

Statement of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands  
Ocean Conference, 5-9 June 2017, New York  
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Secretary General, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Co-Presidents of this Conference, Fiji and Sweden, the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for convening this first UN Ocean Conference.

This conference provides a crucial opportunity to galvanize action and secure commitments to maintain the health of the vital marine and coastal ecosystems that sustain our livelihoods, provide us with food and shelter, regulate our climate and support a dazzling array of biodiversity. As a result, the future survival of our planet depends on the health of these ecosystems.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, to which 169 States are now Parties, provides the global legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of all wetlands. These wetlands include marine and coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, tidal flats, coral reefs and sea grass meadows. It also includes inland wetland types such as lakes and rivers that connect our lands to our coasts and are therefore important for the health of our oceans. The Convention thus provides a fundamental platform from which to achieve SDG14 and its targets.

A key obligation of Contracting Parties to the Convention is the designation of wetlands of exceptional value in their territory as 'Wetlands of International Importance' also called 'Ramsar Sites'. By doing so, they commit to the long-term conservation and sustainable use of these Sites. So far, Parties have designated over 2,270 Ramsar Sites worldwide, including 946 that contain coastal or marine areas, covering over 68 million hectares.

These Ramsar Sites provide a range of valuable ecosystem services: the Convention's Parties report that among the coastal Sites, 77% are important for recreation and tourism, 49% help to reduce the impact of hazards such as storm surges, and 46% provide wetland products and food for local communities. These Sites also play a significant role in supporting local livelihoods, providing carbon storage and supporting biodiversity.

The scale of the threats to the world's oceans calls for ambitious, coordinated action to turn the tide. And we do congratulate all countries and institutions that have announced their Voluntary Commitments at this Oceans Conference to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems.

Protecting marine and coastal areas is a first important step, which recognizes the value of these ecosystems. Taking the further additional steps that will help maintain their ecological health is equally vital. Other steps to be taken include enacting the right legislation, engaging the right partnerships such as with businesses and regional and international actors, empowering local communities and developing management plans for these Sites.

It is also important to monitor our progress and adapt our responses to reach the level of ambition of SDG14. In this regard, the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands have committed to reporting on the extent of their wetlands starting in 2018. This will provide a source of validated data to help us monitor the state of the world's wetlands and to measure progress on the implementation of SDG14 on oceans and SDG6 on water. Further, the Convention will release the Global Wetlands Outlook: State of the World's Wetlands and their Services to People, at the next Conference of the Parties (COP 13) to take place in Dubai in 2018.

Our coastal and marine ecosystems provide benefits that are vital to achieve other SDGs, including poverty reduction and water security, as well as climate regulation, adaptation and mitigation. Their conservation, management and restoration are thus essential components of the path to achieve SDG14 and of the whole 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

We must maintain the momentum born here because the future of our oceans depends on it, and I assure you of our full support.