

The Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands would like to send our best wishes to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Bac Kan Provincial People's Committee, and other distinguished guests and participants attending this Biodiversity Day event at the Ba Be National Park.

Unfortunately, the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has to send our sincerest regrets for not being able to attend this important event, especially when it will be celebrating the listing of the Ba Be National Park as a 'Ramsar Site', indicating that it is now recognized as one of the world's Wetlands of International Importance.

Wetlands are places where land meets water, and many types can be found worldwide from the mountains down to the coast. Wetlands types include rivers, lakes and marshes, as well as mangroves, mudflats and coral reefs.

Wetlands are our natural infrastructures for storing water, and for delivering water. They are vital for supporting life on Earth, by supplying water at the right time and in the right quantity and quality. The conservation of wetland therefore, is also about ensuring access to water that we and our environment depend on.

Wetlands provide many ecological services, such as in supplying the water we drink and the food we eat, such as rice and fish. They help regulate floods by storing the rain water that falls during heavy storms, and then slowly releasing the water afterwards. Wetlands recycle nutrients and so help to maintain soils and support plant growth. Lastly, they provide areas for recreation and education, and often have cultural or historical importance.

The Government of Vietnam joined the Ramsar Convention in 1989 and so recognizes the important value of wetlands and the services they provide. So far, the government has listed the Xuan Thuy Natural Wetland Reserve and the Bau Sau Wetlands and Seasonal Floodplains as Ramsar Sites. We are now very pleased to see that the Ba Be National Park will become the country's third Ramsar Site.

As a Ramsar Site, the Ba Be National Park has joined the world's largest network of protected areas. The site is unique in supporting the country's only significant mountain lake, as well as a diversity of valuable natural freshwater habitats, such as freshwater lakes, river valleys, streams, waterfalls, rapids, marshlands and subterranean waters, as well as human-made wetlands, such as aquaculture ponds and paddy fields.

The Ba Be National Park also provides many of the important services that are associated with wetlands.

Firstly, Ba Be Lake is important for the local community as it provides water for the irrigated agriculture in the Nang River, and so supports food production and peoples' livelihoods in the large downstream areas. Then during the wet season, Ba Be Lake plays an important role in reducing the risk of flooding around the Nang, Gam and Lo Rivers by storing much of the floodwaters from the Nang River, and slowly releasing it afterwards. The site forms the watershed for rivers, including Nang and Len Rivers that have important hydropower plants that supply electricity.

As with many other wetland areas, the landscape around Ba Be Lake is famous for its beauty, attracting poets, artists and song writers, and inspiring many legends. It is now also attracting visitors to come and enjoy its scenery which in turn, provides additional income for the local economy. Apart from tourism,

the site has a great potential for promoting greater awareness about the environment, and wetlands in particular, amongst students and the public.

We should not forget that this site also supports a unique biodiversity, including the endangered White-eared Night Heron and Big-headed Turtle. There are endemic species, such as the Vietnam Salamander and a new species of amphibian that is so far only known to Ba Be Lake. The lake also supports the highest diversity of fish in Vietnam.

In designating Ba Be Lake as a Ramsar Site, the Government of Vietnam has made an international commitment to manage and ensure the wise use of this unique and beautiful wetland so that its ecological services can continue to benefit both locals and visitors. There will no doubt be many challenges ahead, especially in balancing the needs for development and tourism, with the needs for conserving the environment of the lake. In that work, the Secretariat and partners of the Ramsar Convention will be there to provide the best support we can.

We want to wish you all a happy and successful celebration today. Thank you.