

Wellness in Wetlands 2025 – Summary Report

First International Conference on Nature, Mental Health, and Community Well-Being

Colombo, Sri Lanka | 09–12 October 2025



The **Wellness in Wetlands 2025 – International Conference on Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future** was successfully held from **9 to 12 October 2025** at Ape Gama, Colombo. The international conference was organised by the **Emotional Intelligence and Life Skills Training (EILS) Team**, bringing together **over 300 participants** through **both physical and online platforms**.

Participants joined from **Australia, the United States, India, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Morocco, Kenya, Malaysia, Japan, and Sri Lanka**, reflecting strong global engagement on wetlands as critical ecosystems for biodiversity conservation, mental health, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods. The conference brought together **wetland academics, conservation activists, mental health professionals, psychologists, nutritionists, consultants, ecologists, and policy practitioners**, creating a rich multidisciplinary and international dialogue.

The conference was **led and coordinated by Prasad Jayasinghe**, Managing Director of **Emotional Intelligence and Life Skills Training Team (GTE) Ltd**, together with his organizing team and a committed **wetland protection volunteer guide team**. The initiative was implemented with funding support from the **UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme**.

The event was honoured by the presence of the **Ambassadors of Pakistan and Spain**, senior Sri Lankan government officials, and key policymakers, including **Deputy Minister of Tourism Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe** and **Deputy Minister of Industry and Entrepreneurial Development Hon. Chathuranga Abeyasinghe**, underscoring national-level commitment to wetland conservation and sustainable development.



A major highlight of the conference was the keynote address by Prof **Susan Clayton**, world-renowned environmental psychologist from the **College of Wooster, USA**, who emphasised the strong relationship between healthy ecosystems, mental health, and human identity. The conference was further enriched by **Uruwarige Wannila Aththo**, leader of Sri Lanka's Indigenous Vedda Community, who shared indigenous perspectives on cultural heritage, ancestral wisdom, and living in harmony with wetlands.

The **Academic Chair** of the conference was **Dr Sanath Mahawithanage**, Senior Lecturer at the **University of Sri Jayewardenepura**, Faculty of Medical Sciences, and Founding Director of the **Centre for Mindfulness-Based Research and Practices**, a pioneering institute advancing research on mindfulness and well-being.



The four-day programme featured **plenary sessions, expert panels, workshops, and field visits**, focusing on blue-green environments, children's health, Ayurvedic knowledge systems, and nature-based healing approaches. Delegates visited the **Beddagana Wetlands**, where they observed biodiversity and engaged directly with practical wetland conservation initiatives.



The conference was a **collaborative effort supported by a strong network of partners**. **Technical and Knowledge Partners** included the **University of Colombo (Sustainable Tourism Unit)**, **University of Sri Jayewardenepura**, **Sri Lanka Land Development Corporation (SLLDC)**, **IUCN**, **Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)**, **Wetlands Link International (WLI) Asia–Oceania**, **Growing Edge Consultants**, the **Centre for Planetary Earth**, and **Staatsbosbeheer Netherlands**.

Co-organisers comprised **SLAAAA**, **Indian Association of Life Skills Education (IALSE)**, **Life Skills Education Institute**, **Male' Association of Life Skills Education**, **Maldives Mental Health Association**, **SLV Sri Lanka**, and **SNECC Sri Lanka – Nippon Education and Cultural Centre**.

A key outcome of the conference was the adoption of the **Kingdom of Kotte Declaration**, which recognizes wetlands as sanctuaries that nurture **mental health, resilience, cultural heritage, sustainable livelihoods, and biodiversity**. Participants acknowledged the urgent need to address **climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation** through **people-centred, nature-based solutions**, while honouring the **indigenous wisdom, knowledge systems, and traditions of local communities** that continue to protect wetland ecosystems.



The Declaration remains **open for online signature**, and the organisers encourage institutions, professionals, and concerned citizens worldwide to **add their voices in solidarity for wetlands and well-being**.

The conference concluded with a strong commitment to **continued global collaboration**, with participants agreeing to reconvene at the **2nd International Conference on Wellness in Wetlands in 2026** to review progress, strengthen partnerships, and advance collective action.

The event was made possible through the generous support of the **UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme**, **Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau**, **SriLankan Airlines**, **Ada Derana 24**, and numerous academic, technical, and partner organisations



Kingdom of Kotte Declaration



**1st International Conference On
WELLNESS IN WETLANDS 2025**
PROTECTING WETLANDS FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE
October 9–12, 2025 | Sri Lanka

Preamble

We, the participants of the International Wetlands and Mental Health Conference 2025, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 9–12 October 2025, representing governments, academia, civil society, indigenous communities, youth, private sector, and international organizations, gathered with a shared vision: to recognize the inseparable link between wetlands, human wellbeing, and the future of our planet.

Acknowledging that wetlands are not only ecosystems of extraordinary biodiversity but also sanctuaries that nurture mental health, resilience, cultural heritage, and sustainable livelihoods;

Recognizing the urgent need to address climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and rising mental health challenges through integrated, nature-based, and people-centered solutions;

Honoring indigenous wisdom and local communities whose knowledge and traditions safeguard wetlands and inspire new models of coexistence and harmony with nature;

Celebrating Sri Lanka's commitment, as the host nation, to conservation, sustainable tourism, and wellbeing-driven development;

We hereby adopt the **Kingdom of Kotte Declaration** as a call to action for national and international partners.

Our Commitments

- 1. Protect & Restore Wetlands**
 - o Strengthen conservation, restoration, and wise use of wetlands as critical ecosystems for biodiversity, climate resilience, and human wellbeing.
 - o Promote sustainable management aligned with international conventions, particularly the Ramsar Convention, and national frameworks.
- 2. Integrate Mental Health & Nature**
 - o Recognize wetlands and natural spaces as essential to mental health, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and community wellbeing.
 - o Encourage health systems and policies to incorporate nature-based mental health promotion strategies.
- 3. Empower Communities & Indigenous Voices**
 - o Respect, safeguard, and learn from indigenous knowledge and community-led conservation practices.
 - o Ensure equitable participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in wetland management and decision-making.
- 4. Promote Eco-Tourism & Sustainable Livelihoods**
 - o Develop community-based, eco-friendly tourism models that protect natural heritage while generating inclusive economic opportunities.
 - o Position Sri Lanka as a global hub for wetlands-based wellness and sustainable tourism.
- 5. Foster Education & Youth Engagement**
 - o Integrate wetlands and mental health themes into educational curricula and youth programs.
 - o Build future leaders who champion sustainability, intercultural understanding, and peace through nature-based learning.
- 6. Strengthen Global & Local Partnerships**
 - o Enhance cooperation among governments, academia, NGOs, private sector, and international partners to advance research, policy, and practice.
 - o Promote cross-regional collaborations linking Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond for shared learning and innovation.
- 7. Align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
 - o Emphasize wetlands as vital to achieving SDGs on climate action, health, sustainable cities, life below water, and life on land.
 - o Advocate for integrated frameworks connecting environment, health, and wellbeing.

Call to Action

We call upon **Heads of State, international organizations, policymakers, civil society, private sector, and communities** to endorse and implement the commitments of the **Kingdom of Kotte Declaration**, ensuring wetlands remain living classrooms, healing spaces, and cornerstones of sustainable futures.

We pledge to monitor progress, share knowledge, and inspire action through continued collaboration beyond this conference.

Together, we affirm that **caring for wetlands is caring for humanity**.

Adopted on 12 October 2025 at Ape Gama, Colombo, Sri Lanka
at the International Wetlands and Mental Health Conference 2025.



Signatures





<https://www.change.org/p/sign-the-kingdom-of-kotte-declaration-be-a-partner-in-protecting-wetlands-for-wellness>



FULL KEY PERSONNEL LIST (CONFERENCE ECOSYSTEM)

GLOBAL & INTERNATIONAL LEADERS

Prof. Susan Clayton / USA

World-leading environmental psychologist specializing in nature–mental health relationships.

Ms. Sandra den Adel / Netherlands

Director-level conservation leader driving European wetland restoration and climate resilience.

Dr. Jonathan Reeves / United Kingdom

Senior research scientist integrating wetlands into public health and wellbeing systems.

Dr. Gauri P. Hardikar / India–Switzerland

International education policy strategist shaping global curriculum systems.

Ms. Ashley Fargnoli / USA

Fulbright scholar specializing in expressive arts therapy and trauma-informed care.

Ms. Alex Hughes/ United Kingdom

Project Manager – International Engagement, WWT, UK

LK SRI LANKA – ACADEMIC & SCIENTIFIC LEADERS

Prof. Piyanjali de Zoysa / Sri Lanka

Leading clinical psychologist advancing culturally grounded mental health systems.

Prof. Devaka Weerakoon / Sri Lanka

Top conservation biologist specializing in biodiversity and wildlife science.

Prof. (Dr.) D.A.C. Suranga Silva / Sri Lanka

Global tourism economics expert focusing on sustainability and policy frameworks.

Dr. Malkanthi Hettiarachchi / Sri Lanka

International psychologist bridging mental health and security studies.

Dr. Venura Palihawadana / Sri Lanka–Australia

Consultant psychiatrist promoting integrative mental health systems.

Dr. Himalee De Silva / Sri Lanka

Specialist in Ayurveda psychiatry and integrative mental health approaches.

Prof. Bandunee C. Liyanage Athapattu / Sri Lanka

Environmental engineering academic contributing to sustainable infrastructure.

Dr. Anuradha Herath / Sri Lanka

Child and adolescent mental health specialist focusing on eco-anxiety.

Dr. Prasad Chathurangana / Sri Lanka

Medical doctor specializing in climate-related child health impacts.

Mr. Lakshman Abeysekara / Sri Lanka

National enterprise development leader and policy implementation strategist.

Dr. N. S. Wijayarathna / Sri Lanka

Senior government environmental official managing wetland systems.

Major General Sudantha Ranasinghe / Sri Lanka

Former military leader specializing in rehabilitation and disaster management.

Uruwarige Wannila Aththo / Sri Lanka

Indigenous Vedda leader representing traditional ecological knowledge systems.

IN INDIA – EDUCATION & LIFE SKILLS LEADERS

Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair / India

Founder of Life Skills Education movement influencing regional education policy.

Dr. Sunitha Ranjan / India

Psychologist and trainer in emotional intelligence and life skills education.

Dr. Subasree Vanamali / India

Academic psychologist contributing to education and mental health systems.

Prof. V. Reghu / India

Education expert specializing in teacher training and curriculum development.

Dr. Sandhya Ajit Thakur / India

Science education researcher focusing on biology teaching systems.



COMMUNITY & FIELD CONTRIBUTORS (SRI LANKA)

Wetland Youth Volunteers / Sri Lanka

Community-based conservation group supporting wetland restoration and eco-tourism.

Homestay Community Leaders / Sri Lanka

Local eco-tourism operators integrating conservation with community livelihoods.