

FORUM: Environmental Sub-Commission Two

QUESTION OF: International cooperation to conserve wetlands to safeguard biodiversity

SUBMITTED BY: Belize

CO-SUBMITTERS: Afghanistan, Brazil, Panama, Mexico, Estonia, Samoa, Sudan, Luxembourg, Andorra, Nigeria, DPRK; Belarus, Zimbabwe, Tajikistan, Israel, Colombia, Marshall Islands, Montenegro, St. Kitts and Nevis

ENVIRONMENT SUB-COMMISSION 2,

Emphasizing the fact that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the governing body of protected sites, has highlighted the importance of wetlands for the enrichment and survival of biodiversity,

Further noting that IUCN's research has shown that an estimated 126,000 organisms rely on freshwater habitats to survive,

Underlining the fact that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes goals and targets to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and priority ecosystems for advancing social well-being, economic growth, and environmental protection,

Recognizing that the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which works to maintain ecosystem services for the benefits that are essential to all people, remain sustained to fulfill the vision in which in 2050 biodiversity is valued,

Taking into account that if the United Nations and other valuable organizations do not work together towards the immediate attempt to conserve the world's beautiful wetlands, then issues such as the rapid release of water runoff from residential buildings and pavements will cause heavy flooding,

Taking into consideration that wetlands can store up to 50 times more carbon than rain forests helping to keep the heat-trapping gas that contributes to climate change out of the atmosphere according to the World WildLife (WWF),

1. Endorses the immediate scientific assessment to be conducted by the IUCN of each country's wetlands and their current biodiversity by using remote sensing technology and Geographical Information System (GIS) in order to:
 - a) appropriately classify each wetland and create an international database with up-to-date information such as wetland type, surface area, specific biodiversity and conservation status
 - b) collect relevant data proving the value and impact of wetlands such as sediment deposition, retention rates and consequences of wetland productivity
 - c) undertaking field studies of selected species and ecosystems to create current and future projection trends for species in light of the increasing rate of species extinction, such as to track aviary migration within the scope of the 1979 Bonn Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals
 - d) identify biodiversity hotspots and aid in the setting of more specific protection targets
 - e) furthering restoration activities, such as forest and wetland landscape restoration, to re-establish ecosystem functionalities, by:
 - i. developing ex-situ conservation measures such as captive breeding, botanical gardens, and more
 - ii. restoring vegetation on denuded areas after development projects
 - iii. attempting to remove drainage tiles and restore natural drainages;
2. Recommends the creation of community outreach programs by the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) to help communities value the environment and create willingness to

protect wetland ecosystems through projects such as but not limited to:

- a) intertwining higher education science classes with ecology and visits to local natural sites to instill respect for the environment and understanding of threats to our environment
- b) UN-financed ecology college courses adults in towns surrounding wetlands
- c) FAO conducted visits to companies operating in highly developed wetlands to advise on ethical practises
- d) emphasizing days such as World Wetlands Day, 2nd February 1971 as adopted by the Convention of Wetlands, as it will teach the values and benefits that wetlands provide
- e) support the Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF), which complements existing training and education initiatives with wetland-related instruction, including:
 - i. preparation of teaching materials and implementation of university-level courses on management and conservation of wetland ecosystems
 - ii. revision of current training curricula for strengthening existing training programs to enhance wetland management
 - iii. graduate placement for individuals who have specialized in wetlands and wish to start a wetland project upon returning to their own countries;

3. Requests all nations to designate at least 40% of their wetlands, if such is possible while conforming to selection criterion, as protected lands, in order to protect their biodiversity and highlight their value to local communities, under national or international programs including but not limited to:

- a) Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites)
- b) UNESCO Biospheres
- c) Important Bird Areas
- d) Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network;

4. Calls for the development of adequate legal instruments including laws, regulations, policies and procedures, with assistance from the World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL), to regulate and address the challenges of wetland preservation in each nation, which include:

- a) building community support for wetlands projects through partnership models to raise awareness of:
 - i. the significance of Ramsar sites and their importance for migratory birds and other wildlife
 - ii. the business risks of wetland and biodiversity decline and the importance of risk management and implement sustainability measures
- b) the use of regional and watershed approaches in setting restoration objectives through:
 - i. providing financial incentives, with bonding of restored sites to ensure that a percentage of the bond monies could be returned after restoration
 - ii. devising statistical profiles that can provide an up-to-date picture of current status of wetland ecosystems
- c) creating and enforcing a legal penalty system up to each country's discretion for individuals and groups who do not abide by said country's environmental laws with a baseline penalty set at:
 - i. a fine based on the size of the area impacted and the severity of the damage inflicted to the wetland
 - ii. compulsory community service aiding wetlands for a time not inferior to 1 month
 - iii. imprisonment, in the case of extremely severe destruction of wetlands;

5. Believing that reinstatement of the Clean Water Act's Wetlands provision of 1987 would be more successful with the added benefits for those reluctant to abide, including, but not limited to:

- a) giving farmers an option of relocation of farmable land in exchange for the wetlands, or other forms of compensation such as money
- b) property and land owners to be given compensation by the government in other forms such as a tax deduction if they offer to donate or sell wetlands;

6. Further supports research into the optimization of existing, restored and constructed wetlands, with added research in:
 - a) improving water quality, including their phosphorus reduction capabilities
 - b) managing water quantity for supply and natural hazard management, the development of effective prevention, detection, monitoring and mechanical, biological and chemical control of invasive species in wetlands
 - c) the role of wetlands in adaptation strategies and climate resiliency with the ecosystem services they provide, such as flood attenuation
 - d) understanding and quantifying how wetlands are responding to climate change through:
 - i. changes to their hydrologic functions
 - ii. changes in their role to act as carbon sinks or sources
 - iii. changes to their role in supporting aquatic and terrestrial habitats;
7. Further endorses the creation of media campaigns or the enhancement of already-existing ones in order to raise public awareness and sensitize the public on their role on conserving wetlands which will include advertisements such as but not be limited to;
 - a) documentaries
 - b) public campaigns
 - c) social media
 - d) factual posters and stands in areas such as National Parks;
8. Calls for the establishment of a framework for determining priority areas and focusing efforts on conservation and restoration that considers the broader landscape in terms of context and provincial commitments such as:
 - a) wetland loss
 - b) habitat connectivity
 - c) natural heritage systems
 - d) mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
9. Further invites the creation of an environmental agency in each country, if not already available, for purposes such as but not limited to:
 - a) monitoring national wetland and biodiversity conservation status
 - b) reporting back to the IUCN and the Species Survival Commission (SEC) with results in order to form an appropriate strategy for wetland protection
 - c) regularly contributing to the official United Nations International Wetlands Database (UNIWD) which will include previously mentioned scientific research results so that all those tasked with safeguarding wetlands have access to current data and can track environmental patterns;
10. Further calls for cooperation between countries in conserving transboundary wetlands for coherent, sustainable management through international agreement.