

Australia attends the 12th Ramsar Conference of Contracting Parties in Uruguay, June 2015

Outcomes of the 12th Ramsar Conference of the Parties

Australian Government Department of the Environment

The twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was held from 2-9 June 2015 in Punta del Este, Uruguay, with the theme “Wetlands for our Future”.



The Conference adopted 16 resolutions by consensus, including a new Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016-2024 with its vision that “wetlands are conserved, wisely used, restored and their benefits are recognised and valued by all”. It also adopted resolutions on a new framework for the delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance on the Convention; a programme of communication, education and capacity-building; the role of wetlands in disaster risk reduction; effective management of Ramsar sites; peatlands; and the development of a system for accreditation of “World Wetland Cities” .

In the face of the continued loss and degradation of wetlands globally, COP12 sought to heighten the visibility and broaden the leverage of the Ramsar Convention. The COP strengthened its ties with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sustainable Development Goals and disaster risk reduction. It also considered ways of improving implementation of the Convention on the ground.

Australia, as a member of the Oceania Region, made a significant contribution to regional consideration of the draft resolutions, and also participated in two successful side events, presenting on Australia’s experience in wetland restoration and a case study on environmental watering in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Australia has stepped up to take on further regional responsibilities during the 2016-2018 triennium as the Oceania Region’s representative to the Ramsar Steering Committee. In addition the Head of Australia’s Ramsar Administrative Authority, Mr David Papps, was elected as Vice-Chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee for the next triennium.

For further information on the outcomes of the Ramsar COP, see: <http://www.ramsar.org/about/cop12-punta-del-este-uruguay-1-9-june-2015>

Copies of the final resolutions can be found at: <http://www.ramsar.org>

Local NGO leads community engagement at Ramsar Conference of the Parties

Louise Duff, Secretary Australian Wetland Network

Uruguay hosted the 12th Ramsar Conference of Parties (COP12), from 1-9 June 2015. The COP brought together 800 government representatives from 168 contracting parties to debate and adopt resolutions. These drive global policy for wetland conservation and wise use going forward. I was fortunate to attend Ramsar COP12 as a facilitator for the World Wetland Network (WWN).

WWN is an international alliance of non-government organisations (NGOs). These organisations reflect their local cultures and communities and are a considerable force for Ramsar wetland conservation. I was also representing the Australian Wetland Network's 39 members, and my employer WetlandCare Australia, who funded my time at the conference.

While at COP12, I supported 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. The Pre-COP meeting was sponsored by the Japan Fund for Global Environment.

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. A copy of the statement can be found at http://www.worldwetnet.org/docs/NGO-OpeningStatement_RamsarCOP12_FINALeng.pdf.

Next day I 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. A copy of the survey report can be found at http://www.worldwetnet.org/docs/RamsarNGOs_Final.pdf. Delegates then participated in a series of activities to create dialogue about working more effectively across sectors.



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

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. 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 my participation at the COP.

Finally, we worked together to draft a Closing Statement which was presented by Rafaela Nicola, WWN's Latin American representative. The Closing Statement can be found at http://www.worldwetnet.org/docs/WWNClosingStatementRamsarCOP12_Eng.pdf

Thanks to WetlandCare Australia for funding my participation at the COP, as well as all the local donors including Australasian Wader Study Group, Hunter Wetlands Centre, and Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group.

For more information on the outcomes of Ramsar COP 12 visit the Ramsar Convention's web site, or contact me on 02 4951 1425 or at louiseduff@wetlandcare.com.au