

THE WORLD COASTAL FORUM A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TO ENHANCE COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

Launched on 25 September 2023, Yancheng, P.R. of China

Ministers, governors, mayors and other representatives of governments at national and local levels, international organizations, academia, civil society organisations, business associations and youth and women's groups are convening at the 2023 World Coastal Forum (WCF) on September 25-27, 2023 in the city of Yancheng, Jiangsu Province of the People's Republic of China. Sponsored by Jiangsu Provincial People's Government, Ministry of Natural Resources and National Grassland and Forestry Administration, the 2023 WCF will deliberate on the future of coastal ecosystems under the theme ***Our Coasts: Harmony between People and Nature***.

This document has been prepared by the WCF Coordination Group (WCF CG) and the 2023 WCF Organizing Committee to be presented during the opening ceremony. It is intended to engage like-minded stakeholders to support and take priority actions in support of the mission and the vision, and to elaborate the ways to move forward the work of the WCF.

WHY COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS?

Coastal ecosystems¹ provide a critical interface between terrestrial and marine ecosystems. They are vital to supporting a wide range of biodiversity, including migratory species such as waterbirds, which ecologically connect nations and continents. Globally, coastal ecosystems have shared challenges and opportunities for their sustainable management.

Functioning coastal ecosystems offer critically important nature-based solutions to the climate and biodiversity crisis by protecting coastal communities from sea level rise, reducing disaster risks of climate change-exacerbated extreme weather events and providing blue carbon storage. They also provide other non-market ecosystem services such as purification of water and air and a range of market services including fisheries, natural products, recreation and tourism, that are integrally linked to the livelihoods and wellbeing of local communities and provide essential economic opportunities for local people.

Yet coastal ecosystems face many pressures. Failure to manage coastal ecosystems sustainably is leading to erosion of their natural capital and contributing to the biodiversity extinction crisis. Confronted with rapid loss and degradation in recent decades, there is increasing international concern about the future of coastal ecosystems and diminishment of the multiple benefits they provide.

Loss and degradation of coastal ecosystems is in part due to lack of awareness of their status and values, poor access to evidence-based ecosystem conservation approaches and lack of capacity to implement them, together with fragmented governance of coastal ecosystems. In the face of sea level rise and other climate change effects, as well as erosion of natural capital and a biodiversity extinction crisis, there is now a more urgent need than ever for concerted actions to conserve these ecosystems and their services, ensuring that any use of them is sustainable.

¹ Coastal ecosystems comprise intertidal wetlands (e.g. open mudflats, sandflats) and ecologically-associated habitats: seagrasses, salt marshes, mangroves, rocky beaches, estuaries, deltas, islands, coral reefs, coastal plains and non-wetland ecosystems of coastal areas, where an ecosystem approach is needed for the effective conservation of migratory and resident species, and management and regulation of activities having consequent direct or indirect negative impacts on coastal ecosystems.

SUPPORT AND NEED FOR A WCF

Concern about the existing and emerging challenges to coastal ecosystems globally, led multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to call for support to establish a multi-stakeholder global coastal forum to promote and facilitate the protection, conservation, management, wise use and restoration of coastal ecosystems, and replicate and scale up coastal economic development models that maintain their natural capital to the benefit of local communities and biodiversity.

Work since 2019 has focused on designing and convening a WCF as a direct response to the decisions and resolutions of MEAs and the IUCN that called for its establishment². This builds on the advice and consensus of expert organizations³, on recognised progress in WCF development⁴ and on a wider series of international consultations⁵.

At the opening ceremony of COP14 of the Convention on Wetlands in Wuhan and Geneva in November 2022, President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China committed to advancing the global process on wetlands conservation and supporting the convening of a conference of the WCF. At a side event of COP14, Yancheng offered to host the 2023 WCF.

The coming decade is critical to collectively addressing the triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. For coastal ecosystems, it is imperative to develop a truly global partnership to engage and enable coastal areas to play significant roles in the synergistic implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and other global initiatives.

VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WCF

The vision of the WCF is that coastal ecosystems around the world are enhanced in terms of their biodiversity and ecosystem and cultural services, and that they benefit the livelihoods and wellbeing of coastal communities and multiple stakeholders.

The mission of the WCF is to catalyse, facilitate and promote local, national and international efforts that support synergistic delivery of international commitments to protect, conserve, sustainably manage and restore coastal ecosystems, building on science and evidence-based actions.

² These decisions and resolutions include: [Convention on Migratory Species Resolution 12.25 on Promoting Conservation of Critical Intertidal and Other Coastal Habitats for Migratory Species](#), November 2017; [Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIII.20 on Promoting the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats](#), October 2018; [Convention on Biological Diversity Decision 14/30 on Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives](#), November 2018, operative paragraphs 15 and 16; and [IUCN Resolution 030 on Enhancing the resilience of coastal areas in the face of climate change, biodiversity crisis and rapid coastal development](#), September 2021.

³ At the [International Advisory Meeting](#) on the World Coastal Forum (WCF) held on Jan 10, 2022 in Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province of the People's Republic of China, 19 organizations agreed to initiate the process to establish the WCF and set up the WCF Establishment Group (WCFEG).

⁴ For example, international efforts to establish the WCF were taken note of [Resolution 8.7 on Knowledge Gaps](#) adopted by the 8th Meeting of Parties of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement, Budapest, September, 2022; [Resolution 14.6 on Synergies](#) adopted at COP14 of the Convention on Wetlands, Wuhan and Geneva, November 2022; and [Decision 15.13 on Cooperation with other International Organizations and Conventions](#) taken at CBD COP 15, Montreal, December 2022.

⁵ Consultations took place at side events of several multilateral meetings including the UN Oceans Conference in Lisbon, Portugal on 30 June 2022, COP14 of the Convention on Wetlands in November 2022 in Wuhan and Geneva, and the 11th Meeting of Partnership of the East Asian- Australasian Flyway Partnership in Brisbane, Australia in March 2023.

The partnership initiative of the WCF will realize its vision and implement its mission in the following ways:

- Collect, synthesise and disseminate evidence and information, international best practices and innovative products for the protection, conservation management, wise use and restoration of coastal ecosystems.
- Promote and encourage coordinated, concerted and cooperative implementation of priority actions at an international scale, scaling up what works at local levels.
- Support capacity building including through mentoring, exchange visits, site twinning, networks of demonstration sites and other initiatives among coastal areas.
- Enhance communication, education and public awareness, including through engagement of youth and women.
- Through working in synergy, add value to relevant existing international initiatives, including those of the global conventions, while being independent of the treaties, focusing on supporting their implementation.

PRIORITY ACTIONS OF THE WCF

By 2030, it is proposed that the partnership initiative of the WCF will undertake and enable, in synergy with other international initiatives, the following priority actions:

- Continue to organize WCF to serve as an essential and impactful global knowledge hub to inspire, share and learn, and catalyse actions of multiple stakeholders.
- Develop, maintain and regularly update a World Coastal Ecosystem Conservation Toolkit, an open access online database for creation and dissemination of science and evidence-based guidance on coastal ecosystem protection, conservation, sustainable management and restoration.
- Undertake a regularly updated assessment of the State of the World's Coastal Ecosystems, consistent with needs, and in collaboration and cooperation with, international agreements having a mandate relating to coastal ecosystems.
- Develop and implement Communication, Capacity building, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) activities.
- Mobilize resources to support above listed actions and initiatives in an efficient, transparent and effective manner.

MOVING FORWARD THE WCF: BUILDING MOMENTUM AND SUPPORTING ACTION

To support the efforts of the WCF, work will be carried out through the following arrangements after the 2023 WCF.

The WCF will be coordinated by a WCF Secretariat, sponsored by related local governments and government agencies of China, in collaboration with the WCFCG, to build partnerships and catalyse and implement the priority actions.

The WCFCG will serve as an open-ended group to provide international multi-stakeholder consultation on the development of the partnership initiative and support delivery of the priority actions through thematic teams and a steering group.

Partners and stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the WCF and to provide resources to the extent possible to support implementation of the priority actions.

The following organizations and entities are encouraged to participate in the WCF: national governments and governmental agencies, regional organizations, sub-national and local governments, international and intergovernmental organizations, academic institutions, NGOs and civil society organizations, private sector organizations, and global and regional initiatives.

Opportunities and modalities for participation in the WCF will be provided on the WCF website at www.worldcoastalforum.org.