



Factsheet

Pacific Wetlands Conservation



What are wetlands?

Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. These freshwater, brackish or marine areas provide a vital breeding habitat for wildlife and water filtration.

Mangroves and coral reefs are the two most prevalent wetland types in the Pacific. Wetlands provide tremendous economic and conservation benefits through fisheries production, flood control, shoreline stabilization, maintenance of coastal water quality and provision of recreational opportunities.

The Pacific contains 3 percent of the world's mangroves and about 25 percent of the world's coral reefs.

The Ramsar Convention and SPREP: Working together to strengthen wetlands conservation in the Pacific

SPREP is committed to supporting and working with its members and other partners to conserve and manage wetlands in the Pacific. SPREP is currently implementing programmes that aim to support Pacific Island communities to achieve ecologically sustainable use of their wetlands and associated resources.

In 2002, a Memorandum of Understanding was first signed between the Ramsar Secretariat and SPREP on wetlands work in the region. This commitment to joint collaboration was reaffirmed through a new agreement signed in 2006.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.



There are presently 158 Contracting Parties to the Convention. As of January 2009, some 1,828 wetland sites, totalling 169 million hectares, are designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Seven SPREP Members are Parties to Ramsar: Australia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Samoa. A number of other SPREP Members are in the process of joining, including Kiribati and Nauru.

The Ramsar Secretariat is based in Gland, Switzerland.

The Ramsar–SPREP partnership facilitates regional and national activities aimed at promoting the wise use and conservation of wetlands in the Pacific region.

The Ramsar Regional Officer based at SPREP provides support and advice for the Pacific Island Countries in joining the Convention, but also in implementing the “wise use” principle of the Convention.

What are the key issues for Ramsar in the Pacific?

- Conservation and wise use of coral reefs, mangroves, freshwater lakes and other freshwater ecosystems.
- Maintaining the ecological functioning of wetlands and ensuring their cultural and traditional use is maintained for the benefit of present and future generations.

- Managing wetlands and minimizing actual and perceived threats to their ecological character.

Why is the Pacific important?

The South Pacific region has been a long-term priority for the Ramsar Convention.

Our region shelters many of the most endangered wetland ecosystems on the planet, including coral reefs (among them the Great Barrier Reef), mangroves, sea-grass meadows (a vital ecosystem for the survival of the dugong) and rare island wetlands.

Yet, the Pacific is currently the most under-represented region to the Convention. Of the 158 parties to the Ramsar Convention, only 7 are from the Convention's Oceania Region. The region, as defined by Ramsar, contains 29 eligible nations and territories.

World Wetlands Day

Every year, on 2 February, the world celebrates the anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention as World Wetlands Day.

Since 1997, people from all sectors of society have undertaken actions aimed at raising public awareness of the value of wetlands and the importance of the Ramsar Convention.

The Ramsar Secretariat sponsors a wide range of activities, including children's art contests, lectures, nature walks,

Some concepts as defined by the Convention

Wetlands occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land or where the land is covered by water. These areas can be natural or human-made, and represent (according to the definition above and including some coastal areas in some countries), an estimated 1.3 billion hectares. That's around 12% of the Earth's land surface!

Wise Use Principle is the Ramsar Convention's approach for integrated management. It recommends a "big picture" approach to ecosystems management, including not only ecological aspects, but also human, social, economic, institutional and cultural factors. The wise use principle seeks to find a balance between human needs and the conservation of biodiversity to achieve sustainable development.

and the launch of new national programmes. It also provides posters, brochures, activity kits and other promotional materials to parties to help promote the day and assist in coordinating activities.

World Wetlands Day activities are held throughout Ramsar member countries in the Pacific, with SPREP sponsoring a number of wetlands day events at the regional level.

For more information on World Wetlands Day, visit: http://www.ramsar.org/wwd/wwd_index.htm



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