

# Global freshwater conservation gains momentum among UN countries

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Sampans meet at early morning market in the Mekong Delta where rivers converge Vietnam. Credit: Elizbeth Kemf / WWF-Canon

Thirty-five member countries of the United Nations have now officially agreed to common guidelines for sharing and managing freshwater resources that cross international borders. With Vietnam's ratification, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC) will go into effect in August, transforming the way governments share fresh water and settle

water-related disputes.

The agreement comes at a crucial moment. Climate change is influencing [water](#) quality and quantities, and people and wildlife are experiencing more volatile periods of droughts and floods. Growing populations and incomes are changing how people live, increasing and diversifying the demands placed on [fresh water](#). Developing countries especially are using their [water resources](#) in new ways, particularly for industry and energy.

There are 276 international rivers worldwide, with 60 per cent of the planet's freshwater flows. What one country does with its water impacts all others that share the same freshwater system. The UNWC will help countries manage local water concerns in a way that protects [freshwater resources](#) and ecosystems throughout an entire basin.

Vietnam represents the first Asian country to ratify the UNWC, and does so from a particularly important region: the Greater Mekong. The Mekong River passes through six countries and fuels the 'rice bowl' of Asia. It is the world's most productive inland fishery, supporting the livelihoods and food security of some 60 million people.

"This new set of rules is good for both people and nature," says Lifeng Li, Director of WWF's global freshwater programme. "Habitats and wildlife are not bound by national borders, and some of the most important conservation areas are linked to international rivers and lakes.

"WWF has been working with countries and partners around the world to raise awareness of the UNWC and sow the seeds of cooperation. We look forward to supporting the roll-out of the guidelines and continuing to encourage nations to ratify and implement the convention in support of better water management," says Li.

Provided by WWF

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