestration, and develop Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) activities on the importance of protecting and restoring the natural flow of water and its connectivity;
3. REQUESTS the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), in cooperation with other stakeholders, to update the protected area management guidelines in order to guarantee effective protection of wetland habitats;
4. INVITES governments of all states, and other competent authorities, including, but not limited to, IUCN State Members, to review, reform and implement legislation based on the precautionary principle to control the construction of artificial structures that prevent the natural flow of water in rivers, on the coast, and in aquifers, to maintain wetland ecosystems and the lives and the livelihoods of people depending on them;
5. REQUESTS international and national NGO Members to propose to governments and the private sector such projects that are based on the Nature Based Principle and the idea of Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction, to maintain and improve the natural flow of water and sediments in rivers, coasts, and aquifers;

6. ENCOURAGES governments of all states, and other competent authorities, including, but not limited to, State Members to investigate removing or changing the artificial structures that have destroyed wetlands, or that have halted the natural flow of water and sediments, to restore such wetlands, where appropriate; and

7. REQUESTS governments of all states, and other competent authorities, including, but not limited to, State Members, to accept a fair third-party review, including local communities and scientists, of the necessity, validity and impacts of any project involving the building of such artificial structures.