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## **Written Statement/Input to the UN 2023 Water Conference**

A world without wetlands is a world without freshwater. Humanity's legacy of extremely poor management of water and wetlands is increasing the likelihood of water-related disasters, undermining climate action and driving devastating nature loss. Dams, dikes, drains and water diversions have fragmented the natural wetland ecosystems – from rivers and lakes to peatlands and marshes - which previously stored, transported, purified and delivered us water.

Across every continent, inland and coastal wetlands still play a crucial role in ensuring water security as well as storing carbon, enabling climate adaptation, and supporting 40% of the world's biodiversity. Wetlands make a significant contribution to every single Sustainable Development Goal. Yet they remain under-valued and too often seen as an impediment to development, rather than as nurturers and sustainers of prosperity and peace.

With so many wetlands already lost, the challenge is not just to protect the survivors, but to extend and improve them. Just as the global community strives for the restoration of the world's forests, we need restoration of the world's wetlands too. Wetlands International is a supporting partner of the Freshwater Challenge, contributing to the global restoration of at least 300,000 kilometres of rivers and 350 million hectares of inland wetlands by 2030.

The good news is that solutions already exist. For example, at Wetlands International, we are involved in the Water, Peace and Security partnership that helps stakeholders identify and understand water-related security risks and undertake timely, informed and inclusive action for conflict prevention and mitigation. Our Source to Sea partnership aims to improve the conservation status of high-value wetlands in the Rift Valley and along the East Africa mangrove coast for water-resilient communities. In the Mediterranean, our Water-4-Resilience partnership is developing location-specific strategies to promote landscape scale restoration reducing the impact of water extraction, dams and coastal developments.

What we need now is transformative action. Governments, business and civil society must collaborate to upscale conservation and restoration of wetland ecosystems, and to tackle the drivers of wetland loss.

The interconnections between the water, climate and nature crises demand a systems approach. The water resource solutions of the past won't provide security for the future. With increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, human security is not about engineering water control but about nature-based solutions that are flexible and resilient. A systems approach means enabling radical collaboration to connect all sectors for a nature positive and water positive world.

The speed and scale of change required demands bold policy change. As part of that, valuing water is key to connecting it into climate action and channeling finance to local actors. And when we value water, that must include the value of the water-related ecosystems that store, regulate and deliver water to people. This will help identify and address water-related risks, including those caused by ecosystem degradation. It will help ministries and sectors to align and ensure we avoid new water infrastructure that further diminishes wetlands and the vital services they provide. It will help to identify where to restore water-related ecosystems and their natural hydrology - to reduce climate risks and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

The benefits of the rapid transformation demand unprecedented finance. Restoring water and wetland connectivity and functionality across landscapes is a triple win for water security, climate and biodiversity. It's crucial for economic resilience. This triple win needs to be reflected in scale and direction of finance from all sources. In particular, we need to structurally incorporate and finance nature-based solutions that enhance water security at pace and scale as an integral part of climate action for mitigation and adaptation.

In the wake of the UN Water Conference, acting on these issues and deliverables will enhance the linkages between our global commitments on climate, biodiversity, water and sustainable development, and greatly increase our chances of delivering on all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Science-based, locally-rooted NGOs like Wetlands International are key agents to enable this collective action at all levels. Wetlands International will work with all sectors – from civil society to business, and from scientists to Indigenous Peoples and local communities– to share resources and solutions and to upscale wetland conservation and restoration across the world, for the benefit of people, nature and climate.

**Jane Madgwick, CEO, Wetlands International**  
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