

89 Ramsar Sites and Counting

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89 Ramsar Sites and Counting: India's Wetland Conservation Journey

Context

- The **Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention**, Dr. Musonda Mumba, recently highlighted that **India (89 Ramsar sites)** now surpasses **China (82)** in the number of designated wetlands of international importance.
 - This development underscores India's **enhanced focus on ecological conservation**, especially in the backdrop of climate change and biodiversity loss.
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About Ramsar Convention

- The **Ramsar Convention** is an **international treaty** for the **conservation and wise use of wetlands**.
 - It was **signed in 1971** in Ramsar, Iran, and came into force in **1975**.
 - The convention identifies **wetlands of international importance**, called **Ramsar sites**.
 - It is the **only global treaty** focusing specifically on a **single ecosystem**—wetlands.
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Significance of Wetlands

- Often termed as the **"Kidneys of the Earth"** due to their ability to **purify and filter contaminated water**.

- Wetlands are among the **largest carbon sinks**, making them crucial in mitigating **climate change**.
 - They **buffer floods, store water**, and **reduce the impact of extreme weather events**.
 - Nearly **50% of all animal species** depend on wetlands for **habitat and reproduction**.
 - Wetlands support **livelihoods, food production**, and **employment**, particularly in rural areas.
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India's Ramsar Sites

- As of **2025**, India has **89 Ramsar sites**, the highest in Asia.
 - These sites represent about **8% of India's total wetland area**.
 - Wetlands in India span diverse landscapes—from **high-altitude lakes** to **coastal mangroves**.
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New Ramsar Sites Added in 2025

- **Udhwa Lake** - Jharkhand
- **Theerthangal** - Tamil Nadu
- **Sakkarakottai** - Tamil Nadu
- **Khecheopalri** - Sikkim

These additions reinforce India's efforts to include more **ecologically sensitive regions** under global conservation norms.

Wetland Conservation Initiatives in India

1. Wetlands of India Portal

- Launched by **MoEFCC on October 2, 2021**.
- Offers data, mapping, and updates related to wetlands across India.

2. Wetland Decadal Change Atlas

- Prepared by **SAC, Ahmedabad**.
- Tracks changes in wetlands over the past 10 years, aiding in **evidence-based planning**.

3. Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM)

- Established in **2021** under **MoEFCC**.
- Aims to fill **research and knowledge gaps** in wetland management.

4. Wetlands Rejuvenation Program

- Launched in **2020** by MoEFCC.
- Focuses on **reviving degraded wetlands** across states.

5. Integration with Namami Gange

- Wetland conservation is part of the **Namami Gange Mission**.
- Efforts include creating **health cards** and **management plans** for wetlands in **Ganga basin districts**.

6. National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)

- Formed in **2013** by merging two older programs.
- Provides a **comprehensive framework** for managing lakes and wetlands.

7. Amrit Dharohar Scheme

- Focused on **sustainable utilization of wetlands** while ensuring **biodiversity protection** and **community involvement**.

8. National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-2031)

- Stresses the need for a **National Wetlands Mission**.
- Highlights **wetland conservation** as key to protecting **inland aquatic ecosystems**.

Conclusion

India's growing leadership in wetland conservation is both **environmentally strategic** and **globally significant**. By increasing the number of Ramsar sites and launching dedicated conservation programs, India is taking major steps toward **climate resilience**, **ecological security**, and **sustainable development**.

This topic is relevant under UPSC themes like:

- **Environment and Ecology**
- **Biodiversity and Conservation**
- **Climate Action and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- **Government Initiatives and Schemes**

