

Wetlands and the Tsunami

The significance of wetlands in the tsunami event

Away from the epicentre of the earthquake and tsunami, wetlands may have provided a “green barrier”, to protect the coastline and its communities. There are localised and anecdotal reports of reduction of tsunami impact and damage behind mangrove stands, and coral reefs, but little quantitative data is yet available. However, in high energy situations such as affected Aceh province, Sumatra, complete loss of beaches, mangroves and severe localised damage to coral has occurred.



Wetlands will have an important role to play in ensuring a sustainable future for people in the areas of South and South-East Asia, devastated by the recent tsunami events. For example, the recovery and re-habilitation of mangroves and linked coastal and marine habitats, such as coral reefs and sand-bars, will be vital to increase coastal protection and support coastal fisheries. Safeguarding other wetland systems in the region will also be important to secure sufficient freshwater supplies.

Further information is needed to guide future actions. In particular, there is a need for map-based assessment of the pre-tsunami situation for the full suite of wetland types and livelihood dependence, to enable follow-up assessment. Priorities (both geographic and thematic) for rapid or comprehensive assessment are also required to be set, to enable more efficient targeting of resources, and policy interventions.

Coordinated approach by international NGO's

At the request of the Ramsar Secretariat, the Ramsar partners: Wetlands International, WWF International, IUCN, BirdLife International and the International Water Management Institute agreed to collaborate within a “Ramsar Tsunami Reference Group” coordinated by WI. The Group has agreed to share assessments on the impacts of the tsunami on coastal wetlands in the affected areas of the Indian Ocean (including Eastern Africa) and to work with each other and other partners to ensure complementarity in response to the tsunami in the region.

The Tsunami Reference Group maintains a wetlands-focused portal to remote sensing images of the affected area (see www.wetlands.org/tsunami/) and interactive discussion fora on the key issues concerning the environmental impacts of the tsunami and priorities for ecological restoration linked to livelihood recovery.

In particular, Wetlands International and partners are seeking to:

- Support regional assessments of coastal wetlands to identify priority areas and actions for ecological restoration, linked to livelihood recovery, through partnership with remote sensing specialists
- Collate wetland assessment information and making it accessible to governments and key decision-makers dealing with the short term environmental assessments and longer term re-development issues
- Facilitate advice concerning key wetland issues, best practice examples and particular opportunities for ecological restoration that will accelerate the recovery of local community livelihoods (for example through encouraging the re-establishment of mangroves, sand-bars, beaches and coral reefs)
- Influence spatial planning processes and respond to proposed infrastructure developments, to ensure that implications for wetland/coastal ecosystems and associated livelihood issues are taken into account



The Group is cooperating to bring relevant information together and provide it to governments, the UNEP Task Force, the FAO and donor institutions, so as to inform decisions over reconstruction works.

Role of Wetlands International in the affected region

In *Indonesia*

- coordinating and working closely with the National Coordination Body for Post Tsunami Rehabilitation and Reconstruction led by National Planning Board Republic of Indonesia (Government), as a member of the Ministry of Forestry Task Force and in Regional Task Force (ASEAN) led by Ministry of Environment. This will assist the development of short and long term measures for coastal restoration and rehabilitation
- developing a workshop with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Home Affairs) to coordinate stakeholders
- undertaking a month long field assessment in the affected areas of Aceh to guide decision making on rehabilitation and reconstruction

In *Malaysia*

- coordinating with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment on coastal zone conservation needs
- supporting media activity with relevant information
- preliminary assessment in Penang (the most badly hit state) to determine priorities for further work
- developing a project on the importance of mangroves and coastal conservation
- developing technical inputs on "Mangroves, Wetlands and Tsunami Aftermath" in conjunction with International Society Mangrove Ecosystem General Assembly in August 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, in partnership with the UNDP-GEF Project "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Tropical Peat Swamp Forests and associated Wetland Ecosystems"

In *India*

- coordinating with the Ministry of Environment and Forests on coastal zone conservation needs
- cooperating with UNDP-India on information sharing
- coordinating with WWF-India to organise a meeting of NGOs, technical institutions and others involved in coastal assessments, to promote synergies, gap identification and improve cooperation
- organisation of the Asian Wetland Symposium 2005, with a special session on the Tsunami and coastal ecosystems

In *Thailand*

- coordinating with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment on coastal zone conservation needs
- coordinating with universities and other agencies assessing the damage and impact on coastal ecosystems

Wetlands International offices are working with its partners across the region to assist in the targeting and administration of donor funds.

About Wetlands International

Wetlands International works globally, regionally and nationally to achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands, to benefit biodiversity and human well-being. It is the only global NGO dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Wetlands International is an independent, not-for-profit, global organisation supported by Government membership from all continents of the world, extensive specialist networks and volunteers.

Mission: "To sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations"

Vision: "Wetlands and water resources are conserved and managed for their full range of values and functions, benefiting biodiversity and human well-being".

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