**Draft NGO Statement, Ramsar 2012**
“The NGO sector greatly appreciates this opportunity to present our views to the COP, and we have worked together through the World Wetland Network over the past months to develop this statement. We hope that this Ramsar CoP11 meeting can help us move forward as civil society, private sector and governmental partners, to make a positive difference to the delivery of wetland conservation in our respective countries.

We fully support the wise use principle of the Ramsar convention, but we continue to see examples of contracting parties favouring unsustainable development and lifestyles. These lead to the irreversible loss and degradation of both designated and non-designated wetlands. Without a change of emphasis from over-consumption and economic development to genuine sustainability, we do not see how the ongoing degradation of wetlands or the wider environment can be halted, let alone reversed. We strongly urge contracting parties to adopt the Wise use of Wetlands approach, in practice not just in principle.

Although the Danube Delta is one of the best preserved wetlands in the world for wildlife and people, civil society groups are still highly concerned about the continuing degradation and loss of wetlands both in Romania and globally. With the world’s population now over 7 billion – we need to find a more sustainable way of living to protect nature and wetlands, not just protect isolated sites.

Our specific recommendations to the COP are as follows:

* Even in times of economic crisis, don’t make short-term unsustainable economic development more important than longer term investment in wetland protection.
* Regarding unavoidable damage or loss of wetlands, ensure that strategic environment impact assessment and any compensation work are implemented BEFORE any development or loss of wetland, and that impact on ecological function, biodiversity value and ecosystem services are taken into consideration.
* Protection of wetlands has to go beyond designated sites to engage social, environmental and economic stakeholders that have an impact in the wider catchment.
* Civil society and NGOs deliver the majority of practical wetland conservation on the ground, and work to support contracting parties’ commitment to Ramsar. We offer our support wholeheartedly, but in return, we need support financially and access to decision-makers to do this well.
* Despite targets for Ramsar site designation, NGOs find that contracting parties are very slow at designating sites that NGOs and local people put forward. NGOs are keen to support the process and help contracting parties identify and put forward potential sites.
* Regarding DR7, tourism offers an important opportunity for education for people visiting wetlands, but the same wetlands are important to local communities and nature so strategic choices need to be made to balance these demands. Sustainable tourism should bring economic benefits to local people through their direct involvement.
* NGOs are concerned about the change of hosting arrangement due to short term disruption and use of resources, and longer term increase in bureaucracy. We would only support a change if clear benefits are available to the delivery of the Ramsar goals and better involvement of civil society.
* Taking into account the impacts of climate change and energy production on wetlands, we encourage contracting parties to take measures to increase energy efficiency and reduce consumption.
* With regard to DR10 on wetlands and energy, we have concerns regarding environmental, social and economic impacts of renewable energy production affecting wetlands and local livelihoods, such as small hydropower production. Special attention should be given to cumulative impacts of these activities, and assessments at a whole catchment level.
* DR15 which talks about pesticide use in rice paddies looks positive on the surface but we have identified various concerns with it. No reference is made to traditional farming practices, and we recommend Contracting Parties not to adopt this DR until STRP produces guidelines on how these methods can help reduce pest damage through organic means. Currently suggested Integrated Pest Management implies a continued use of pesticides, potentially including use of genetically modified organisms, which we do not support.
* There is an implementation gap between STRP guidelines/reports and what can practically be used to deliver wetland conservation on the ground. For example, in the Draft Resolutions on Health and Energy, relevant technical information needs to be shared in an accessible format to those delivering them.
* We stress the importance of National Ramsar committees for inclusion of stakeholder and continuity of support. We urge the Ramsar convention to strongly request that Countries adopt national Ramsar Committees, with the active participation of NGOs/CSOs.”
* WWN has held an open international survey to identify good and bad wetland practice internationally, the wetland globe awards. We will announce the results of this competition at the side event held today at 18.15 in Room 3, to which you are all welcome.

Finally, the NGO sector is a vital component for delivering changes on the ground, working with the contracting parties and private sector, and we look forward to working together positively to deliver the outcomes of COP11.

Box 1: Example of damaging dam developments

There are 160 small dams planned or in place in the Upper Paraguay River Bain / Pantanal wetland. Individual impact assessments are therefore not suitable. In addition, in many cases, small developments are exempt from impact assessment, and are being used as a strategy to avoid development controls. In Romania small hydropower and wind farms are having negative impacts on wildlife.

Four Major Rivers Project for the “Restoration” is ongoing in Republic of Korea (RoK). RoK, the hosting country of Ramsar COP10, has built 16 dams along the 1,363km length of 4 major rivers, as well as 1,728km-long bicycle roads and 690km-long river bank at or near the rivers. In addition, 570 million ㎥ of sediments were dredged in the 4 major rivers in only two years. Four months Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was completely insufficient to understand its ecological function and ecosystem services. Also, the compensation work to create 12,538,000㎡ of artificial wetlands to replace the 12,066,000㎡ of natural wetlands lost (The information from the Ministry of Environment, 29th June 2012) due to the project seems not to offset the losses of its original biodiversity, because, the EIA did not provide sufficient data to evaluate its losses.

*NB: This text will not be included in the verbal presentation*