

ROUNDTABLE ON EU WETLAND PARTNERSHIPS:

Putting Wetlands at the Centre of Climate and Biodiversity Agenda – A Recap.



For this year's edition of the EU Green Week, whose theme was "Towards a water resilient Europe", we contributed with the "Roundtable on **EU Wetland Partnerships**: Putting Wetlands at the Centre of Climate and Biodiversity Agenda", bringing together key stakeholders and experts to discuss a further commitment to wetlands conservation globally through EU Wetland Partnerships. The hybrid event took place on 17th June at Residence Palace in Brussels, with 45 attendees in person and approximately 60 attendees joining online.

The event was opened by Steve Trent, the CEO and Founder of the Environmental Justice Foundation. As the moderator, he began by presenting a short film about the value of wetlands, Calling on the EU to lead global efforts to safeguard and restore wetlands like the Pantanal by forging Wetland Partnerships - agreements between the EU and partner countries to mobilise green investments for reversing wetland degradation and ensuring their protection.

By committing to restore these vital ecosystems, protect what remains, and ensure sustainable supply chains, the EU can help to secure a future where wetlands thrive, ensuring biodiversity, water security, and climate resilience for generations to come.

As the keynote speakers, the event featured Dr Musonda Mumba, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands and Barbara Pompili, Special Envoy to the President of the French Republic for the One Water Summit. **Dr Musonda Mumba**, connecting with the UN World Day to Combat for Desertification and Drought celebrated the same day, stressed about the impact of climate change making Europe increasingly dry. She highlighted the global interconnectedness of wetlands; how the moisture from places like the Pantanal and Amazon influences distant ecosystems such as the Congo Basin and Doñana in Spain. She concluded her speech by congratulating the recent passing of the Nature Restoration Law, and emphasised the importance and urgency of taking action, as time is a crucial factor.

As the next keynote speaker, **Barbara Pompili** emphasised the alignment of France with the vision of the EU Wetland Partnerships, valuing wetlands for their beauty, life support and resources, as well as the urgency or collective actions to sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity. She began with France's commitment to this issue and highlighted the country's support for the Freshwater Challenge Initiative, which aims to restore around 30% of the Earth's degraded freshwater ecosystem as well as delivered the progress and plans for future action for the initiative. Additionally, she conveyed the One Water Summit Initiative, which aims to contribute to the ongoing United Nations discussions and process to enhance global water governance, to accelerate action on SDG 6 on water and sanitation, building on the momentum of the UN Water Conference in 2023. She closed her speech by calling for concrete solutions and expressing her readiness to discuss best practices and identify priorities with EU Wetland Partnerships.



Dr Chris Baker, the Director of Wetlands International Europe, presented the importance of wetlands, how they serve as a circulatory system of the world for water and the range of benefits they bring to people. He highlighted major wetlands like the Pantanal in Brazil, the Sudd in South Sudan and the Sundarbans in Bangladesh as large, integrated systems critical for global ecological health.



Furthermore, he conveyed the recognition of wetlands across multiple international frameworks and conventions and the need for substantial investment in the order of billions, to meet the targets. He believes that the EU should be the leader in wetland conservation due to its commitment and its influence on global agricultural and industrial practices affecting wetlands, as well as addressing the direct and indirect impacts on wetlands worldwide. Thus, he proposed the creation of wetland partnerships as a financial mechanism to support large-scale wetland conservation and restoration projects which should involve agreement between the EU countries and partner countries.

The discussion was followed by **Veronica Manfredi**, the Director for Zero Pollution and Green Cities, European Commission's Directorate General for the Environment as the next speaker. She emphasised the essential role of wetlands as the foundation of economies and societies, as well as highlighted the commitment of the EU to water management and marine strategy through ambitious policies such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and Nature Restoration Law. Additionally, Veronica stressed the vital role of international partnerships and global initiatives on related issues to enhance water resilience and ecosystem restoration. Lastly, she ended her speech by calling for partnership and action in the water resilience agenda, acknowledging the times and the collective need to end the broken relationship that we have with nature.

Dr Aleš Bizjak, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia and the Vice-chair of the Bureau of the UNECE Water Convention presented online and shared the upcoming 10th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention that will be held on 23 – 25 October this year in Ljubljana, Slovenia focusing on transboundary water cooperation and climate resilience. The meeting aims to enhance peace and stability through transboundary water management and promote multilateralism in this issue. Dr Aleš Bizjak also highlighted the future program of work for 2025 – 2027, which includes initiatives such as conjunctive management of transboundary waters and ground waters, source-to-sea approaches, and the promotion of conservation and restoration of transboundary freshwater and water-related ecosystems. He concluded his speech by warmly inviting all participants to the Water Convention meeting this year's upcoming October.

The following speaker, **Péter Olajos**, EU Blue Deal Co-rapporteur, CCMI Delegate at the European Economic and Social Committee and President of CEEweb for Biodiversity shared his key messages about the Blue Diplomacy as an essential part of the Blue Deal and the global significance of wetlands. He began his speech by stressing the importance of water in the triple planetary crisis and how the water problem exists in many parts of the world. Furthermore, he also stated the role of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as the initiator of the Blue Deal initiative, and how the organisation calls for a new and comprehensive water strategy for the EU. EESC proposed 15 principles and 21 concrete actions based on data collection to the conditionalities, river basin approach and sharing best practices towards a water-smart society. Besides, regarding Blue Diplomacy, Péter added the EU should increase its efforts on Blue Diplomacy, and water should be integrated into the EU foreign policy and external actions. He concluded his speech by calling for support for the EU Blue Deal initiative to ensure water security and resilience for all.

Artur Falcette, the Executive Secretary of Environment, Mato Grosso do Sul State Government and as the last speaker presented The Pantanal Law. He provided an overview of the Pantanal as the largest wetland in the world and shared about the new law for Pantanal, which was developed through extensive discussions with various stakeholders. The law includes specific regulations for the biome, building on Brazil's 2012 Forest Code, and emphasises the importance of environmental services and their recognition and payment to ensure high levels of conservation. He also detailed the establishment of the Pantanal Climate Fund and the need for international partnerships to support the fund's goals of preserving the biome while compensating private landowners. Artur concluded his speech by inviting further discussion on partnerships and stressing the readiness for action.

The event was followed by a Q&A session, in which participants shared their concerns about the potential environmental impact of the Hidrovia project and the recent development proposal in the area of Pantanal. In this regard, Artur Falcetti responded by emphasising the regulatory role of the federal government and the ban on commercial agriculture in the biome, as well as acknowledging the complexity and degradation challenges following the fire that happened in 2020. He highlighted the urgency for a holistic approach to evaluate the infrastructure projects, considering environmental, social, and economic impacts.

In the closing remarks, Chris Baker thanked all the participants for their participation in the event and emphasised the importance of collaboration and the need for an EU Wetland Partnerships commitment. He highlighted the consensus on the issue and what should be done on the ground. Lastly, he expressed hope of achieving EU Wetland Partnerships at the COP in Brazil in 2025.

