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Towards Sustainable Wetland Management: Understanding Public Preferences for the Key Attributes of Bundala Wetland**Dharmawardhana, D.T.P.S.¹, De Silva, W.N.², Amarasinghe, O.²,
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University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka***udani.g@agri.ruh.ac.lk***Abstract**

Wetlands are recognized as ecosystems that are rich in biodiversity and have the ability to reduce the negative effects of climate change. Bundala Wetland, situated in the climate-vulnerable region of southern Sri Lanka, is acknowledged as a prominent bird sanctuary. Currently, it is being degraded as a result of ill-planned development activities. Thus, the concept of sustainable wetland management is recognized as essential for this wetland to ensure the wise use of its resources, mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change and safeguard it for future generations. This study applied a choice experiment method to identify public preferences and estimate the economic value of key attributes associated with a sustainable management plan for the Bundala Wetland. Lagoon fish production, biodiversity conservation, eco-tourism and resource governance were the selected wetland attributes. The levels of the attributes were increase in lagoon fish catch by 4 kg and 8 kg for lagoon fish production; facilitating arrival of local and migratory bird species by 10 species and 20 species for biodiversity conservation and providing trainings on eco-tourism activities for 50,70 and, 100 people. Resource governance attribute consists of the levels of managing the wetland by the government, government and community partnership or government, community and private partnership. Respondents were asked to consider a monthly contribution of 50,100,125 and, 175 Sri Lankan Rupees to manage the wetland as the payment attribute. Primary data were collected through randomly selected 171 respondents who resided within 10 km from the Bundala Wetland. A conditional logit model was used to estimate the Marginal Willingness-To-Pay (MWTP) for each attribute. According to the results, all the attributes, except eco-tourism were found to have significant and positive impacts on the choice. It was observed that the payment attribute had a negative effect on the utility of choosing a choice with a higher monthly payment value for the Bundala protection Fund. Participatory governance received a higher MWTP, with a preference for a governing structure that involves the government, community and private sector rather than a single party. The findings of this study are intended to assist policymakers in the formulation of a socially acceptable and economically efficient wetland management plan for Bundala Wetland.

Keywords: *Choice experiment, Climate change, Marginal willingness to pay, Participatory governance, Wetland*