

## ***Concept note***

### **Restoring and conserving wetlands as a tool to reduce water scarcity in transboundary basins**

*side-event*

10 December 2023

12:40 – 14:30

#### **Background**

Droughts and water scarcity became one of the biggest challenges leading to food insecurity in recent years in different regions and transboundary basins across the world. The recent *IPCC report*<sup>1</sup> also states that climate change has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, to freshwater ecosystems. In particular, wetlands can be significantly impacted by climate change.

On the other hand, healthy and sustainable ecosystems increase our resilience to the adverse impacts of climate change because of the services they could provide<sup>2</sup>. For example, wetlands can play an important role in mitigating the effects of floods and droughts by acting as sponges, and at the same time preserve biodiversity, water quality and provide benefits to people health, livelihoods and well-being. Unfortunately, wetlands are disappearing at a high pace, thereby aggravating the impacts of floods and droughts. Drainage of wetlands is also responsible for increased greenhouse gas emissions. Preservation and restoration of wetlands is therefore a win-win for both climate adaptation and mitigation and should be systematically integrated as priority action under water management plans, including for reducing water scarcity.

Transboundary basins are home for Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites). In Asia for instance, the Mekong basin counts 14 Wetlands of International importance. In Africa and Europe, 22 transboundary complexes encompass 65 Ramsar Sites and represent around 18 million hectares of irreplaceable wetlands. In such transboundary complexes, conservation and restoration of wetlands provide positive opportunities to strengthen collaborations and mutual assistance that also directly benefit to water resources. The same would apply to transboundary cooperation which makes wetland conservation and restoration more efficient under changing climate by reducing uncertainties through exchange of data, enlarging the planning scale, better prioritization of measures as well as sharing costs and benefits. In this regard, integrated and intersectoral approaches, from source to sea, are also necessary to deliver whole-basin outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Synthesis Report for the Sixth Assessment IPCC Report, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/climate-change/what-we-do/climate-adaptation/ecosystem-based-adaptation>

This side event will provide an occasion for decision-makers and experts to share experiences, lessons learned and best practices in wetland restoration and conservation to reduce water scarcity and drought risk in transboundary basins. The event is organized by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic and by UNECE Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) in cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning of Slovenia and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

## PROGRAMME

### Restoring and conserving wetlands as a tool to reduce water scarcity in transboundary basins

Time	Description
12:40-13:00	<b>Refreshments</b>
13:00-13:20	<p><b>Ministerial exchange</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Hanna Plotnykova, Water Convention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Republic of Azerbaijan</li> <li>• Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE</li> <li>• Ms. Maša Kociper, State Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, Slovenia</li> </ul>
13:20-13:55	<p><b>Technical panel discussion - Opportunities and challenges for wetland restoration and conservation to reduce water scarcity and drought risk in transboundary basins</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Ms. Hanna Plotnykova, Water Convention</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Flore Lafaye de Micheaux, Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands</li> <li>• Ms. Farida Alakbarova, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Republic of Azerbaijan</li> <li>• Mr. Aleš Bizjak, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, Slovenia, Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention</li> <li>• Ms. Hanna Capeder, Swiss Development Cooperation</li> <li>• Mr. Anoulak Kittikhoun, Chief Executive Officer, Mekong River Commission Secretariat</li> <li>• Ms. Francesca Antonelli, Wetlands International</li> </ul>
13:55-14:25	<b>Interactive discussion</b>
14:25-14:30	<p><b>Conclusions and way forward</b></p> <p>Ms. Sonja Koeppel, Secretary, Water Convention</p>