

**Message from Vincent Sweeney**  
**Head, UNEP Caribbean Sub-Regional Office**  
In commemoration of  
**World Wetlands Day 2024:**  
**Protecting Wetlands Through Zero Waste in the Caribbean**

On February 2, 2024, the world celebrated World Wetlands Day, a global call to action to protect and restore wetlands for their invaluable role in sustaining biodiversity, mitigating climate change, and supporting livelihoods. For the Caribbean, where coastal wetlands such as mangroves, seagrasses, and swamps serve as natural buffers against storms, provide habitats for diverse marine life, and contribute to local economies, this day highlights the urgent need to address pollution—particularly waste mismanagement—that threatens these fragile ecosystems.

### The Challenge: Waste Pollution and Wetlands Degradation

Caribbean wetlands face increasing pressure from land-based waste pollution, including plastic debris, agricultural runoff, and untreated wastewater. The region generates high levels of waste per capita, a significant amount ending up in waterways, eventually reaching wetlands and coastal ecosystems. Plastic pollution, in particular, has devastating effects on wetland biodiversity, harming marine species and reducing the ecosystem services these areas provide to local communities. Without effective waste management strategies, these crucial ecosystems remain at risk.

### Zero Waste Solutions for Wetland Protection

Embracing zero waste principles—waste prevention, reduction, reuse, and resource recovery—can play a transformative role in safeguarding the Caribbean’s wetlands. Key solutions include:

- 1. Plastic Reduction Initiatives:** Implementing bans on single-use plastics and promoting sustainable alternatives can significantly reduce plastic waste entering wetland areas.
- 2. Waste Reduction Initiatives:** Promoting and Implementing waste reduction strategies including waste reduction, recycling and reuse initiatives.
- 3. Community-Based Waste Management:** Strengthening local waste collection and recycling programs, especially in coastal and wetland-adjacent communities, ensures proper disposal and prevents litter from reaching these ecosystems.
- 4. Organic Waste Composting:** Encouraging composting programs reduce landfill-bound organic waste while producing nutrient-rich soil, that can support wetland restoration efforts.

5. Innovative Cleanup Campaigns: Engaging citizens, businesses, and policymakers in regular wetland cleanup initiatives raising awareness and actively removing harmful debris from sensitive habitats.
6. Policy and Financial Support: Governments should promote extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes, invest in circular economy solutions, and secure financial mechanisms to support waste reduction and wetland protection.

## The Path Forward

The connection between zero waste and wetland conservation is clear: reducing waste generation and improving waste management directly benefits wetland ecosystems and the communities that rely on them. By integrating zero waste strategies into national and regional environmental policies, the Caribbean can ensure the long-term health of its wetlands, strengthen climate resilience, and support sustainable economic development. Through the recognition of World Wetlands Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to a cleaner, greener, and more resilient Caribbean through zero waste actions.

Learn more here:

- <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-wetlands-day>
- [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FM7xDtLMSOJsWA\\_fPOB0aSe-HHEeocd1/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FM7xDtLMSOJsWA_fPOB0aSe-HHEeocd1/view)

For further information, please contact:

Zero Waste in the Caribbean: New Ways, New Waves Project Team

Email: [unep-zerowaste-caribbean@un.org](mailto:unep-zerowaste-caribbean@un.org)

### About the Zero Waste in the Caribbean project:

The Zero Waste in the Caribbean project is funded by the European Union, in collaboration with CARIFORUM, co-financed by the German cooperation and implemented by AFD, GIZ and UNEP, in partnership with the OECS. For more information, please visit <https://www.unep.org/zero-waste-caribbean-new-ways-new-waves>.



In collaboration with:



Co-Financed by:



Implemented by:



Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



In partnership with:

