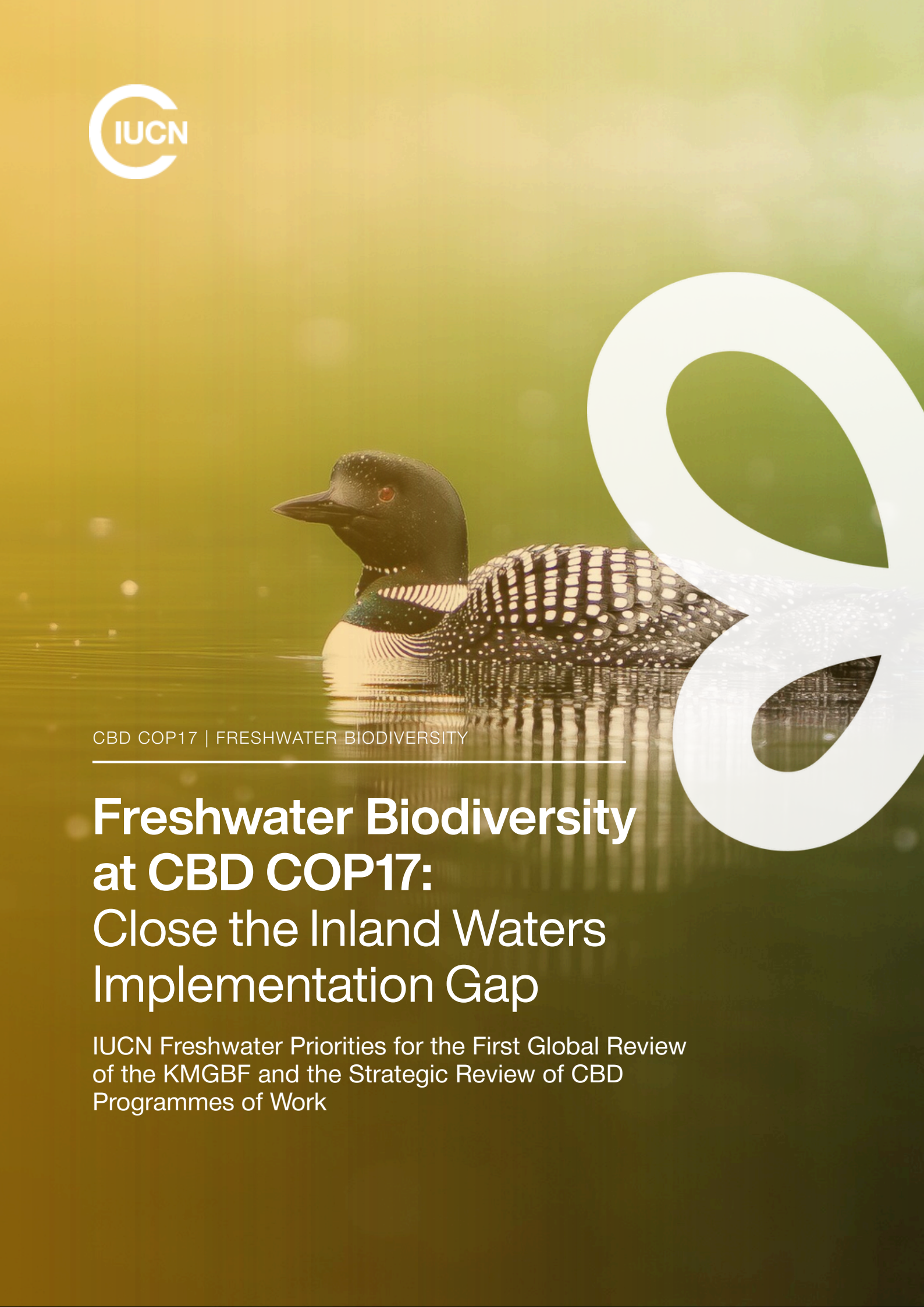


CBD COP17 | FRESHWATER BIODIVERSITY

Freshwater Biodiversity at CBD COP17: Close the Inland Waters Implementation Gap

IUCN Freshwater Priorities for the First Global Review of the KMGBF and the Strategic Review of CBD Programmes of Work

KEY MESSAGE

The findings of the first Global Review and the strategic review of the CBD programmes of work highlight the need to 1) drive greater resource mobilization, ambition and implementation for inland waters, 2) strengthen capacity for reporting and tracking progress, 3) update the Programme of Work on Inland Waters' Biodiversity, including freshwater connectivity for the KMGBF era, 4) mainstream freshwater ecosystems into the Rio Trio agenda, in cooperation with the Convention on Wetlands, and 5) strengthen links between CBD commitments and embed freshwater ecosystem priorities in the governing bodies of wetlands, rivers, springs, lakes and groundwater.

Capitalizing on COP17 for Freshwater Biodiversity

COP17 is the first Conference of the Parties at which countries will collectively review progress in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). The formal agenda contains no stand-alone freshwater item, but several decision points are directly relevant to inland waters. Importantly, Agenda item 17(a) considers the strategic review of the Convention's programmes of work. The recommendation before COP17 explicitly identifies inland waters' biodiversity among the programmes that could be maintained and regularly updated, although the text remains bracketed.[1]

This creates a significant opportunity for COP17 to turn existing commitments into action for freshwater biodiversity. Inland waters are already embedded across the KMGBF targets; the priority now is to mobilise investment, ensure the effectiveness of relevant policy frameworks, and strengthen implementation so that freshwater outcomes can be scaled up, measured and delivered before 2030.

1 CBD/SBSTTA/REC/27/4, Strategic review and analysis of the programmes of work under the Convention in the context of the Framework; and CBD/COP/17/1/Rev.1, Provisional agenda for COP17.



COP17 YEREVAN ARMENIA

Photo: Matvei/Pexels

Where Freshwater Biodiversity Fits on the COP17 Agenda

AGENDA ITEM	FRESHWATER RELEVANCE
8(a)-(b)	Adequate and equitable financing is a primary barrier to implementation. Substantive decisions on resource mobilization, including adoption of criteria and institutional structure, and financing mechanisms that are accessible, equitable, and responsive to the priorities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), are urgently needed at COP17.
9(a)-(b)	First Global Review and monitoring framework highlights the gap in inland-water ambition (target setting) and implementation and creates an opportunity to define and operationalize actions to address that gap.
13 and 14	Cooperation with other conventions and mainstreaming: the route to connect biodiversity commitments with the Convention on Wetlands and with water, agriculture, infrastructure and other sectors.
17(a)	Strategic review of programmes of work: the clearest formal opening to retain and update the Programme of Work on Inland Waters Biodiversity for implementation of the KMGBF.
17(c)	Programme of Work on Protected Areas: important for ensuring Target 3 is representative of freshwater ecosystems through spatial planning, ecological processes, connectivity, effective management and equitable governance, not area alone.[2] This includes the proposed new connectivity pillar (the 5th element) addressing aquatic connectivity, which is different from, though connected to, terrestrial connectivity.
18(a), (d), (f)	Climate change, agriculture and health: key cross-sector drivers and benefits through which freshwater biodiversity outcomes are determined.

[2] IUCN WCPA (2024). Designing and managing protected and conserved areas to support inland water ecosystems and biodiversity. https://doi.org/10.2305/ZOKC6253

The First Global Review Reveals Freshwater Ambition But Implementation Gap

The evidence base for COP17 makes the case for corrective action. The IPBES Nexus Assessment concludes that freshwater biodiversity is being lost faster than terrestrial biodiversity, and links that decline to water withdrawal, habitat fragmentation, wetland degradation, flow modification, pollution and land-use pressures. It also shows that water connects biodiversity, food, health and climate systems, while decisions affecting these systems are still frequently taken in institutional silos.[3]

The Global Report on Collective Progress reinforces the same concern. Across targets, inland water ecosystems are under-represented. Monitoring coverage for inland water restoration is weaker than for terrestrial ecosystems; national ambition for inland water conservation under Target 3 lags behind the terrestrial realm; and current protected area reporting and information is not sufficient to assess inland water performance consistently. The report also finds that mainstreaming biodiversity into wider water, food, development and economic decisions remains uneven.[4] Resource mobilization has largely been directed to terrestrial areas.

COP17 Implication

Inland waters should be treated as a specific implementation gap within the Global Review, not absorbed into aggregate terrestrial reporting. The objective is not to create a parallel monitoring framework, but to ensure that Parties can see whether freshwater commitments are translating into ecological outcomes.

3 IPBES (2024), Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health, especially the Summary for Policymakers and water/biodiversity response options

4 CBD (2026), Global Report on Collective Progress in the Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, prepared for the first Global Review at COP17



Photo: Tana Photo/Canva

Four Priority Actions for Freshwater Biodiversity at CBD COP17

1 Use Agenda item 17(a) to revitalize the Programme of Work on Inland Waters Biodiversity for the 2030 Targets and beyond

This is a critical decision point for freshwater at COP17. SBSTTA recommendation 27/4 places inland waters biodiversity among programmes that should be maintained but would benefit from updating to align with the KMGBF, currently in brackets.[1]

An updated Programme of Work (PoW) on Inland Waters Biodiversity should translate the KMGBF into the ecological and governance realities of freshwater systems. It should address basin and catchment planning, protection and conservation, environmental flows, water allocation, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, ecological connectivity, water quality, freshwater fisheries (relevant to Targets 5, 9, 10), restoration, infrastructure impacts and the cumulative pressures that operate across entire river and lake systems. Importantly, considering the short time remaining until 2030, any revitalized PoW should make the programme an implementation instrument for the period to 2030 and beyond.

Any update should be tightly integrated with PoWs on protected and conserved areas and ecological restoration, address any remaining gaps, and demonstrate what successful freshwater implementation means for Targets 2 and 3. A restored or protected river reach or wetland may not be effectively conserved, or support biodiversity recovery if upstream abstraction, pollution, fragmentation or altered flows undermine its ecological character. Area-based conservation for inland waters should therefore be interpreted through measures of conservation effectiveness, including condition, connectivity, hydrological integrity, and effective management.

2 Under Agenda item 9, make inland water visible in the Global Review and close the gap

COP17 should address gaps found in the first Global Review and drive targeted acceleration where implementation is weakest. For inland waters, this means encouraging Parties to strengthen national targets and implementation as well as encouraging disaggregated reporting to track progress for inland waters ecosystems, particularly for Targets 1, 2, and 3, independently from terrestrial ecosystems.

Existing information can be used more effectively, including national wetland inventories, Convention on Wetlands information, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and freshwater Key Biodiversity Area data, the Global Ecosystem Typology, IUCN Green List assessments, ecosystem condition, river connectivity, hydrological and water-quality information, and restoration data. The practical objective is to enable Parties to identify where freshwater biodiversity is recovering, where it remains in decline, which pressures are preventing progress and what actions are needed to accelerate progress towards the KMGBF targets.

Parties are encouraged to address the implementation gap identified in the Global Review by increasing ambition, investment and action for inland water ecosystems, prioritising areas of particular importance for biodiversity and under the greatest pressure.





Photo: Mihaela Stoica/Canva

3 Highlight synergies and cooperation with the Convention on Wetlands under agenda items 13 and 14 as a practical avenue for accelerating implementation

The Convention on Wetlands is the most developed institutional bridge between CBD commitments and freshwater ecosystem delivery. The Sixth Joint Work Plan of the CBD and the Convention on Wetlands runs from 2024 to 2030 and is explicitly designed to align implementation and monitoring under the two conventions.[5] Parties at COP17 should use this existing architecture and scale the ambition of collaboration on wetlands between the Conventions at national scale.

At national level, the priority is to connect NBSAP commitments with national wetland policies and inventories, Ramsar Sites and other protected and conserved areas, and then link these to basin and catchment plans, water allocation, pollution control, restoration programmes and investment decisions. This is where whole-of-government implementation becomes operational rather than rhetorical.

Other biodiversity-related conventions should be used selectively where they provide a clear additional lever: CMS for migratory freshwater species and ecological connectivity and CITES where international trade and exploitation materially drive freshwater species decline. The purpose is coherent implementation around a defined freshwater problem, not a proliferation of new inter-convention processes. SDG 15 clearly refers to freshwater ecosystems and identification of protection and KBAs and links between the SDGs and the KMGBF could be better highlighted.

5 CBD and Convention on Wetlands (2024), Sixth Joint Work Plan 2024-2030 (CBD/COP/16/INF/19); CBD Decision 16/35 on cooperation with other conventions and international organizations

4 Translate COP17 decisions into country-led delivery before COP19

Several standing resources exist to support Parties in closing the ambition and implementation gap for inland waters. This includes The Freshwater Challenge (FWC), a ready country-led mechanism for moving from commitments to delivery. Inspired by Targets 2 and 3 of the GBF, it aims to support and accelerate restoration of 300,000 km of degraded rivers and 350 million hectares of degraded wetlands by 2030 (Target 2), while protecting and conserving intact freshwater ecosystems (Target 3). More than 50 countries and the European Union have joined.[6] Its relevance to the KMGBF is practical: it can help Parties convert Targets 1, 2 and 3 into identified rivers, wetlands and basins, national restoration and conservation priorities, NBSAP targets, implementation partnerships, monitoring arrangements and investment pipelines. The FWC is a voluntary delivery mechanism for existing KMGBF commitments, not an additional global target.

Agenda items 8 and 12 provide complementary routes to direct finance, capacity-building and technical and scientific cooperation towards identified freshwater implementation gaps. The CBD Technical and Scientific Cooperation Support Centres can help countries apply existing knowledge and tools, while the Freshwater Challenge can provide a country-led platform through which implementation needs become concrete and investable.

6 IUCN and Freshwater Challenge partners, Freshwater Challenge: country-led initiative to restore 300,000 km of degraded rivers and 350 million ha of degraded wetlands by 2030 and conserve intact freshwater ecosystems.

Keep the Freshwater Message Focused Across the Rest of the Agenda

Freshwater biodiversity is also relevant for matters under the COP17 items on climate change, agriculture, biodiversity and health, wildlife, and protected and conserved areas. These should reinforce rather than fragment the core message. Climate policy affects hydrological regimes and freshwater resilience; agriculture is a major driver of abstraction, nutrient and pesticide pollution; freshwater ecosystem condition influences water quality and health; and protected and conserved area implementation must account for flows and connectivity. Creating a dedicated agenda item for inland waters will highlight where these cross-cutting linkages can be identified and prioritised for action through mobilising multiple stakeholders and sectors. Consideration should be given to prioritising inland waters at COP18.

IUCN's COP17 Message

Move from freshwater recognition to freshwater implementation. Use the Global Review to operationalise actions that close the inland waters gap including through the Programme of Work on Inland Waters Biodiversity, and through a dedicated agenda item at COP18; improve cooperation with the Convention on Wetlands, especially at the national level; and scale country-led delivery through the Freshwater Challenge and other existing technical and financial mechanisms.

Proposed IUCN calls to Parties at COP17

- Under Agenda item 9, recognise and address the specific implementation and monitoring gap for inland waters and employ stronger disaggregation of freshwater progress in national implementation, reporting and future review.
- Under Agenda items 13 and 14, operationalise the CBD-Convention on Wetlands Joint Work Plan at national level by linking NBSAPs with wetland policy, inventories, site networks, basin planning and water-sector decision-making.
- Include inland waters biodiversity in the agenda for COP18, in the multi-year programme of work of the Convention.
- Use CMS the Minamata Convention, the Water Conventions and CITES selectively where inadequate transboundary cooperation, migratory connectivity or international trade are material drivers of freshwater biodiversity loss, while avoiding duplication of mandates.
- Use resources like the Freshwater Challenge, technical and scientific cooperation, and existing finance mechanisms to convert freshwater commitments into measurable, basin-scale implementation before the next global review.



Photo: Vladimir Srajber/Pexels



Photo: Natalia Kotovych/Pexels

We acknowledge the support and technical expertise provided by IUCN WCPA Freshwater Specialist Group during the creation of this brief.

For More Information

IUCN Water and Wetlands
water@iucn.org
Rue Mauverney
28, 1196 Gland