# Strategic Intent 2011-2020



# Origin of this strategy



The Strategic Intent 2011-2020 is a revised ten year outlook for Wetlands International and replaces the Strategic Intent 2005-2014 as the overarching strategy for the organisation worldwide. This document was prepared following extensive internal and external consultation since 2009, including evaluations of past achievements and lessons learned and assessments of the internal and external challenges and opportunities for the organisation.

Extensive stakeholder consultations were conducted in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, involving over 250 people from more than 50 countries, including members and representatives of governments, UN agencies, NGOs, research institutions, private companies and consultancies, as well as key individuals from our specialist expert network. Discussions were held in national and regional workshops and advice was also received via questionnaires and interviews.

Wetlands International is grateful to all those who contributed their time and expertise to help shape our forward strategy. We are sure that, as a result, this global document and the regional strategies are better informed and more focused.

### Jane Madgwick, Chief Executive Officer





Regional strategy review meetings were held in Nairobi, Dakar, Buenos Aires, Ede and New Delhi. By Wetlands International

# Wetlands provide abundant water for rice cultivation, such as here in Southern India. By Pieter van Eijk

# Introduction by the Chair



In both the developed and developing world, the pressures for land and water use are intensifying. In this context, I am delighted to present Wetlands International's new ten year forward strategy. The content of this document reflects the new challenges for wetland conservation and the increasing relevance of wetland condition to human well-being in today's world.

The strategy gives direction to Wetlands International and also invites others to collaborate, support and contribute to achieving the goals. By emphasising the connections between wetland biodiversity, water and livelihoods, Wetlands International has been increasingly influential with respect to water allocation and water infrastructure decisions, helping to safeguard some wetlands of global significance for biodiversity. We see the need to build on this experience in the coming years, working in key places and with key institutions. The importance of the links between wetlands and climate change has only recently come to the fore, and this strategy calls for a much stronger focus on climate and the role of wetland ecosystems than before. Wetlands International is already active in developing and communicating the knowledge and capacity needed to influence climate policies and investments relevant to wetlands. This work will be continued and extended. Additionally, by scaling up our community-based wetland rehabilitation work in all regions and working together with the humanitarian and aid sectors, we aim to demonstrate and mainstream an integrated, ecosystem-based approach to climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Wetlands International has developed considerably as a global organisation over recent years, with strong collaborations between its offices and building strategic partnerships. The achievement of the goals set out in this strategy will depend on effective partnerships and continued investment in institutional development across the network of offices, as well as the development of a broader financial base. These aspects are dealt with in a separate business plan. While some growth in the organisation is needed to achieve our goals, Wetlands International aims to remain at a modest size and to retain a degree of flexibility, in order that we can respond rapidly and effectively to new circumstances and opportunities.

This document sets out how we work as an organisation and the key strategies we use. Our strategies are also evolving. By working for the long-term in a selected number of major wetland systems, coasts and catchments, Wetlands International aims to collaborate with all relevant sectors to promote optimal, integrated solutions to wetland and water management that address climate, poverty, water and biodiversity objectives. There has been a growing demand from stakeholders in all regions for Wetlands International to provide and communicate knowledge on the status and trends of wetlands and wetland species. This will be a strong focus of our work for the years ahead. It will be achieved through collaboration with many partners and by continuing to engage with our extensive networks of scientific expertise. At the same time, our advocacy role has become more and more valued. Using our field experience and accumulated knowledge, we are increasingly working on improving public and corporate policies as a means to bring about change. The approaches and targets presented in this document reflect this.

This is an ambitious but well-focused strategy that reflects the importance of wetlands to the increasingly global complex challenges of biodiversity loss, water stress, climate change and poverty. It has been greatly influenced and enriched by the inputs of our members and stakeholders in all regions, who have generously given their time to consider our past achievements and to advise on priorities for our attention in the next decade. Thank you for your continuing interest and support. We look forward to working closely with you to reach the goals and targets set out in this document.

### Gordana Beltram

Chair of the Board of Association (for the period 2008 - 2011)



# Wetlands International

Wetlands International works globally, regionally and nationally to achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands, to benefit biodiversity and human well-being. It is the only global NGO dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Wetlands International is an independent, not-for-profit, global organisation supported by government and NGO membership from all continents of the world, a specialist expert network and volunteers.

The fore-running regional organisations were established as early as 1954. Wetlands International was established as a global organisation in 1995 and is registered in the Netherlands as a Foundation. Additionally, an Association Wetlands International enables governmental and non-governmental membership.

### A network organisation - working locally and globally

We work through a network of regional, country offices and project offices - in the European continent, Africa, South, East and North Asia, Oceania, and Latin America; with our head office in the Netherlands. All our offices contribute to develop and implement our global Strategy and are accountable for performance against the global targets.

The headquarters in the Netherlands oversees the work of the Foundation Wetlands International and as part of this, guides and supports the work of the office network. Legal entities are established in each region to develop and implement our programmes and to nurture regional and national partnerships. By formal agreement, the office network works to the same global strategy goals and targets, policies and operational standards. Through collaboration with governments and civil society organisations we are able to work in more than 100 countries.

### **Our Core Values**

In carrying out our work through all our offices and with partners, Wetlands International maintains the following core values:

- Our work is globally relevant
- Our work is based on sound science
- We work through partnerships and with a wide range of sectors
- We respect traditional values and knowledge
- We respect human rights and aim to contribute to gender equality
- We work in a transparent and accountable way

### Map of our offices



# Why Focus on Wetlands?

Wetlands exist in every country and in every climatic zone from the polar regions to the tropics. They are among the world's most important environmental assets, contributing a disproportionately high amount to global biodiversity, compared with other biomes, as well as providing a cornerstone for human survival and development.

Wetlands are highly variable and dynamic. They can be water bodies but also include land. They can be freshwater, brackish or saline, inland or coastal, seasonal or permanent, natural or man-made. They include rivers, lakes, marshes, rice-fields, floodplains, peat bogs, glaciers, coral reefs as well as flooded forests. Estimated to cover a total area that is 33% bigger than the USA, wetlands are distributed very unevenly and discontinuously, according to hydrological processes. They are connected systems rather than sites - and so are best considered from the whole basin perspective.

There has been concern over the loss and deterioration of wetland species and habitats since wetland loss started to accelerate over fifty years ago. Initially the focus of attention was on threatened species - and while this concern has deepened as habitat loss has advanced, it has been joined by a growing concern for the indirect impacts of wetland loss and the deterioration in ecosystem functioning, leading to loss of services to human populations.

# Wetlands at the "front-line"

The rate of loss and deterioration of wetlands is accelerating in all regions of the world and the pressure on wetlands is likely to intensify over the coming decades due to increased global demand for agricultural land and water, as well as climate change.

Wetlands can be a precious lifeline, providing water, food, fibre and other vital support functions to isolated and poor, rural communities. Where harvesting and use of the wetlands does not lead to degradation, or even contributes to its maintenance, then this is "wise-use". Wetlands are vulnerable to over-exploitation due to their natural productivity and water supplies. Equally, when they are seen as unproductive, marginal lands, wetlands are targeted for drainage and conversion. For example, threats of large-scale conversion of wetlands for biofuel production are increasing.

So, in many ways, wetlands are at the "front-line" as development pressure increases. Wetlands are where it is most urgent and essential to combine conservation and development knowledge and expertise - to consider the win-win opportunities and trade-offs intelligently - and to find innovative and lasting solutions to land and water management that meet the various needs of stakeholders.



# Inter-governmental commitments

A special international treaty, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, was established in 1971 and, at the time of writing, has 160 Contracting Parties. Through this Convention, governments have established numerous Resolutions for action towards the conservation and wise use of wetlands and set out clear technical guidance for how to implement these.

Wetlands are also a priority under other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The Convention on Migratory Species and the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement give a particular focus on the need for strong collaboration and concerted efforts to monitor and conserve networks of wetlands along the migratory routes of waterbirds.

The Convention on Biological Diversity sets targets for Inland and Coastal Waters and has a joint plan of action with the Ramsar Convention, to help mobilise priority interventions. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, adopted at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, recognises the crosscutting nature of water in underpinning the services that we need from ecosystems. In recent years, the UNFCCC has given more recognition to the role of wetlands (especially peatlands) in climate mitigation and adaptation, due to their role in carbon storage and sequestration. It is anticipated that the post 2012 climate agreement will include commitments that will provide incentives for wetland conservation and restoration as a means to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Wetlands International is an active organisational partner of these MEAs, participating in policy and technical fora, contributing our knowledge and experience, advising and building capacity amongst contracting parties and forging partnerships and programmes for implementing decisions and resolutions.



Water is a cross-cutting element in many ecosystem services, and key to biodiversity. By Emma Greatrix and Pieter van Eijk

# Growing momentum to take action

Since the time of writing of the last Strategic Intent in 2004 our ability to quantify and define the vital role of wetlands for society has developed considerably. There is a growing body of evidence showing that actions for the conservation and wise use of wetlands can result in major contributions to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, poverty reduction, climate mitigation and adaptation. The outcomes of such measures include safeguarding wetland-dependent species, valuable water resources and other wetland products and services. Additionally, there is a rapidly growing interest in using wetlands as cost-effective "natural infrastructure", especially as a way of increasing resilience to natural disasters.

There has also been significant progress in developing the means to incorporate the values of nature into decision making about natural resource management at all levels. More companies, especially those that have a direct impact on nature (such as extractive industries), are seeing that failure to account for the values of natural capital in the early stages of planning can pose significant business risks. The potential "ecological liabilities" of business were especially brought home by the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster in 2010. Increasingly, governments are introducing incentive mechanisms to encourage or require mitigation and compensation for adverse impacts.

The increasing number of partnerships between conservation and development organisations bears testament to the recognition from both sectors of the need to find integrated solutions. This involves combining our knowledge and approaches. However, there is still a significant gap between this understanding, the language of ecosystem services and valuation and the introduction and use of governance and finance mechanisms that will make these benefits manifest.



# Our Purpose and Ambition

Wetlands International believes that people's spiritual, physical, cultural and economic well-being depends on safeguarding and restoring wetlands worldwide.

We consider that far greater prominence needs to be given to the conservation and wise use of wetlands as a contribution to sustainable development. We call for improved governance and concerted action by all sectors of society, from global to local levels, to secure wetlands and their range of values and services for current and future generations.

### Our long-term Vision is:

a world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support and the resources they provide



By Wetlands International Malaysia

### Our Mission is:

to sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity

### The future of wetlands is a challenge for all society

Our Goal focuses on four, closely inter-related clusters of wetland ecosystem services, bringing attention to the key societal role that wetlands can play. For example, in a river basin, changes in flood patterns can influence the incidence of waterborne diseases as well as the productivity of crops and conditions for wetland biodiversity. Therefore individual sectoral interventions, which don't take account of these inter-relations can have limitations or even unwittingly undermine wetland status or human well-being.

Wetlands International, as a specialist institution, can make a unique contribution towards achieving our Goal. However it is clear that this requires the support and engagement of many other actors as well as innovative approaches that can bring about lasting and timely results.

To this aim we seek to bring together expertise from different disciplines in development and the environment to secure wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide. For example when wetlands are restored to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the location and design of interventions should also maximise the benefits for biodiversity and local livelihoods and ensure the hydrological integrity of the wetland system. When these are set as joint objectives from the outset, then wetland management can be truly sustainable.

### **Our Goal is that:**

wetlands are wisely used and restored for the role they play in:

- improving human well-being and local livelihoods
- conserving biodiversity
- sustaining the water cycle
- reducing climate change and its impacts



# Where we work

Some of the key wetland ecoregions where we work for the long term

### Sahelian floodplains

Restoring floodplain forests to enhance fisheries and colonial bird habitat, working with villagers of the Inner Niger Delta in Mali.





Mangrove coasts of Latin America Supporting sustainable use and restoration of mangroves.



West African coastal wetlands Conserving and restoring mangroves through policy work, sustainable production techniques and communitybased restoration.



Patagonian peatlands Improving the conservation and sustainable use of the peatlands of Tierra del Fuego, Argentina.



Mahanadi River Basin Involving local stakeholders in water management and increasing community resilience in the Mahanadi Delta and Chilika Lake, India.



Mangrove coasts of Southeast Asia

Restoring mangroves with local communities to provide coastal protection and improve livelihoods.

### Peatlands in Russia

Conserving and re-wetting the fire-prone drained peatlands in Moscow oblast, Russia.



Restoring the hydrology of mountain peatlands in Ruoergai, China at the top of the Yangtse, Yellow River.







Southeast Asian peatlands Restoring degraded peat swamp forests in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia through re-wetting, reforestation and supporting community fire brigades.

Arctic wetlands

Highlighting the linked biodiversity and ecosystem service values to influence planned developments, including oil and gas in the Arctic region.





Mediterranean and Black Sea

Building civil society capacity

regarding wetlands and water

management, for example in the Mujib River catchment in Jordan.

wetlands

# Long-term goals and five-year collective targets

### Structure and reporting cycle

Linked to our over-arching Goal statement, we have developed a number of long-term goals for protecting and enhancing key wetland ecosystem services. For these goals, we have Collective Targets, which will guide the work of the Wetlands International network over five years, 2011-2015. These Collective Targets have emerged from regional and global analyses of the condition of wetlands, ongoing trends, specific threats and opportunities in the coming years, together with a consideration of our past achievements, current and potential partnerships and specific niche.

The Collective Targets are outcomes that are relevant to more than one region and for which collective action by different offices in the network. Some indication of the expected regional contributions to these targets is given in the relevant sections. Linked to these Collective Targets there are also regional and national targets set out in regional and national strategy documents, which describe the relevant strategies and programmes for the period 2011-2015 and provide more contextual information and detail.

Wetlands International will annually report to its Supervisory Council and Board of Association on progress towards meeting these Collective Targets. Where applicable, the Boards of regional or national Wetlands International entities will also receive annual reports on achievements. At the global level, a mid-term three-year assessment will be undertaken as well as a five-year review, which will set further five-year targets. The achievements of Wetlands International are made available to our stakeholders in our Annual Reviews, which are also available on our website.

In the remainder of this section we describe the key themes of our work and the rationale behind our goals and targets. We explain the problems, indicate the role and niche of Wetlands International in contributing to achieve positive change, introduce our five-year targets and describe how we intend to achieve these targets.

### LOCAL LIVELIHOODS

### Our long-term goal:

Improve human well-being and local livelihoods through wise use of wetlands

### The Problem

Many of the world's poorest communities live near wetlands and are highly dependent on the services and resources that wetlands provide. These communities are directly or indirectly affected by wetland degradation caused, for example, by diverting water for irrigation upstream. Interventions such as these, designed to address poverty and increase access to resources, rarely consider the full range of consequences and trade-offs with ecosystem services and the other benefits of wetlands.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

New, inter-sectoral partnerships and approaches will be critical in designing interventions in or around wetlands, to help meet the Millennium Development Goals. Wetlands International will work together with a broad range of development partners and community based organisations to address natural resource challenges in wetlands that have high value for biodiversity and for livelihoods. Together, we will identify and catalyse successful approaches to improving livelihoods, while fostering local stewardship of the natural resources of these wetlands. This includes tapping into the wealth of traditional knowledge and expertise, capacity building, the promotion of good governance, the development and use of decision-making tools and the use of incentive mechanisms that enable communities to play an active role in wetland management and wise use, while taking up opportunities for enhancing their income and well-being.



Wetland conservation and livelihood improvement can go hand in hand, as we demonstrated in Thailand (By Wetlands International Thailand) and Malawi (By Emma Greatrix)

### Target 2011-2015

### Wise use and restoration of 20 wetlands is linked with the development of sustainable livelihoods, resulting in a strengthened asset base for at least 200,000 people

Wetlands International will bring about and showcase win-win outcomes for local livelihood enhancement and biodiversity. These initiatives will be focused in and around wetlands where the well-being of local communities is closely linked to ecological conditions. We will continue our long-term focus on some major wetland ecoregions and extend our approach to include some additional inland and coastal wetlands in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Achieving this target depends on a long-term commitment to working in each of the selected wetland areas, focusing on key target groups, using appropriate tools for conflict resolution and providing positive incentive mechanisms. We will scale up the use of innovative micro-credit mechanisms that enable local communities to increase and diversify their incomes through active involvement in restoring and managing wetlands.

### BIODIVERSITY

### Our long-term goal:

Halt and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands and their biodiversity

### **The Problem**

Wetland biodiversity is under severe and increasing stress around the world due to continuing habitat loss and degradation. Unsustainable use or harvesting also plays a role, especially for waterbirds and freshwater fish. Protecting migratory species is a special challenge because their conservation and management often requires coordinated efforts across vast geographic areas and between peoples with diverse technical and financial capacities.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Wetlands International works to improve the conservation status of biodiversity through initiatives that connect a wide range of stakeholders at all relevant scales, including sites, basins and flyways. We influence international and national priorities and action plans and engage local authorities, the private sector and local communities in taking action. Species-oriented approaches complement our site and habitat-based work. Our role is often to mobilise knowledge and expertise that can inform and guide this work. This involves collaborating with local people, scientific experts, partner organisations, national authorities and international conventions. Priorities for biodiversity conservation are also addressed through our work on livelihoods, water and climate change and are an important focus of our corporate partnerships.



The International Waterbird Census involves thousands of volunteers every year counting millions of waterbirds, such as the Greater Flamingo at Krikini Lake, Greece. By Nicky Petkov

### Targets 2011-2015

### Species-oriented and ecological network initiatives result in improved status of selected wetland biodiversity groups, including waterbirds and freshwater fish

Building on past achievements, Wetlands International will work in all regions with governments, partners and stakeholders to promote implementation of the flyway approach, as a key means to conserve and sustainably manage waterbird species and the wetlands on which they depend. We will make specific efforts to involve the corporate sector, which has to date, been insufficiently engaged with this approach. We will provide practical support through further developing on-line knowledge facilities to make waterbird and wetland analyses more readily and easily available and promote technical exchange between regions and flyway partnerships. New and strengthened initiatives in West Africa, India, Oceania and South America will focus on freshwater fish conservation, with attention being paid to raising awareness on the important role of freshwater fish in food security. Regionally specific initiatives will seek to improve the status of emblematic wetland species, such as the West African Manatee, through providing them with greater protection and implementing wise use measures.

# The status of wetland biodiversity is improved in at least 10 globally significant wetland ecoregions

In order to maximise and sustain our impact, Wetlands International will continue to focus its long term presence in significant wetland ecoregions, where development pressures threaten globally significant biodiversity as well as human well-being. These are illustrated in the section 'Where we work' on page 10.

Through our field and policy work in these biodiversity rich ecoregions, we highlight and quantify the likely impacts of key threats to biodiversity and demonstrate and promote the approaches required to maintain or restore the full range of wetland values and services. Our experiences and the outcomes in these places continuously inform the work and knowledge of our organisation as well as the wider environment and development communities.

### Decisions for the conservation and management of waterbird populations and wetlands on which they depend are influenced by timely analyses on the status and trends of waterbirds

Wetlands International will continue and strengthen its efforts as a key player in the Waterbird Monitoring Partnership which, through the annual International Waterbird Census (IWC) and other special counts, collects and analyses data on population size and trends. The IWC data provides a valuable basis for setting conservation priorities for waterbird populations and the wetlands on which they depend, including setting



Awareness raising on cranes in China. By Chen Kelin

criteria for sustainable hunting. We will continue to enable this data to be collected and analysed in a standardised way, mobilise scientific expertise, develop and maintain volunteer networks together with a wide network of national and international partners and enable capacity building in countries and regions where the monitoring is currently weak.

### WATER

### Our long-term goal:

Conserve and restore wetlands as critical elements of natural water infrastructure

### Water resource management

### The problem

Wetlands are one of many water users competing for a finite freshwater resource. But wetlands are more than a competing user of water - they also store and regulate water in the wider landscape, to the benefit of society and the environment. They play a key role in making water available and in preventing water peaks and declines from negatively affecting people and biodiversity. At the same time, wetland loss and degradation is often driven by poor water resource management. Pressure on wetlands and their water resources is intensifying due to the predominant focus on the development of irrigated agriculture as a means to meet food security targets. A predicted shift towards thirsty energy production systems and processing technologies will add further pressure. Additionally, climate change is altering the water cycle and exacerbating existing human impacts.



Wetlands help to regulate water flows, like these on the Tibetan Plateau, China. By Marcel Silvius

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Wetlands International is committed to working long-term in a number of basins where integrated approaches to water and wetland management are essential for tackling threats to biodiversity, livelihoods and human well-being. We promote understanding and awareness of the role and value of wetlands as natural infrastructure that provides a range of vital ecosystem services. Specifically, we mobilise knowledge and enable dialogues between key stakeholders, stimulate relevant additional research, raise awareness and develop tools that can enable basin authorities and communities to take better informed decisions. We carry out and support advocacy for ecosystem based approaches to water infrastructure assessments and water allocation decisions. Our findings are documented and communicated to influence basin authorities, governments, finance institutions and other key organisations in the water sector.

### Target 2011-2015

### In 5 major basins, implementation of water resource management plans safeguard and restore the role that wetlands play in water supply and regulation

Wetlands International will facilitate initiatives that integrate wetlands into water resource planning and management in five major river basins. We will consolidate and build on our current work in three river basins in Africa (the Upper Niger, Senegal and Nile), the Mahanadi Basin in India and the South Boug in Ukraine. Based on sound science and community-based knowledge, we will seek to establish commitments from key water resource management stakeholders to maintain and restore natural water infrastructure in these basins. We will support and facilitate institutional capacity and strategy development to change management planning and practice. Furthermore we will seek to expand this work to other basins where natural water infrastructure is threatened. These will include basins in the Mediterranean. East Africa. Europe and Latin America. Here we will help build the knowledge and capacity of civil society to engage in water resource policy and planning processes, help link networks of restoration expertise and practice into basin management planning processes and undertake assessments and scenario analyses of threats to wetlands.

### Water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

### The problem

Wetlands play a key role in supporting water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in developing countries. Surface and groundwater water sources are often obtained directly from, or recharged via, wetlands. Waste arising from sanitation is often released into wetlands which have a natural capacity to process nutrients and materials and thereby maintain water quality. However, the capacity of wetland systems to deliver these services is finite and they need to be well managed. Wetlands are often referred to as the kidneys of the landscape, but they can fail! Ecologically sustainable WASH practices are needed to safeguard the health and livelihoods of local communities in wetland areas, while also maintaining biodiversity.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Through strategic partnerships with WASH organisations, Wetlands International has contributed to the establishment of principles for delivering ecologically sustainable WASH in wetland areas. We are working to mainstream these principles among global WASH organisations and their local partners by bringing them to bear in a number of WASH initiatives in developing countries.

### Target 2011-2015

### Ecologically sustainable drinking water and sanitation programmes are implemented in the country programmes of 5 WASH initiatives, resulting in improved ecological status of wetlands

Wetlands International will seek to mainstream ecologically sustainable approaches into policy and practice by working with WASH nongovernmental and civil society organisation partners at international and local scales. Internationally we will seek to influence the thinking



Wetlands are a valuable source of water, but are vulnerable to overexploitation and pollution. By Jane Madgwick and approaches used by key strategic WASH organisations that fund, stimulate and facilitate WASH delivery in developing countries. Our partners will use the outcomes and lessons learned to replicate successful approaches elsewhere, thereby influencing many more small WASH organisations. We will work alongside our partner organisations on policy and advocacy, highlighting the need and relevance of ecosystem-based approaches to WASH. We will maintain and expand our action research activities in Mali, Bangladesh and Uganda and encourage the uptake of WASH in other key locations in Africa and Asia. We will initiate some pilot projects in El Salvador and Honduras and seek to influence national sectoral policies in those countries. We will draw on past and future experiences to ground our communications, advocacy and capacity building work on sound knowledge.

### CLIMATE

### Our long-term goal:

Conserve and restore wetlands to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to climate change

### **Climate mitigation**

### The problem

The degradation of carbon rich wetlands worldwide contributes around 2 Giga tonnes of  $CO_2$  equivalents per annum, or 6 % of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The largest concentration of emissions result from the conversion, drainage and burning of peatlands, especially in the tropics. In the past, efforts to reduce global GHG emissions have been almost solely focused on fossil fuel use. Some attention has been



Mangroves (such as here in the Saloum Delta, Senegal) store huge amounts of carbon in their roots and soil; their protection and restoration offer a cost-effective option for offsetting emissions. By Sander Carpay

given to the role of deforestation in contributing to GHG emissions. It is only quite recently that the need to address peatland emissions in developing countries has come onto the agenda of the UNFCCC (e.g. through the programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation - REDD). There is now the possibility of developing incentives to restore and maintain wetlands to reduce GHG emissions and so to secure their very large carbon stocks.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Wetlands International works to influence global and national policies and production systems to stop the loss and degradation of carbon rich wetlands, particularly those threatened by large-scale conversion that would result in net GHG emissions. We achieve this through awareness raising, training and advocacy. We also promote and stimulate research to improve the knowledge-base on GHG emissions caused



Peatland restoration, such as here in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, has huge benefits for mitigating climate change as well as local livelihoods and biodiversity. By Marcel Silvius

by the drainage of peat soils and other carbon rich wetlands to support advocacy for policy change. We aim to influence new international climate policies such as REDD and the follow up to the Kyoto-Protocol so that they to include provision for incentives to restore wetlands.

Wetlands International uses its knowledge and experience in peatland and mangrove management and innovative finance mechanisms to stimulate large-scale community-based rehabilitation programmes that reduce carbon emissions, restore biodiversity and improve local livelihoods.

### Targets 2011-2015

At least 100 Mt of  $\rm{CO}_2$  emissions avoided by conserving and restoring wetlands

### UNFCCC policies provide incentives for reducing wetland emissions in both developed and developing countries and include biodiversity safeguards

Through advocacy, Wetlands International will continue to influence national and international policy frameworks dealing with climate mitigation. We will demonstrate and quantify to governments the relevance of wetland conservation and management for reducing domestic greenhouse gas emissions through dialogues at the country level, (currently ongoing in Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, China and Argentina). In addition, in Indonesia, Malaysia and Russia, we will carry out major field demonstrations to show how wetland emissions can be reduced by supporting and enabling local communities to take action for wetland conservation and restoration.

Wetlands International will work in partnership with the international private sector, carbon investors, governments and local NGOs to improve the management and conservation of some large wetland areas that are being targeted for land conversion. In addition we will contribute to the development and promotion of best practice guidelines to reduce the carbon footprint of some major industrial sectors related to forestry, agriculture and biofuels.

### Climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction

### The problem

Healthy, intact wetlands can greatly contribute to increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change as well as to various other hazards. For example, mangrove forests and coral reefs are natural buffers against the

impacts of rises in sea levels and storms and more gradual processes, such as erosion and saline intrusion. Floodplains, peatlands and lakes often reduce peak flood flows in periods of extreme rainfall or glacier melt. Due to their ability to store and slowly release water, these wetlands can also be a vital lifeline in periods of extreme drought.

To be sustainable and effective in the long-term, it is crucial that climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes work alongside natural processes and consider the role of ecosystems in increasing resilience to natural hazards. Unintended adverse environmental impacts of adaptation and DRR measures, such as those related to the construction of dams, seawalls and dykes need to be avoided.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Wetland management and restoration can complement other approaches to climate change adaptation and DRR, such as flood prediction, preparedness planning and infrastructure development to reduce the impact of various natural hazards. Wetlands International works with development partners, drawing on our field experiences to inform DRR and adaptation fund boards on the potential for wetland areas attenuating extreme (weather) events. We also advise on the need to adopt sustainability guidelines and safeguards linked to relevant funding mechanisms so as to minimise the risk of mal-adaptation.

Through collaboration with knowledge institutes and engineering firms we will further develop the concept of "hybrid engineering" and how it can be applied in river basins and vulnerable coasts. This approach involves combining different elements of "green" and "grey" technologies, such as seawalls that are linked to constructed salt marshes or floodplains that are integrated in managed river systems.



Through restoration of coastal ecosystems we increase the resilience of local communities to natural hazards, such as here in Aceh, Indonesia. By Yus Noor

### Targets 2011-2015

### Investments in wetland protection and restoration are made through 5 government-led climate change adaptation and/or disaster risk reduction plans

Wetlands International will build capacity and awareness on adaptation and disaster risk reduction in Latin America, Africa and Asia, using our climate change adaptation training modules and through policy dialogues. Trained practitioners and policy makers will be linked in expert networks, creating platforms for ongoing knowledge exchange and collaboration. Our offices will contribute their expertise on ecosystem-based approaches during the development and implementation of government-led policies and plans. We will collaborate with government agencies in Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, Argentina, Kenya, Uganda, Mali, India and Indonesia to influence national climate change adaptation and DRR plans.

In the catchments of 10 significant wetlands, community resilience to natural hazards, including those that are exacerbated by climate change is increased through improved environmental management.

Wetlands International will work with aid and development partners introducing tools and approaches that will help improve community resilience to droughts, coastal erosion and other natural hazards. In Africa we will focus on the Senegal and Niger river systems and the Saloum and Tana deltas. In India, Nicaragua and Guatemala we will work with communities to restore degraded wetlands and to develop sustainable coastal resource management plans. We will expand our work promoting better management and restoration of high altitude wetlands in the Himalayas and Andes.



We introduce sustainable production techniques and restore rice fields to diminish the pressure on mangroves in West Africa, such as here in Guinea Bissau. By Richard DaCosta and Ruthpearl Ng'ang'a

### **GREENING THE ECONOMY**

The promotion of economic development that is compatible with wetland conservation is cross-cutting in relation to our Goal and thematic work.

### **The Problem**

Wetlands are often viewed as "marginal lands" that are ripe for development. They are also coming under increasing threat from industrialised irrigated agriculture and biofuel production, as well as from conversion to make room for industrial and urban expansion. While the direct economic benefits of such schemes are clear and quantifiable they often have many detrimental socio-economic impacts that are indirect, distant or time-delayed. The services of the wetlands that developments will affect are either overlooked or undervalued by developers or decision makers in environmental impact assessments. To solve this, a clear and quantified picture of the range of wetland values and services affected is needed at the appropriate scale so as to inform and evaluate options for a proposed scheme. Such information needs to be taken into account at an early stage to leave more space for identifying development options.

### What Wetlands International can contribute

Wetlands International works pro-actively to develop technical expertise and knowledge concerning the policies and practices of some key industries that affect wetlands. Through advocacy, communication, partnership and dialogue, for example via industry round tables, we challenge existing strategies and policies and mobilise knowledge and tools relevant to strategic decisions and sustainability criteria. Through field projects we demonstrate effective solutions. Wetlands International has a strong history in establishing criteria and safeguards for industry groups to prevent the loss of biodiversity and peat carbon. We will extend this work to include other issues, including especially the water footprint.



Peatlands are drained and mined in Belarus (By Hans Joosten) or converted into oil palm plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia (By Marcel Silvius)

### Targets 2011-2015

In at least 5 cases changes or adjustments will be achieved in the design and/or delivery of major development schemes which threaten significant wetlands or water resources, so as to avoid or reduce impacts on biodiversity and livelihoods

Wetlands International will continue to build its capacity to engage with the corporate sector, focusing on the key industries and finance institutions that directly or indirectly have an impact on wetlands and water resources. For example, we are engaged in a global partnership with Shell, through which we will contribute to the development of tools for early risk and impact identification and assessment that will be applied to major projects in fragile wetland environments such as the Arctic.

In all regions, we will be responsive in supporting local communitybased organisations and governments who are concerned about specific threats to wetlands and their resources with a regional or global significance. We will seek to ensure that the value of wetlands will be more fully taken into account in development plans affecting key wetlands, including the Niger Delta in Nigeria and the Parana Delta in Argentina.

### Industry standards, regulations and community practices are improved for at least 3 production systems to prevent the loss of wetlands and their values, such as for water, climate regulation and biodiversity

Wetlands International works to address some of the key drivers of wetland loss, mainly in the agriculture sector. Examples include the loss and degradation of tropical peatland due to palm oil production, the impacts of large scale irrigated agriculture on water availability in dry regions and mangrove loss due to shrimp aquaculture. Wetlands International develops dialogues with multinational companies in the food and fuel sectors with the aim of influencing production system standards.



Through a silvofisheries approach we restore abandoned aquaculture ponds in Indonesia and Thailand. By Pieter van Eijk

Examples include our advocacy for sector-wide criteria for palm oil, European criteria for biofuel feed stocks and for legislation in Indonesia regarding palm oil production. We will focus on other production systems in the coming five years, including soy production in Latin America; sugar cane in Africa and Latin America and aquaculture in Asia, Oceania and Africa. We will stimulate action research and continue to work with stakeholders at the local level, for example extending our work to improve the environmental sustainability of tilapia and shrimp production in South-east Asia.

## How we work

Here we set out the main strategies for our work. Over the years, our organisation has developed a distinct approach that makes us effective and defines our niche. Our strategies are used in the work of each and every one of our individual offices and programmes, although the balance of each strategy differs in each case.

Our strategies address the reasons for the continuing loss and degradation of wetlands. Wetland loss is generally not a result of a lack of information or awareness, but is more usually the result of overly narrow sectoral approaches that do not reconcile the competing stakeholder interests and the trade-offs involved in different land and water uses. Sometimes, there is a knowledge gap, for example a lack of technical approaches for building ecosystem values into development-oriented initiatives. But more often, wetland loss and the impacts on biodiversity and livelihoods are simply a consequence of a lack of political will to act differently, even when there is a compelling economic case to do so. Therefore, apart from providing information and knowledge in an appropriate way, Wetlands International also employs a range of associated strategies, including highlighting critical issues and implementing carefully-planned advocacy that is linked to key decision moments and opportunities. In all cases, creating and working with allies is vital in order that we make a sustainable impact. By working at different scales and by using the reach of our network of offices and our

partnerships, we seek not only to influence the direct causes of wetland degradation, but also the drivers of change.

Below we further characterise our four main strategies:

### Mobilising the best available expertise and knowledge

Knowledge is at the core of Wetlands International's work. It is not a goal in itself but developing and communicating knowledge is the core mechanism that we use to gain attention from, inform, train and convince others. As a science-based organisation we aim to underpin our work with the finest available knowledge. Our field projects provide test grounds for research programmes and, in turn, the research findings improve field practice. When we identify the need to address key gaps in our science-base, strategies, practices and knowledge, we stimulate further research by others and collaborate in "action research" projects linked with our field programmes.

We strive to keep abreast of relevant current scientific developments through involvement in scientific networks and, more structurally, through partnerships with Specialist Groups, Associate Experts, collaborations with scientific institutions or individual researchers and participation in key scientific fora. As a small organisation our strength is in our network of partners and specialists, which helps us develop our knowledge base and communicate our message.



Wetlands International produces a variety of "knowledge-products", including technical analyses, fact-books, scientific papers, policy briefs and web-based articles. We also develop and maintain systems that help us to share and integrate the knowledge gained through our own experience with that of others.

For example, over the last fifty years, Wetlands International has built an extensive network of partners that gather field data and carry out analyses that help to estimate the population size and trends of different waterbird species, both within key flyways and globally. The International Waterbird Census database is one of the longest standing and most comprehensive biodiversity data sets in the world. This information not only allows an assessment of how well species are doing, but is also used by governments and NGOs to provide an international context for national programmes, and by international treaties such as the Ramsar Convention and the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement, to set conservation priorities and guide the designation of networks of key sites for waterbirds.

The data can also be an important reference for environmental impact assessments. During the recent outbreaks of avian influenza, this data and the knowledge of our network, proved invaluable for gauging the risk of disease transfer and for developing appropriate responses. Our waterbird population analyses provide indicators for long-term international trend assessments, highlight successful conservation approaches and help to bring attention to the gaps in knowledge, stimulating research by others. Furthermore, by sharing our datasets and connecting them with those of others, such as BirdLife International and the Ramsar Site Information Service and developing analytical tools that can operate at a multitude of scales, (such as the Critical Site Network Tool in the African-Eurasian flyway), we have greatly extended the range of applications and users - from the wetland site level to global.

### Raising awareness on the critical issues

Often dialogue on wetland issues is inhibited by a lack of attention, a limited sense of urgency, or conflicts of interest. Before we can discuss and present possible solutions, our target audiences need to recognise the relevance and importance of wetland issues. So, drawing attention to the critical, and often shocking, facts and problems about wetlands is often a necessary first step to opening up opportunities for action.

Awareness-raising often needs to be extended beyond those directly involved in wetland issues to include those key stakeholders such as politicians or civil servants who are gatekeepers to resources or policy changes. In other cases the net needs to be spread wider. For example, the continuing degradation of peat swamp forests due to palm oil developments is not due to a lack of awareness of the importance of wetlands among plantation owners or the authorities that sell and provide concessions. Here there has been a need to raise awareness among less direct stakeholders, such as companies that use palm oil, socially conscious consumers and authorities that support the use of biofuels In cases such as this, where broader lobbying or awareness raising is needed we often work in partnership with other like-minded organisations, to maximise our reach and impact.

### Enabling society to take action

Whilst Wetlands International believes that it is vital for society to value natural capital as well as financial and social capital, we recognise that a purely utilitarian view of biodiversity should not be allowed to erode the inestimable value it has for the human spirit. Therefore, we promote, communicate and highlight these multiple values of wetlands, particularly the relatively intangible non-use ones, by integrating them into the design of field and policy level interventions. We also seek opportunities for building traditional knowledge and value systems into our various work programmes.



We empower communities to take action, such as in restoring this fish refuge and bourgou field in the Inner Niger Delta. By Jane Madgwick

Wetlands International employs a variety of strategies to enable different sectors of society to take action to address wetland-related issues. Instead of controlling and managing wetland areas ourselves, we play a catalytic approach. For instance, by providing knowledge, building local capacity and opening up access to financing opportunities, we enable communities to restore local wetlands that provide them with services. As well as being designed to provide local benefits to biodiversity and people, our field projects also aim to act as demonstration projects - to both test and illustrate approaches so that others can see them working and be motivated to try similar approaches in their own situation.

Local communities are our most important allies in achieving longlasting and sustainable wetland conservation. Hence, we focus most of our attention on enabling local communities to take action to maximise the benefits that they derive from wetlands in a sustainable way that creates opportunities for livelihood development whilst avoiding adverse environmental impacts.

- We act as intermediates between communities and other stakeholders, such as government agencies and development authorities, to ensure that community needs are taken into account in natural resources management policies and plans.
- We help communities to bridge the conflicts of interest over natural resources that exist between them and other stakeholders and to secure long-term benefits, such as increased resilience against disasters. Our Bio-rights approach provides local communities with micro-credits in return for their engagement in the conservation or restoration of their natural environment and biodiversity.
- Our community-based wetlands management activities are usually supported by extensive training programmes and technical exchanges between communities.
- We engage in advocacy at the national and international levels to ensure that local communities can get involved with and benefit from new markets for ecosystem services, such as water provision or maintaining carbon stores. Locally, Wetlands International helps communities to connect to these schemes.

In addition to our community-focused work, Wetlands International seeks to enable other sectors of society to take action for wetlands, using a variety of strategies.

 Wetlands International develops specific thematic training modules, on topics such as climate adaptation, the links between wetland management and poverty reduction and on flyway management for waterbirds. We work with existing training institutes to develop and roll out training programmes and encourage the development of long-term learning networks. We support inter-sectoral policy dialogue linked to these trainings. In recent years, Wetlands International has established strategic partnerships with many organisations from the humanitarian, aid and development sectors and with the corporate sector. By working alongside such organisations in joint projects and on policy and advocacy, we have been able to both expand our own understanding and capacities and also help to bring an ecosystem approach into the planning and actions of other organisations. The review process identified many further possibilities for future partnerships and collaborations. We will seek to develop such new collaborations and partnerships and take them forward at the institutional or programme level, in line with our partnership policy and the specific needs and opportunities that arise in addressing our regional and collective targets.

### Influencing policies and practices

Wetlands International's advocacy work aims at improving public or private policies and practices. We focus on advocacy related to topics where we have a unique contribution to make, and avoid topics that are outside our own direct experience. Our advocacy role is generally highly focused and based on our specific wetland knowledge. We also empower local communities to advocate for key policy changes, based on their own experiences and needs.

Advocacy strategies can vary considerably according to the topic, target audience and decision-making process. Often, an advocacy plan involves action by staff from more than one of the Wetlands International offices, so as to reach different audiences in different regions and sectors. To influence institutions in places and arenas where Wetlands International has a limited presence, we work through policy networks, enabling other organisations (usually NGOs) to take up our case and use their welldeveloped networks and advocacy skills to achieve shared goals and outcomes. This has proved very effective, for example, in influencing EU institutions over recent years.



We bring specific wetland issues to the attention of national and global audiences, such as at the UNFCCC. By Marcel Silvius

Wetlands International invests considerably in advocacy for specific issues relating to the relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements, treaties and conventions. We inform governmental delegations and other participants and observers (such as NGOs and company representatives) about our views and provide the right level of information to influence relevant texts.

Our advocacy positions are based on our strategy documents and are developed by our offices. In all cases we benefit from the advice of our networks of experts and partners and our Supervisory Council. Policy positions are approved by the CEO.

# Strengthening the Organisation

Wetlands International functions through a global network of offices, which have different mandates and perform different functions. All the offices are guided by this Strategic Intent, contribute to its goals and targets and work to a common set of Core Values and organisational policies. Regional and national strategies clarify the particular focus of each office.

The global headquarters in the Netherlands provides overall guidance, support and coordination to the network. Other offices have a regional, sub-regional or national mandate, a thematic lead role or are devoted to managing specific projects.

The headquarters is led by the Management Board (Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operations Officer) which is supervised by the Supervisory Council. Local offices (apart from project offices) are generally governed by a local Board. The heads of the offices in the network coordinate with the Management Board to address organisation-wide issues and strategies.

There is a standard agreement regarding conditions for the use of the name 'Wetlands International'. This binds these offices to the headquarters and commits the constituent parts of the network to work to a common global strategy and to follow common operational standards - for example on financial accountability, human resource management and communications.

There is an organisational development programme in order to strengthen the network, foster its growth and improve its capacity to meet its strategic needs. This programme aims to address critical gaps in capacity across the network and /or in individual offices. The priorities for this programme are to achieve:

- a well managed and coordinated, transparent network organisation with a clear governance structure
- efficient collaboration between the offices, supported by modern ICT systems, enabling easy access to the knowledge available in the network
- effective and collaborative resource development by the network
- systematic evaluation and learning
- effective internal and external communications capacity



Taking the current offices network as a basis, the ambition is to maintain and enhance a coherent network of offices consisting of at least:

### **Headquarters in the Netherlands**

### Africa

- Regional office (Dakar, Senegal)
- Sub-regional office East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya)
- Sahelian sub-regional office in (Bamako, Mali) with field office in Mopti (Mali)
- National office in Guinea Bissau

### Asia

- Regional offices for South Asia (New Delhi, India), North Asia (Beijing, China) and Southeast Asia (excluding Indonesia)
- National offices in Japan (Tokyo) and Indonesia (Bogor) plus other field offices in Indonesia
- National offices in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and Thailand

### Australia and Oceania

- Regional Office (Canberra, Australia)
- Project and thematic offices, including for Pacific Islands (Fiji)

### Latin America and Caribbean

• Thematic regional offices in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Wetlands & Biodiversity) and Panama City, Panama (Wetlands & Livelihoods)

### **Europe**

- Regional coordination office (in headquarters or other location)
- Sub-regional Mediterranean office (Arles, France)
- Sub-regional Black Sea office (Kiev, Ukraine)
- Sub-regional office Russia (Moscow)

# Financing the Strategy

Each office is responsible for ensuring the sustainable funding for its operations, independently or in collaboration across the network. The headquarters leads and enables resource development for the network and sometimes acquires and manages global programmes, which are then devolved to regional lead offices for implementation Total global income over the last five years has ranged between approximately €7 million and €15 million per year. A far greater sum is leveraged by the work of Wetlands International through partnerships, adding considerably to the reach and impact of our programmes.

To achieve the ambitions of this Strategic Intent (2011-2020), the aim is for the whole network to reach and sustain a level of at least €15 million per year by 2015. This is an ambitious target in view of ubiquitous budget restrictions in the aftermath of the global financial-economic crisis. However, Wetlands International is well-placed to scale up its work, given its broad sectoral relevance and strong track record in managing complex partnership programmes that have technical and policy relevance locally, nationally and globally. In recent years, we have proved to be an attractive partner to environmental and development/ humanitarian organisations, as well as to the private sector. Additionally, our investments made to enhance leadership, operational and management competencies and systems in the headquarters and the regional offices, places these offices in a stronger position to attract new donors.

The ability of Wetlands International to reach out to donors and partners will be the decisive factor in achieving our organisational ambitions over the coming years. To this end we will make further investments in our organisational development programme, giving priority to strengthening our capacity for programme and resource development and enhancing the brand and visibility of the organisation. We will continue to strengthen and extend our strategic partnerships and to reach out to new donors. Although our largest source of funding is likely to remain (multi-annual) project grants, the membership dues provide some financial stability, which is important for core activities. The resource development strategy will include a focus on strengthening such (relatively) stable sources of funding.

### Mission:

### To sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity

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