

# **2020 Yellow & Bohai Sea Coastal Wetlands Symposium Statement of Outcome**

(Dec 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Yancheng, China)

## **Background**

2020 Yellow & Bohai Sea Coastal Wetlands Symposium, the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Yancheng international symposium, was held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020, with domestic participants gathering in Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province, China, and others joining online due to COVID-19. It was attended by more than 200 representatives from about 10 countries including governments, international organizations, and research institutions, to exchange ideas on coastal migratory waterbird and wetland conservation and sustainable development.

## **Outcome**

This document reflects the symposium outcomes, 18 months since the World Heritage inscription of Yancheng's "Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I)". It focuses on updates presented by Chinese representatives on various milestones made during the past 14 months since the 2019 Yancheng Symposium, along with international participants' responses.

As well as hosting annual international conferences, starting in 2017, reflecting the great importance Yancheng places on international collaboration, it has established:

- Yancheng Wetland and Natural World Heritage Conservation and Management Center to oversee all the projects within and surrounding the World Heritage Site in Yancheng,
- the Yellow Sea Wetland Institute, a think-tank, providing a bridge between government bodies, academia, and industry, for promoting wetland conservation and restoration and initiating sustainable development projects,
- several research laboratories associated with the Wetland Institute, including Nature-based Ecological Restoration Research Center partnered with China Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Center of Ministry of Natural Resources, Coastal Agriculture Research Institute partnered with Kyungpook National University, and Urban-rural Integration Development Lab of Tongji University.

Steps being taken by Yancheng to develop a Five-Year Management Plan for the World Heritage Site were welcomed. It is essential to have a long-term plan for the property to provide direction to its conservation management, benefit to the local people, and to embed it within a broader Yellow Sea context. This is even more critical during the expansion of the Yellow and Bohai Sea property to tie together its different elements across the tidal areas of the Yellow and Bohai Seas.

Such a site management plan is vital to mitigate, via habitat restoration and creation, loss of waterbird habitat, from causes such as hydrological changes, sea-level rise, invasive alien *Spartina cord grass*, and aquaculture ponds.

A network of multi-functional feeding and roost sites should be maintained and created at regular intervals along the Jiangsu coast to provide both safe and disturbance-free roost areas and foraging sites for waterbirds in the face of changes in intertidal mudflat feeding areas. These need to be managed by a range of established evidence-based tools, including site-related management planning, zoning of different activities to different parts of the wetland, and creation of disturbance-free refuges. Ultimately, good solutions will come from ensuring bird-friendly human activity.

Strengthening and developing well-coordinated multi-disciplinary research programmes on, and year round monitoring of, waterbirds and wetlands in Yancheng and other important Yellow Sea sites is critically important to provide the evidence-base for planning, demonstrating, and adapting successful management and restoration actions. Monitoring should be harmonized with, and build on existing expertise and networks of government, NGOs, and experts. Development of a Yellow Sea collaborative platform is recommended for sharing and reporting monitoring data and other information to help meet World Heritage, Ramsar, and EAAF Partnership obligations.

The Wadden Sea case study clearly demonstrated the importance of stakeholder involvement to fully develop World Heritage site's potential while respecting and improving its Outstanding Universal Value.

There is great potential for wetland centres in Yancheng to implement education, ecological tourism, and monitoring in order to significantly stimulate ongoing development of these along the flyway. They can demonstrate and refine sustainable development principles, balance creating world class visitor experiences with sensitively managing reserves for wildlife, and become models for wetland conservation and solutions.

The international community remains highly supportive of China's leadership in moving forward on Phase II of the World Heritage nomination of the Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China and offers its full support to China in responding to technical requirements conditioned under the Phase I Decision. In this respect, a Joint China-International Task Team Group is proposed.

## **Global Coastal Forum**

Ahead of the symposium, at a closed door informal brainstorm, representatives of the Secretariats of the Ramsar, Migratory Species Conventions, IUCN, EAAFP, and the Government of the Republic of Korea welcomed the offer of Yancheng, China to host in 2021, a meeting to agree next steps to establish the Global Coastal Forum, as recognised by recent decisions of the Conventions, including CMS (Resolution 12.25), the Ramsar Convention (Resolution XIII.20), CBD (Decision 14/30), and IUCN (2020 Resolution 30). They all recognised the importance of setting up a multi-stakeholder global coastal forum.

This would contribute to building Yancheng into an international wetland city with world-class standards of sustainable development, and facilitating a local to global and global to local flow of information on evidence-based coastal wetland and migratory bird conservation.

The forum could inter alia provide a platform for global coastal conservation that collates information to identify priorities and ensure the implementation of evidence-based coastal ecosystem conservation management and restoration including to deliver nature-based solutions. It could use horizon scanning to identify forthcoming opportunities and challenges, use solution scanning to identify possible options, use evidence-based conservation combined with best theory and local experience to provide guidance on interventions, and use well designed and automated monitoring systems to ensure learning and improvement in practice.

### **Appreciation**

Delegates expressed their thanks for the organisation of such a useful meeting to its Hosts (Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources of the PRC, Yancheng Municipal People's Government), Supporters (National Forestry and Grassland Administration), Organizers (Yancheng Wetland and Natural World Heritage Conservation and Management Center, Eco Foundation Global, Yellow Sea Wetland Institute), and Alliance of Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow and Bohai Sea.

Delegates hoped that Yancheng and partners would continue to make progress on coastal wetland conservation and restoration matters over the year ahead, preceding what is hoped to be the Global Coastal Forum, which has now established a reputation in facilitating local to global coastal wetland and migratory bird conservation.