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Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat

1. Introduction

As an introduction, I would like to tell you that in this briefing note I am going to talk to you about the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, also known as the Ramsar Convention of 1971.

2. Obligations under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as waterfowl habitat

The Ramsar Convention provides a very broad definition of both what is to be considered as a wetland, as well as the waterfowl concept.

Wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh,



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brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.

In addition, waterfowl include all birds that are ecologically dependent on wetlands.

With this Convention, the States undertake to promote the conservation of their wetlands and waterfowl. To this end, they will create nature reserves in all of them and will adopt all the necessary measures for their conservation. In addition, the most important wetlands in their territory will be included in the World List of Wetlands of International Importance, known as the Ramsar List.

3. The List of Wetlands of International Importance

On the Ramsar List, I should point out that when a State accedes to the Ramsar Convention it is obliged to designate at least one wetland for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

At present, the Ramsar List includes almost 2,500 wetlands in all regions of the world, covering an overall area of over 256,000,000 hectares, although these figures vary continuously upwards. These data are continuously updated on the Ramsar Convention's Web site (<https://www.ramsar.org/es>).

The Ramsar List is an internationally recognised register of the world's most important wetlands in terms of ecological and biodiversity conservation interest.

This is because only wetlands that meet one of the Criteria of International Importance developed by the Convention are eligible for inclusion in this List, which ensures the quality of these sites.

3.1. The Criteria of international importance for inclusion in the Ramsar List

There are nine criteria for the inclusion of sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Thus, a wetland must be included in the Ramsar List:

(1) if it contains a representative, rare or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region;

(2) if it supports vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities;

(3) if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a given biogeographic region;

(4) if it supports plant and/or animal species when they are at a critical stage of their life cycle, or provides refuge for them when adverse conditions prevail;

(5) if it regularly supports a population of 20.000 or more waterfowl;

(6) regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of a species or subspecies of waterfowl;

(7) if it supports a significant proportion of the native fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity;

(8) if it is an important source of food for fish, is a spawning ground, a growth and development area and/or a migration route on which fish stocks within or outside the wetland depend; and

(9) if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in the population of a wetland-dependent species or subspecies that is a non-avian animal species.

3.2. Spain and the Ramsar List

Spain ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1982, and, at that time, included two emblematic sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance: Doñana and the Tablas de Daimiel. To date, a total of 76 Spanish wetlands have been included in this List, as a fair representation of the richness of our wetland heritage and its uniqueness on the world stage.

In the case of Spain, the procedure for the inclusion of new wetlands in the Ramsar List requires a formal proposal from the corresponding Autonomous Community, submission to public information, technical analysis by the Wetlands

Committee and examination by the State Commission for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, with the Council of Ministers ultimately agreeing to authorise each new addition, after which the Ramsar Secretariat proceeds to the actual inclusion in the Ramsar List.

If we look at the map of Spanish wetlands included in the Ramsar Convention List, we can see that all the Autonomous Communities have some wetland included in this List. The Autonomous Communities with the most wetlands are Andalusia, Castile-La Mancha and the Valencian Community.

