

**Hon. John. N. Michuki, EGH, MP**  
**Minister for Environment and Mineral Resources**  
**NHIF Building PO Box 30126 - 00200**  
**Kenya**

Wageningen, Netherlands, July 2, 2008

Your honour,

**Proposed Sugarcane Plantation in the Lower Tana River Wetlands**

We are deeply concerned by the decision of the Kenya Government through the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), housed by your ministry, to approve the development of a sugarcane plantation in the Lower Tana River wetlands. Since Kenya is a member country of Wetlands International and Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, we feel it our responsibility to draw your attention to the fact that this development is attract strong international criticism since it fails to meet basic sustainability criteria. We ask you to reconsider this decision and offer our support to define alternative sustainable development opportunities that are compatible with your commitments for the conservation of wetlands of international importance.

The planned sugarcane plantation would replace a nationally and globally valued wetland ecosystem, that is rich in biological and cultural diversity and supports the livelihoods of local communities, including small scale farmers, fishermen and pastoralists, Wetlands of this kind are the most highly threatened ecosystems in the world – and yet they have the highest value for nature and people. These wetlands are recognised to support a unique assembly of wildlife including globally significant populations of twenty-two species of waterbirds. The wetlands provide crucial stopover sites for migratory waterbirds that annually migrate to and from as far as Eurasia. Therefore, apart from the local consequences, conversion and destruction of these wetlands would result in impacts that are significant for Africa and other regions of the world.

It seems likely that conversion of the wetlands for ethanol production in the lower Tana would reduce the economic and environmental security of its peoples. Our report 'Biofuels in Africa' (May, 2008) indicates that most biofuel production schemes in Africa offer few real livelihood opportunities to local smallholders. We therefore urge you to review the full socio-economic consequences of the planned ethanol production development and to bring into consideration the socio-economic goods and services provided by the wetlands. In this context, we would like to remind you that while the EU is promoting the use of biofuels; the proposed EU policy is to exclude biofuel production from all wetland areas and areas with high biodiversity.

With this brief letter we urge you to look critically into the decision by your department , with a view to rescinding the decision, taking into account the range of environmental and socio-economic consequences and your commitments made towards sustainable development.. We are at your disposal to offer technical advice and participate in all processes geared towards alternative sustainable development options, linked with the conservation of the Tana's rich natural resources.

Yours faithfully,

Jane Madgwick  
Chief Executive Officer

CC:

The Ramsar Convention Secretariat  
Rue Mauverney 28  
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland

UNEP / CMS Secretariat  
United Nations Premises  
Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10  
53113 Bonn, Germany

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird  
Agreement  
UN-Premises  
Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10  
53113 Bonn, Germany

Dr. Muusa Mwinzi  
Director General  
National Environment Management Authority  
PO Box 67839-00200  
Nairobi, Kenya

Permanent Secretary  
Ministry of Water & Irrigation  
P. O. Box 49720 – 00100, Nairobi

Dr. Julius Kipng'etich  
Director  
Kenya Wildlife Services  
PO Box 40241  
Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. Ali Kaka  
Executive Director  
East African Wildlife Society  
PO Box 20110-00200  
Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. Paul Matiku  
Executive Director  
Nature Kenya  
PO Box 44486-00100  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Fax: +254 (0)20 3741049

BirdLife International  
Wellbrook Court  
Girton Road  
Cambridge CB3 0NA  
UNITED KINGDOM

Birdlife in Kenya / WOW regional center  
PO Box 3502  
00100 GPO  
Nairobi  
KENYA

East African Wildlife Society  
PO Box 20110  
00200 Nairobi Kenya

IUCN International  
Rue Mauverney 28  
Gland  
1196  
Switzerland