

Increasing Japan's Ramsar Sites from 50 to 100

Aiming to further increase Ramsar sites from the current 50 to 100

The number of Ramsar sites in Japan reached 50 with the designation of four new wetlands in May 2015. Only 11 wetlands were designated in the period of 19 years from 1980, when Japan became a contracting party to Ramsar Convention, to COP7 in 1999. A resolution at COP7 that provided a short-term objective of doubling the Ramsar sites prompted the Japanese government to set a numerical target and undertake its task under The National Biodiversity Strategy in the following 16 years. As a result the number of Ramsar sites in Japan reached 50.

We proposed to the Ministry of the Environment that it set a long-term objective of bringing the number of Japan's Ramsar sites to 100. Although the position of the Ministry in 2005 was that about 50 Ramsar sites might be the upper limit, they announced as many as 172 candidate sites in September 2010. Twelve of them have since been designated and 160 remain to be designated.

A draft resolution for adoption by COP12 also recognizes a significant increase of Ramsar sites as an important objective. For Japan to fulfill its responsibilities as a contracting party, it is necessary to proactively designate those 160 candidate sites as Ramsar sites. Bringing the total number of Japan's Ramsar sites to 100 is not a daunting target.

(See back of flyer for details.)

- Wetlands designated as Ramsar sites by COP12 in 2015
- Candidate sites: wetlands identified as potential Ramsar sites that meet the Ramsar Site Criteria by Japan's Ministry of the Environment in 2010

* The map data is based on the MoE's documents. Dots represent the approximate location of the candidate sites.



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50 wetlands designated in the last 35 years

The number of Ramsar sites in Japan reached 50 with the designation of four new wetlands in May 2015. It has taken Japan 35 years to increase the number of Ramsar sites to 50 since it became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention by designating Kushiro-shitsugen as its first Ramsar site in 1980.

The trend in the number of wetlands designated as Ramsar sites over the years shows that only 11 wetlands were designated in the 19 years from 1980 to 1999. At COP7 in 1999, contracting parties adopted Resolution VII.11: Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance and set a short-term objective of doubling the then number of nearly 1000 Ramsar sites by COP9 in 2005. This prompted the Japanese government to work towards doubling the number of Ramsar sites in the country. Japan announced the designation of two new wetlands at COP8 in 2002 and a remarkable 20 at COP9 in 2005 and indeed achieved a three-fold increase of Ramsar sites from 11 to 33 between COP7 and COP9.

Thereafter, 4 new sites were added at COP10 in 2008, 9 at COP11 in 2012 and 4 at COP12 in 2015. Thus in the decade after the designation of 20 wetlands in 2005, 17 more wetlands were added and Japan's list of Ramsar sites was developed at a rate at least three times higher than the period up to COP7.

What lies behind this increase in Ramsar sites is the fact that the Japanese government provided a numerical target of 10 wetlands to be designated by COP10 in The Third National Biodiversity Strategy established in 2004 and 10 more wetlands to be added by 2020 in The National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2012 – 2020.

Given that four wetlands were designated this time under The National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2012 – 2020, and that Japan has conventionally designated new wetlands in time for each COP, Japan should aim at adding at least six new wetlands by COP13 in 2018.

Japan has more than 150 potential Ramsar sites

When 20 new wetlands were designated in 2005, we, NGOs working towards wetland conservation in Japan proposed to the Ministry of the Environment that it set a long-term objective of bringing the number of Japan's Ramsar

sites to 100. However the position of the Ministry's officer in charge of the Convention then was that about 50 Ramsar sites in Japan might be the most they could designate.

When The Third National Biodiversity Strategy was drawn up, we suggested that the Ministry should set a numerical target of 20 new wetlands to be designated by CBD/COP10. As a result they set a numerical target of 10 new Ramsar sites. Also, when the Ministry set up a committee to consider candidate sites for the Ramsar list in 2010, we advised them to set a mid-to-long-term objective of bringing the total number of Japan's Ramsar sites to at least 100 or a total area of 750,000 ha which equals 2% of Japan's total land area and to set a short-term objective of designating at least 10 wetlands and securing a total area of 100,000 ha by additional designation and expansion of existing Ramsar site area in time for each COP.

Apparently in response to such calls by NGOs, the Ministry announced as many as 172 candidate sites in September 2010 making their view in 2005 of limiting the number of Ramsar sites to 50 a thing of the past.

100 Ramsar sites as mid-to-long-term target

With the number of Ramsar sites reaching 50 in May 2015, Japan has reached a stage where it should officially recognize a mid-to-long-term objective of bringing the number of Ramsar sites to 100. Although 12 out of 172 candidate sites selected in 2010 were already designated, 160 still remain to be designated. The number of Ramsar sites in Japan could exceed 100 by designating even one third of them.

DR XII. 2: The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021, a draft resolution for adoption by COP12 also recognizes a significant increase of Ramsar sites as one of the objectives. For Japan to fulfill its responsibilities as a contracting party, it is necessary to proactively designate 160 candidate sites that meet the Ramsar Site Criteria. With only 50 more wetlands to be designated, 100 Ramsar sites is never a daunting target.

We are on the verge of having what we NGO's have advocated for a decade – an increase of Japan's Ramsar sites to 100 – accepted as a Japanese government's mid-to-long-term objective. We intend to continue to cooperate with the government wherever possible to bring this to fruition under the mantra of "Increasing the number of Japan's Ramsar sites from 50 to 100."



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