



Ministry of Environment

N° : 1126 MoE

Phnom Penh, 2 December 2015

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Prek Toal - the heart of Tonle Sap – was recognized as a new Ramsar Site

South-East Asia's largest waterbird colony, the 21,342 hectares Prek Toal (Ramsar Site no. 2245 <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/2245>) has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance (also known as a 'Ramsar Site'), by the Royal Government of Cambodia and recognized by the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The declaration of Cambodia's fourth Ramsar Site was made on 2 October 2015 by Prime Ministerial Sub-Decree.

Prek Toal's Status as South-East Asia's largest waterbird colony was under threat due to overharvesting of the waterbirds until the Ministry of Environment in close cooperation with the Wildlife Conservation Society started working back in 1999 to conserve the colony. The colony was a fraction of its current size, due to decades of egg and chick collection. Former egg collectors were employed as nest guardians, stationed on tree-top platforms throughout the breeding season to protect and monitor the breeding birds. The protection continues to this day, and Prek Toal now supports more than 50,000 breeding waterbirds of at least ten globally threatened species. These include Southeast Asia's only breeding Spot-billed Pelicans, nearly half of the world's Greater Adjutants and many thousands of storks and darters. It is for this reason that Prek Toal has received recognition as a Ramsar Site. Prek Toal attracts thousands of tourists annually and supports the most productive fishery in the Tonle Sap Lake.

"Cambodia should be proud that Prek Toal has been declared as a wetland of international importance. It recognises the years of hard work between government, local communities and NGOs, and opens the door to many more years of this exciting collaboration that has restored Prek Toal to its place as a natural wonder of Cambodia" said Dr. Ross Sinclair, WCS Cambodia Director.

"We congratulate the Royal Government of Cambodia for putting forward Prek Toal as a new Ramsar Site", said Dr. Lew Young, Senior Regional Advisor for Asia-Oceania (Ramsar Secretariat), "and we look forward to supporting the Royal Government of Cambodia to designate more Ramsar Sites in future, and to ensure their sustainable management for the benefit of the local people and the environment."

30% of Cambodia is covered by wetlands and the majority of them have been identified as globally important, owing to the populations of threatened species that they support. In 1999 Cambodia became a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. However, up until now only three Ramsar Sites had been designated. They are:

- Boeng Chhmor and Associated River System and Floodplain (Ramsar Site no. 997, <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/997>);
- Koh Kapik and Associated Islets (Site no. 998, <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/998>), and;
- Middle Stretches of Mekong River North of Stoeng Treng (Site no. 999, <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/999>).

R

"Recognizing Prek Toal as a Ramsar Site not only draws attention to the international importance of this wetland but it will be a bridge for Cambodia to nominate more wetlands as Ramsar Sites in the future", said H.E. Say Samal, Minister of Environment of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

BirdLife International and the Department of Freshwater Wetlands Conservation of the Ministry of Environment have been working together towards designating more wetlands as Ramsar Sites in Cambodia since 2008. Prek Toal is the first new Ramsar Site declared in Cambodia in the last sixteen years. "In addition to its biodiversity value, Prek Toal Important Bird Area delivers ecosystem services such as fish which support the livelihoods of the surrounding floating villages, we are delighted at this result" said Mr. Bou Vorsak, BirdLife Cambodia's Programme Manager. "Ramsar status for this wetland will attract international interest in this fantastic site."

Each Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention designates at least one wetland for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, and these sites are selected by the Party based on the site's international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology. Worldwide, there are 2,240 Ramsar Sites, making this the largest network of wetland managed for conservation.

Financial support was provided by the Darwin Initiative, a small grant of Japanese Ministry of the Environment, the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, a Ramsar Small Grant, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. *R*

### ENDS ###

**From Department of Freshwater Wetlands Conservation of Ministry of Environment**

**Dr. Srey Sunleang**, Director of Department

Phone: (+855) (0) 77 333-456

Email: [kampongspeu@yahoo.com](mailto:kampongspeu@yahoo.com)

**From BirdLife International:**

**Mr. Bou Vorsak**, Cambodia Programme Manager,

Phone: (+855) (0) 12 222-073

Email: [vorsak.bou@birdlife.org](mailto:vorsak.bou@birdlife.org)

**From Wildlife Conservation Society:**

**Dr. Ross Sinclair**, Cambodia Director

Phone: (+855) (0) 12 57 87 42

Email: [rsinclair@wcs.org](mailto:rsinclair@wcs.org)



*bc*