

"Wetlands: water, life, and culture"

**8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002

Resolution VIII.7

Gaps in and harmonization of Ramsar guidance on wetland ecological character, inventory, assessment, and monitoring

1. RECALLING that through Article 3.1 of the Convention, Contracting Parties undertake to “formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List [of Wetlands of International Importance], and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory”; and under Article 3.2, to “arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change”;
2. ALSO RECALLING that through Resolution VI.1 Contracting Parties adopted working definitions of “ecological character” and guidelines for describing and maintaining the ecological character of listed sites, and through Resolution VII.10 adopted revised definitions of “ecological character” and “change in ecological character”, and that Parties are strongly encouraged to include within their management plans a regime for regular and rigorous monitoring to detect changes in ecological character;
3. RECOGNIZING that Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Annex to Resolution VII.11) is “to use Ramsar sites as baseline and reference areas for national, supranational/regional, and international environmental monitoring to detect trends in the loss of biological diversity, climate change, and the processes of desertification”, and that definition and assessment of the ecological character of Ramsar sites is an essential prerequisite for delivering this Objective;
4. AWARE that Recommendation 4.7 and Resolution VIII.13 approved categories of information to be provided by Contracting Parties in the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) that include a statement of the ecological character of the sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance;
5. ALSO AWARE that Contracting Parties have adopted a range of guidance relevant to the identification, assessment, monitoring and management of the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance and other wetlands, including on wetland inventory (Resolution VII.20), wetland risk assessment (Resolution VII.10), impact assessment (Resolution VII.16), and monitoring (Resolution VI.1);
6. RECOGNIZING that this meeting of the Conference of the Parties has adopted further guidance relevant to the assessing and managing of the ecological character of wetlands, including *A Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Resolution VIII.6), *New Guidelines for*

management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands (Resolution VIII.14), and on impact assessment (Resolution VIII.9);

7. RECALLING that Resolution VII.25 authorized the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), in collaboration with appropriate international bodies, to compile and disseminate reliable criteria and methods for the evaluation of the ecological character of wetlands through the establishment of indicative biological, physical, and chemical parameters; and ALSO RECALLING that through the Annex to Resolution VII.18 the STRP was also requested to compile information on functional and biodiversity assessment methodologies and the means for their integration in wetland management for dissemination to Contracting Parties, for their adaptation to local situations;
8. HAVING BEEN INFORMED that the STRP has reviewed the available tools and guidelines related to the ecological character of wetlands published in Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks 7 and 8, and has concluded that although there is a substantial range of guidance available and in preparation for use by Contracting Parties, there are gaps and disharmonies in this guidance developed through the Convention process at different times, and that the preparation of further guidance is necessary;
9. AWARE that the STRP recognized the need to develop an overarching “wetland ecosystem assessment framework” for use by Contracting Parties to provide a conceptual framework for defining the ecological character of wetlands and for assessing and addressing change in ecological character and guidance on which available tools and guidelines should be applied in each stage of the process of inventory, assessment, monitoring and management of Ramsar sites and other wetlands;
10. NOTING that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) has been developed to provide guidance and information to the Ramsar Convention, *inter alia*, concerning the condition and trends in global ecosystems including wetlands, future scenarios, and response options for decision-makers at global and sub-global scales, and is preparing good practice guidelines and methods for undertaking ecosystem assessments, applicable to wetland assessment, at local, national and regional scales;
11. FURTHER NOTING that other assessment programmes currently underway, including the Global International Waters Assessment, UNESCO’s World Water Assessment Programme, and IUCN’s Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment Programme, will provide information on the status and trends of wetlands, wetland biodiversity, and water resources, and that through the Joint Work Plan 2002-2006 between the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) the World Resources Institute has prepared a review of the status and trends of inland waters biodiversity as a contribution to the review and elaboration of the CBD’s programme of work on inland water ecosystems;
12. AWARE that through the CBD-Ramsar Joint Work Plan 2002-2006 the STRP and Ramsar Bureau are working with the CBD Secretariat in the preparation of guidance on the rapid assessment of inland water biodiversity, including in small island developing states, and of marine and coastal biodiversity for consideration for adoption by Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention and CBD;

13. THANKING the STRP's Expert Working Group on Ecological Character for the preparation of the Information Paper available to this meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Ramsar COP8 DOC. 16), which outlines a conceptual framework for the application of integrated wetland ecosystem inventory, assessment monitoring and management, stresses the role of wetland ecosystems and their goods and services in human well-being and poverty alleviation, and summarizes the tools and guidance currently available for use by Contracting Parties; and
14. NOTING that UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is developing a procedure entitled Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring (BRIM) and that through the Ramsar-MAB joint programme of work it is proposed to test this procedure, including indicators, on wetlands that have been designated both as Ramsar sites and Biosphere Reserves;

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15. REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to further review and, as appropriate, develop guidance and report to COP9 concerning identified gaps and disharmonies in defining and reporting the ecological character of wetlands through inventory, assessment, monitoring and management of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, giving priority to advice and guidance on practical matters on issues that should include:
 - a) the Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type and (bio)geographical regionalization schemes and their application in defining and reporting the ecological character of wetlands;
 - b) determining the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, including techniques and guidelines for delineating ecological boundaries and mapping wetlands, and for evaluating the values and functions, goods and services provided by wetlands;
 - c) the clear definition of the ecological character features in the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS), including recommendations for change to the structure and content of the RIS and, as appropriate, further guidance on the application of the Criteria for the identification and designation of Wetlands of International Importance in the *Strategic Framework and future development of the Ramsar List* (Resolution VII.11) and the additional guidelines for the identification and designation of under-represented wetland types (Resolution VIII.11) in the definition of the ecological character of Ramsar sites;
 - d) harmonization of the layout and information fields of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) and the core data fields recommended in the *Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Resolution VIII.6);
 - e) incorporation of assessment and management processes and practical methods (including multi-scalar methods for wetland assessment and monitoring) developed by other programmes, including the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), into the Ramsar "Toolkit" of Wise Use Handbooks;

- f) practical methods, including indicators, for monitoring wetlands and for the rapid assessment of wetland biodiversity, including both inland waters and coastal and marine systems;
 - g) incorporation of environmental impact and strategic environmental assessment into wetland risk assessment procedures;
 - h) the relevance and application of adaptive management methods to Ramsar sites and other wetlands, including as a response to the effects of global climate change; and
 - i) harmonization of definitions and terms throughout the suite of Ramsar guidance on inventory, assessment, monitoring and management of the ecological character of wetlands;
16. ALSO REQUESTS the STRP to consider the consolidation of this additional guidance with that already adopted by the Convention in the form of an integrated framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring, developed from that outlined in the Information Paper available to this meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Ramsar COP8 DOC. 16);
17. REQUESTS the STRP to ensure that the tools, guidance and mechanisms provided for the benefit of Contracting Parties resulting from this work should be framed in such a way that they can be applied at different scales according to the capacity, priorities, and objectives of Contracting Parties for the wise use of wetlands within their jurisdiction, and that they should also be provided such that any reporting involved does not represent an undue burden on Contracting Parties and divert resources from the on-site conservation and sustainable use of wetlands;
18. FURTHER REQUESTS the STRP to review and evaluate the Man and the Biosphere Programme's procedure for Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring (BRIM), once developed, and to advise on its application to the monitoring of the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands;
19. INSTRUCES the Ramsar Bureau, working with the secretariat of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, to make available to Contracting Parties and other interested organizations the findings and guidance developed by the MA, and URGES Contracting Parties to use, as appropriate, the MA guidance and methods for sub-global ecosystem assessments in their assessment of wetland ecosystems at the local, national and regional (supra-national) scale, including through international cooperation on the assessment of transboundary aquatic ecosystems;
20. REQUESTS the Ramsar Bureau to maintain contact and develop collaboration with other assessment processes, including the Global International Waters Assessment, UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme, and IUCN's Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment Programme, so as to ensure that their findings and information on the status and trends of wetlands, wetland biodiversity, and water resources are fully available to, and contribute to the needs of, Contracting Parties;
21. FURTHER REQUESTS the Ramsar Bureau, in cooperation with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to make available to all Contracting Parties and

others the findings of the review of the status and trends on inland water biodiversity, prepared in support of the review and elaboration of the CBD's programme of work on inland water ecosystems; and

22. **STRONGLY URGES** all Contracting Parties to make available to the Ramsar Bureau and the STRP their information gathered on the status of the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands in order to assist in improving the further assessment of the global status and trends of wetland ecosystems.