



Pacific wetlands conservation Ramsar Convention on Wetlands



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Wetlands are areas where shallow water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. These freshwater, brackish or marine areas provide a vital breeding habitat for wildlife and water filtration.

The two most prevalent wetland types in the Pacific region are mangroves and coral reefs. Wetlands provide tremendous economic and conservation benefits through fisheries production, flood control, shoreline stabilization, maintenance of coastal water quality and recreational opportunities. The Pacific contains almost 3 percent of the world's mangroves and about 25 percent of the world's coral reefs. Almost 20 percent of Pacific coral reefs have been destroyed; a further 68 percent is currently under threat.

Working together to strengthen wetlands conservation in the Pacific

SPREP is committed to supporting and working with its members and other partners to conserve and manage wetlands in the Pacific. SPREP is currently implementing ongoing programmes that aim to support Pacific Island communities to achieve ecologically sustainable use of their wetlands and associated resources.

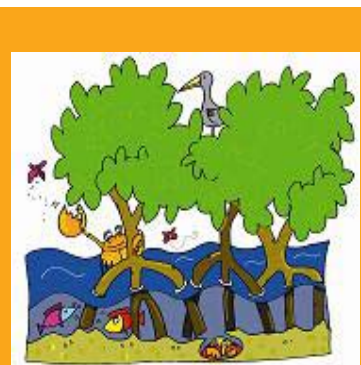
In 2002, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ramsar Secretariat and SPREP for joint collaboration on wetlands work in the region.

The Ramsar-SPREP partnership facilitates regional and national activities aimed at promoting the wise use and conservation of wetlands in the Pacific region.

The Ramsar Regional Officer based at SPREP provides support and advice for the Pacific Island Countries in joining the Convention, but also in implementing the 'wise use' principle of the Convention.

What issues for Ramsar in the Pacific?

- Conservation and wise use of coral reefs, mangroves, freshwater lakes and other freshwater ecosystems.
- Ensuring their ecological functioning integrity and cultural / traditional use is maintained for the benefit of present and future generations.
- There is a strong need to manage and minimize actual and perceived threats to the ecological character of these wetlands.



The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

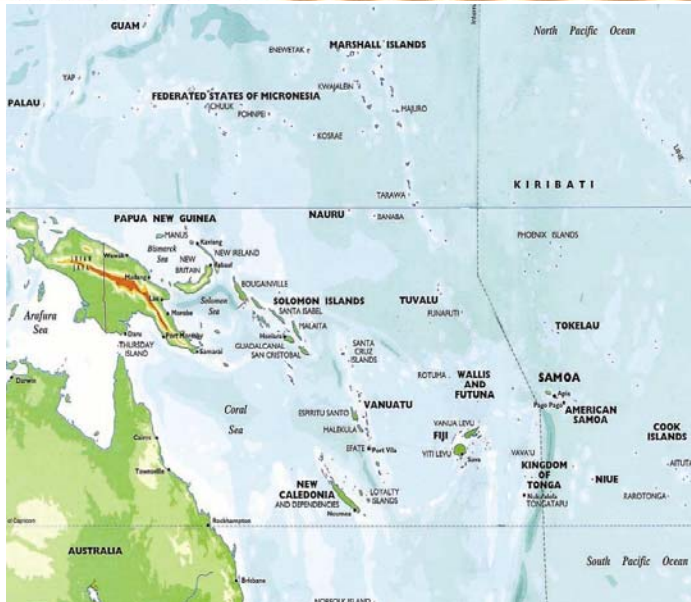
It is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem.

Only four Pacific island countries are so far members of the Ramsar Convention: Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. Fiji and Cook Islands are in the process of joining.



The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organisation that works to protect and improve the Pacific Islands' environment, and promote sustainable development and cooperation.

SPREP is based in Apia, Samoa.



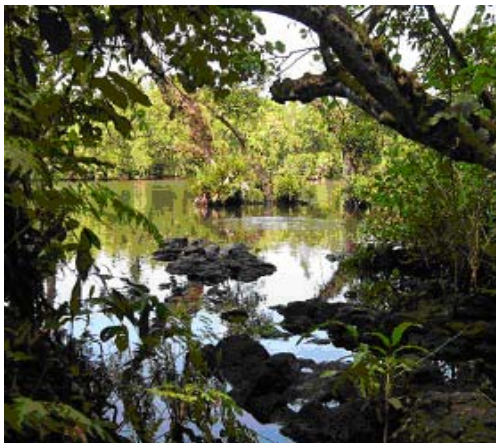
Pacific Islands region

The Pacific Islands region comprises three distinct sub-regions (Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia), 22 countries and territories, and a population of around 7 million people. The region stretches some 10,000 km from east to west and 5,000 km from north to south.

Why is the Pacific important?

The South Pacific region has been a long-term priority for the Ramsar Convention. This region shelters many of the most endangered wetland ecosystems of the planet, including coral reefs (among them, the Great Barrier), mangroves, sea-grass meadows (vital ecosystem for the survival of the Dugong) and rare island wetlands. Yet it is currently the most under-represented region within the Convention. From the 150 countries that have joined the Ramsar Convention, only 6 belong to the Oceania Region, which holds a total of 29 States and Territories.

Definitions under the Ramsar Convention



Wetlands occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land or where the land is covered by shallow water. They can be natural or human-made, and represent (according to the definition above and including some coastal areas in some countries), an estimated 1279 million hectares. That's around 12% of the Earth's land surface!



Wise Use Principle is the Ramsar Convention's approach for integrated management. It recommends looking at the big picture when managing ecosystems, including not only ecological aspects, but also human, social, economic, institutional and cultural factors. The wise use principle seeks to find a balance between human needs and development and the conservation of biodiversity to achieve sustainable development.

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