



# WORLD WETLAND NETWORK

A global network of Civil Society Groups & NGOs working on wetland conservation

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## WORLD WETLAND NETWORK REPORT ON RAMSAR COP12

Uruguay hosted the 12th [Ramsar Conference of Parties](#) (COP12), from June 1-9, 2015. The COP brought together 800 government representatives from 168 contracting parties to debate and adopt resolutions. These resolutions drive global policy for wetland conservation and wise use going forward.

I was fortunate to attend Ramsar COP12 as a facilitator for (WWN). WWN is an international network of NGOs and civil society organisations, many of whom are focused on one or two wetlands in their local area. These organisations reflect their local cultures and communities and represent a considerable force for improving delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals. I was also representing the Australian Wetland Network's 39 members, and my employer WetlandCare Australia, who funded my time at the conference.

World Wetland Network was launched at Ramsar COP 10, so this was our third COP. Our participation in Ramsar is recognised in Resolution 11.6. We were formed to complement the activity of the International Organisation Partners to the convention (IOPs.). WWN fully appreciates the value and expertise of the non-governmental IOPs, who work in strong partnership with local communities and indigenous peoples. To complement their activities, WWN was formed at the initiative of smaller, grass-roots NGOs and CSOs seeking a voice at the table.

While at COP12 I worked with the WWN committee, local delegates and NGO representatives to have an effective voice in the proceedings. First we hosted a pre-COP meeting for NGO delegates. Fifty-five people attended from 14 countries. It was a great chance to meet each other and discuss our aims for the COP. Ania Grobicki, Vice-Secretary General of the Ramsar secretariat, and Camilla Chalmers, Head of Communications, briefed the meeting, along with Carolina Hazin from BirdLife Australia. We worked together on our Opening Statement, and received a declaration from Causa Tota, Colombia. The Pre-COP meeting was sponsored by the Japan Fund for Global Environment, who gave a presentation on biodiversity in rice paddies.

Our WWN Opening Statement was presented to the COP in Spanish by Virginia Juele from local NGO Aguará Popé. The key message was that NGOs support Ramsar and want to do more to conserve wetlands and promote wise use. We made the point that supporting and enabling volunteers and NGO staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources, but small inputs create big outcomes, leading to better programs for Ramsar sites. WE also expressed NGO concerns that:

- Some governments appear to discourage strategic Ramsar site designations. A means for civil society to highlight potential nominations would be welcomed.
- Some governments do not actively use Ramsar as a tool to protect wetlands. NGOs observe government inactivity, reduced financial resources and reduced involvement of public officials.
- There is sometimes inaccurate reporting in the national Ramsar reports. Contracting parties should take responsibility to ensure accurate reporting of wetland status to inform effective decision-making.

A copy of the statement can be found [here](#).

We were also galvanized by the fire-brand Opening Statement from IUCN Director General Inger Andersen. Inger's incisive analysis and passion were the talk of the opening plenary. In her statement she said:

*"Our trashing of the world's wetlands has been going on for so long and is so extensive that we have become inured to it – almost blind to its severity and cost."*



*Shareholders would never stand by and let the capital base of a business be destroyed like this. They would demand change. Yet, despite all being shareholders in the natural capital of the world's wetlands, we let this happen."*

You can read Ms. Andersen's statement [here](#).

Next day we hosted a side event to bring together government and non-government delegates. Twenty-three delegates attended from 19 countries. The side event commenced with a presentation of the results of WWN's global survey of NGOs on their relationship with Ramsar. NGOs often have longer term association with wetlands than their government counterparts. Successfully mobilizing their commitment is a key to wetland conservation success.

The respondent comments and survey findings focused on similar themes:

- the relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat is generally good, although many NGOs rely on WWN for access. Harnessing WWN's role is important.
- the relationships with National Focal Points are generally less positive. There is little contact with National Focal Points between each Ramsar Conference of the Parties and a belief was often expressed that governments did not respect the value of NGOs. Establishing a more robust mechanism for greater involvement and active communication between NGOs and National Focal Points would be welcomed.
- supporting and enabling volunteers and staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources, but these resources lead to better programs and outcomes for Ramsar sites.

A copy of the survey report can be found [here](#).

Following the presentation delegates participated in a series of activities to create dialogue about working more effectively across sectors. We discussed the barriers and difficulties working across sectors, many of which could be classed as cultural differences between the sectors. We also canvassed solutions for more productive relationships, a report will be distributed in the near future.

I was very fortunate to be invited into the working group for the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024. Engagement with the non-government and community sectors and indigenous people was a serious omission from the draft Strategic Plan. Many contracting parties, notably Bolivia, advocated to include local communities and indigenous peoples in the Strategic plan. Successfully advocating to have these groups included, and establishing performance indicators for contracting parties to include NGO representation on National Wetland Committees, was a highlight of WWN's participation at the COP.

Finally, we worked together to draft a Closing Statement which was presented by Rafaela Nicola, WWN's Latin American representative. We noted that the top priority of the Strategic Plan is to prevent, stop and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands. Its recognition of key threats including unsustainable agriculture, forestry and extractive industries, especially oil, gas, mining, and urbanisation closely reflects the local knowledge and concerns of our members, in Latin America and globally.

We encouraged Contracting Parties to work cohesively across ministries and prioritise long-term sustainability when approving developments. A healthy environment is fundamental to our economic and social security. The Closing Statement can be found [here](#).

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WWN representatives (L-R) Minoru Kashiwagi (Japan), Louise Duff (Australia), and Rafaela Nicola (Brazil) at Ramsar COP 12.

