



Press Brief

Inland Waters

Why is this important?

Water supports all life on Earth. Fresh water is the most important natural resource on the planet and is essential for sustainable development, as well as supporting all terrestrial biodiversity. Inland water ecosystems include all kinds of inland water bodies, fresh or saline, as well as groundwater. They are also closely interconnected with terrestrial ecosystems.

The biodiversity of freshwater ecosystems is declining faster than that of any other biome. Half of wetlands worldwide have already been destroyed due to unsustainable practices, which lead to loss of habitat through construction, land conversion (mainly for agriculture) and pollution. Unsustainable use of water and invasive alien species also negatively impact biodiversity. Most alarmingly, by 2030, 47 per cent of the world population will be living in areas of high water stress.

Yet, inland water ecosystems provide services vital to human development and for reducing poverty. These services include food, fibre, medicine, climate regulation, flood and natural disaster mitigation, nutrient recycling, and purification of our drinking water. These ecosystems are also essential for production of energy, transport, recreation, tourism as well as providing habitats for animals and plants.

These services are taken for granted, though they can be expensive to replace. For instance, building and maintaining water treatment plants is often more costly than maintaining ecosystem infrastructure to provide clean water.



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Inland water ecosystems are particularly important in the context of climate change. Many wetlands, in particular peatlands, are “carbon sinks”. They remove and store significant quantities of carbon from the atmosphere. Wetlands contain one-fifth of the world’s carbon and by some estimates twice the carbon stored in forests. The main impacts of climate change will be on fresh water: melting glaciers and ice-caps, which is raising sea-levels, and changes in rainfall (less of it in some areas, leading to drought, and more of it in others, leading to excessive flooding). One projection indicates that water availability will decrease in about a third of the world’s rivers. Inland water ecosystems provide essential services which help us to cope with the impacts of climate change, in particular through flood regulation.

In order to halt or reverse the decline in inland water biodiversity, we need to raise awareness of the importance of these ecosystems. It is urgent to act now, and apply the ecosystem approach when managing both land and water.

What news to expect in Nagoya?

The implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems was reviewed at SBSTTA-14. COP10 will consider SBSTTA’s recommendations which centre on increasing the attention to water across all activities of the CBD, including making it more explicit in the revised Strategic Plan of the Convention. Freshwater is also a key link between the interests of various global issues including biodiversity, desertification, climate change, poverty reduction and sustainable development. The role of biodiversity and ecosystems in underpinning water security requires improved attention as well as increased recognition of the centrality of freshwater in climate change adaptation.

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