How Are Our Wetlands?
Priorities for Knowledge Capture and Use

A Ramsar COP9 Side Event provided by the International Organisation Partners with IWMI

***(Collaborating partners**: Wetlands International (WI),WWF, IUCN, BirdLife International, International Water Management Institute)*

9th November 2005 from 13.15h to 14.45h, Victoria ballroom (buffet lunch will be available)

Goal for the Side Event:

- Raise awareness at COP9 by highlighting major challenges and identifying Ramsar community knowledge-base needs;
- post-COP, assist partners and Contracting Parties to implement Ramsar (and CBD) missions for wetland conservation/wise use

POSITION STATEMENT:

The International Organisation Partners (IOPs) with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), have collaborated on a joint Position Statement as an input to the debate on knowledge capture and use that is necessary, informed by the needs of society, to enable the Ramsar Convention to succeed in its mission.

Conservation and wise use of wetlands and their biodiversity can sustain livelihoods and reduce poverty, but this requires much better integration of knowledge that is both policy relevant and practical.

We consider that past support for inventory and monitoring connected to conservation planning has been inadequate. Emerging issues such as links with disease (e.g. Avian Influenza) and the value of eco-services provide a foundation for changing this situation, especially if inventory and monitoring is targeted and outcome-oriented. The Convention has the tools available to support these efforts and to make better use of knowledge.

See inside pages for more details of our Statement

Key Challenges and a Debate

Approach:

The partners hosting the event will distil their key messages about wetland condition and outlook, based on their experience of tracking the status and trends of wetlands (including their biodiversity), and assessing the value of wetland services. Many case studies will be drawn on by speakers and their lessons used to illustrate how to address the knowledge challenges ahead. The side event will aim to highlight what information really matters to achieve effective implementation of the Ramsar Convention and CBD common mission for wetland conservation and wise use. An interactive debate will test the ideas presented against the needs of the Ramsar community and provide concise recommendations for consideration in debates within the COP, but especially after it, to promote coordinated actions by Ramsar Contracting Parties and their partners.

Interactive debate:

We are actively involved in the implementation of the Convention and its further development, through its Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STRP) and many other global and regional processes. The debate, informed by our Position Paper (attached), will focus this experience and test the needs of the Convention as expressed by an invited Side Event Panel of Contracting Parties and partners. The debate agenda, which will especially reference DR1 and DR2, will include the questions:

- **What knowledgebase priorities should be recommended?**
- **How can the identified knowledgebase priorities get the political and financial backing they deserve?**
- **What are our key messages to the COP emphasising the needs for knowledgebase capture and use to better enable wetlands and water to support life, and to sustain livelihoods?**

Key linkages:

Recommendations from the side event and its debate will help participants better engage in plenary and contact group discussions about the Ramsar Convention's knowledgebase. The side event is relevant to several presentations and debates at COP9 supported by, for example, information documents, DOCs – 18, 22, also relevant to draft Resolutions including:

DR1 - Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept - with new guidelines annexed A to E

DR2 - Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention

DR5 - Synergies with other international organizations dealing with biological diversity; including collaboration on, and harmonization of, national reporting among biodiversity-related conventions and agreements

DR 16 - The status of sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance

Relevant past Resolutions: include 5.4, 6.12, 7.11, 7.18, 8.4, 8.6, 8.8, 8.38 and guidance in the Wise Use series e.g. Handbooks 1,2 7, 8 and 10.

Side Event Programme (9th November 13.15-14.45h)

Time	Presenter	Description
13.15h	Paul Mafabi (Government of Uganda) Chair of Side Event	Welcome and general introduction
13.25h	Doug Taylor (WI)	Challenges based on current understanding of status and trends – knowledge needs for conservation and sustaining livelihoods to achieve wise use
13.40h	Max Finlayson (IWMI)	Ecosystem change – the knowledge problem for assessing and managing wetlands (how do we get, share and use useful knowledge at this scale? Who gets it and who can use it?)
13.50h	Will Darwall (IUCN)	Biodiversity networks – the knowledge problem when assessing and managing species across landscapes
14.00h	Achilles Byaruhanga (BirdLife)	Making use of the information - when monitoring tools, assessments, valuations and indicators have produced their data, how do we use the results most effectively to help in realising management targets and in adapting policies?
14.10h	Facilitators: Archna Chatterjee (WWF) and Taej Mundkur (WI)	**Interactive facilitated debate**, with invited guest national delegates in a Panel, to consider the key issues highlighted in the presentations and Position Paper. Rapporteurs: Floris van Kuijk, Doug Taylor
14.40h	Chair and speaker panel	Concluding statements and recommendations for the COP and after
14.45h	Chair	Close of Side Event

Position Statement

Why does knowledge matter? What do we really need to know? How can the Convention and its Contracting Parties fulfil the Vision for the List? All these questions and more are considered in this Side Event, however, without adequate resources to do what is required to measure risks, value resources, maintain and develop datasets on the effectiveness of the Convention, much of the COP9 agenda for working towards more integrated conservation, wise use and livelihood supporting-outcomes will not be achievable.

In our Position Statement below we show a clear way forward, but the International Organisation Partners, together with IWMI, are very concerned by the current inadequacy of the budget proposed for both the STRP and also for the knowledgebase required by the Convention to realise the ambition of the Contracting Parties.

Sustainably harvested papyrus (yields of 8 tonnes per hectare) contributes to diverse products, adding value

"without adequate resources to do what is required to measure risks, value resources, maintain and develop datasets on the effectiveness of the Convention, much of the COP9 agenda for working towards more integrated conservation, wise use and livelihood supporting-outcomes will not be achievable"

Verifying ecological and social outcomes

Ramsar is poised for the first time to measure ecological outcomes in ways which will allow a systematic and objective evaluation of the effectiveness of its implementation, through new indicator measures. This links with other global programmes such as the targets adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We already have indicator systems which it is intended will feed directly into the proposed Ramsar measures; and **we urge support for Draft Resolution 1 Annex D, and the work which will be required to put it into operation**.

The concept of "ecological character" is a particularly strong feature of the thinking evolved under the Ramsar Convention, and its relationship with concepts of ecosystem services in the context of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and is further elaborated in materials tabled for COP9. We are keen to see the preparation in the coming triennium of the guidance (already requested at COP8) on the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character of wetlands.

Making the socio-economic case

The socio-economic value of services provided by ecosystems generally and wetlands specifically has been underlined in the recent Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The need to better understand the nature of wetland economic value was recognised in Ramsar Recommendation 6.10 "Promotion of cooperation on the economic valuation of wetlands", and is emphasised recently by the need to understand the value of the buffering effect of coastal wetlands in storm and tsunami events.

The current Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan (2003-08) identifies a number of actions to advance this including the development of methods for socio-economic evaluation, the integration of socio-economic evaluation of wetlands into Environmental Impact Assessment methods and the development of training. However, the impact of this knowledge and information on planning, development and management in wetlands and the surroundings to which they are functionally linked remains limited. Recently, during the FAO / Netherlands Government "Water for Food and Ecosystems" Conference (The Hague, 2005) a specific lack of awareness of wetland values in national level planning processes was identified in relation to sustainable development (including integrated water resource management).

We believe that the Convention urgently needs to address this situation so that the socio-economic values of wetlands become a central theme in efforts to conserve and manage them, alongside the importance of conserving biodiversity in its own right. Actions need to move beyond provision of information to more active advocacy and 'making the case'.

The Convention needs to:

- Raise the awareness of wetland socio-economic values by targeting senior planners and decision-makers at the national level in all sectors whose activities are related to wetland management and development;
- Raise the awareness of other multi-lateral agreements concerning the importance of wetland socio-economic values;
- Urge Contracting Parties to be proactive in undertaking socio-economic evaluations of Sites (for instance during the process of designation of new Sites);
- Devise and implement a strategy targeting senior governmental decision makers, working through Contracting Parties and CEPA focal points to integrate wetland valuation in planning and decision making processes.
- Simultaneously, raise awareness among the global corporates and FI s (investing in government schemes) to build the socio-economic assessments of wetlands into their decision-making

We will work with Contracting Parties to achieve these objectives, specifically by developing wetland assessment tools and methods to include socio-economic values; measuring and communicating the socio-economic outcomes of demonstration projects in all regions; working with national governments to build the full range of wetland values into national policy and strategy development; implementing outreach and capacity building initiatives that address socio-economic issues together with regional training centres; and by producing a range of regionally and nationally accessible information resources on wetland socio-economic values in multiple languages, specifically targeted also at sectoral and development agencies.

Gathering data on biodiversity status to inform management action

Ramsar Site designation is a potent tool for conservation of wetland biodiversity. For the 2010 CBD target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, the Ramsar Site family ought to be a premier source of information. Once Sites are designated, there are two key data obligations on Contracting Parties to notify the Secretariat about change of significance to biodiversity:

> Ecological change data. *Contracting Parties are expected, in accordance with Article 3.2 of the Convention, supplemented by Resolution 5.4 and Resolution VIII.8, to supply "without delay" information about change in ecological character of any Site.*
>
> Change in Site status. *Any changes in site status should be notified through revisions to the RIS at least on a six yearly cycle, under Resolution VI.13 (dating from 1996).*

Flamingos at Lake Nakuru, Kenya, just one of the many species networks supported by the Ramsar Sites family

However, very few RISs for Sites are being updated regularly. Data from the Ramsar Sites Information Service indicates that only 256 Sites have had their conservation status information updated, out of the 734 Sites that Contracting Parties are obliged to report on. The consequence is that little is known about ecological change for the majority of Sites.

We encourage Contracting Parties to fulfil their obligations, and also encourage the Convention to adopt the indicators of performance as proposed in Draft Resolution 1 Annex D, to better enable the monitoring of wetland status.

Gaps in our guidance on knowledge capture and use

Although the Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring now includes a large number of different tools and approaches, **a number of gaps remain**. They include:

i) development and testing of a hydro-geomorphically-based system of classification of wetlands;

ii) further development of the Web-based wetland inventory meta-database, now part of the Ramsar Sites Information Service;

iii) a review of data and information needs for Ramsar sites and other wetlands, including guidance for the description of the ecological character of wetlands;

iv) advice on delineating and mapping wetlands;

v) further guidance on detecting, reporting and responding to change in the ecological character of wetlands; and

vi) establishment and implementation of mechanisms for the ecological 'outcome-oriented' indicators of effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention.

Vii) devising ways in which this information could be disseminated to other sectors that are impacting wetlands conservation and wise-use

Fish capture and return techniques are used to monitor fish harvest sustainability

There is also a need for more case studies and comprehensive assessments of the socio-economic value of wetland ecosystem services and their critical dependence on adequate water flows.

quantitative information on the technical and economic basis for addressing the role of wetlands in natural disaster prevention, mitigation and adaptation is currently inadequate

Priorities for improving our knowledge capture and use

The following steps for improving our knowledge capture and use are recommended.

i) All countries that have not yet conducted a national wetland inventory should do so, preferably using an approach that is comparable with other large-scale wetland inventories. Inventory needs to provide sufficient data for listing against the criteria, and for monitoring change. Therefore a basic data set should focus on the location and size of the wetland, the status and distribution of criteria-relevant wetland species, and the major biophysical features, including habitat areas and the water regime.

ii) Once the baseline data have been acquired and adequately stored, more management-oriented information on wetland threats and uses, land tenure and management regimes, benefits and values should be added.

iii) Each knowledge capture program should contain a clear statement of its purpose and the range of information that has been collated or collected.

iv) Priority should be given to improving the knowledge of wetland habitats that are currently poorly covered in most parts of the world, e.g. seagrasses, coral reefs, saltmarshes, coastal tidal flats, mangroves, arid-zone wetlands, rivers and streams, artificial wetlands and high altitude wetlands.

v) Knowledge networks must be strengthened to assess and manage species across landscapes including flyways and routes for fish migration and movement of aquatic mammals.

vi) The effectiveness of all programmes should be increased through the use of a standardised framework and a generic wetland inventory core dataset, designed to be as flexible as possible for use in all regions of the world and to accommodate various inventory and assessment objectives.

vii) Models for effective knowledge capture, using appropriate GIS, remote sensing and ground techniques, should be compiled and widely disseminated.

viii) The capture of knowledge about wetlands should provide a basis for ongoing wetland monitoring.

Ground truthing of satellite imagery, a cost-effective management tool

These and other issues will be taken into account in the comprehensive review of data and information needs of the Convention, proposed to be undertaken by the STRP as a priority task in its 2006-2008 programme (Draft Resolution 2). The task must especially include ways of dealing with emerging and often urgent knowledge needs. For example, we recognise that documentation and communication of quantitative information on the technical and economic basis for addressing the role of wetlands in natural disaster prevention, mitigation and adaptation is currently inadequate – and we recommend that the Contracting Parties instruct the Convention to address this as a priority.

Capacity building for improved knowledge capture

Capacity building activities for information management and reporting at any scale should focus on three levels of capacity development: individual, institutional and systemic.

It is also recommended that steps should be taken to ensure that the Global Environment Facility and the GEF Implementing Agencies take fully into account the coordination and information management required to support both implementation and reporting for the various MEAs, when they are financing and implementing programmes.

Institutional capacity building for development of observer networks

Packaging our knowledge

More can be done to package information on the importance of wetlands, and on sustainable policies and management approaches, in ways which are based on actual experience as well as theoretical principle.

There is a wealth of practical experience of lessons learned from example stories which could be better captured and promoted as the essential evidence-base for advocacy and support of the Convention's policy goals.

Parties, NGOs and others can all exchange more case study information of this kind, and in better ways, in the context of the Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) programme of the Convention.

Enabling action: the policy environment

A key part of international linkage is the ever more important area of cooperation between different Conventions and other global processes themselves. Progress has been made, but there are still further significant gains to be made by judicious joint working arrangements, harmonisation of various technical and information-management protocols, and other aspects of the so-called agenda on "synergy". Draft Resolutions 3 and 6 are important here. A key limitation on what the Convention can achieve is the degree of political weight which it carries.

The Ramsar agenda on Knowledge Capture and Use is still failing to penetrate many of the mainstream policy sectors and high levels of governance where some of the solutions lie.

We believe that the key to this is to further develop and demonstrate the power of the evidence base for the importance of wetlands to other public policy goals, including their importance to human well-being in a material sense, but also in myriad less tangible ways, including the value they have in their own right.

Wetland Policies and National Wetland Strategies need to be mainstreamed into all sectoral policies

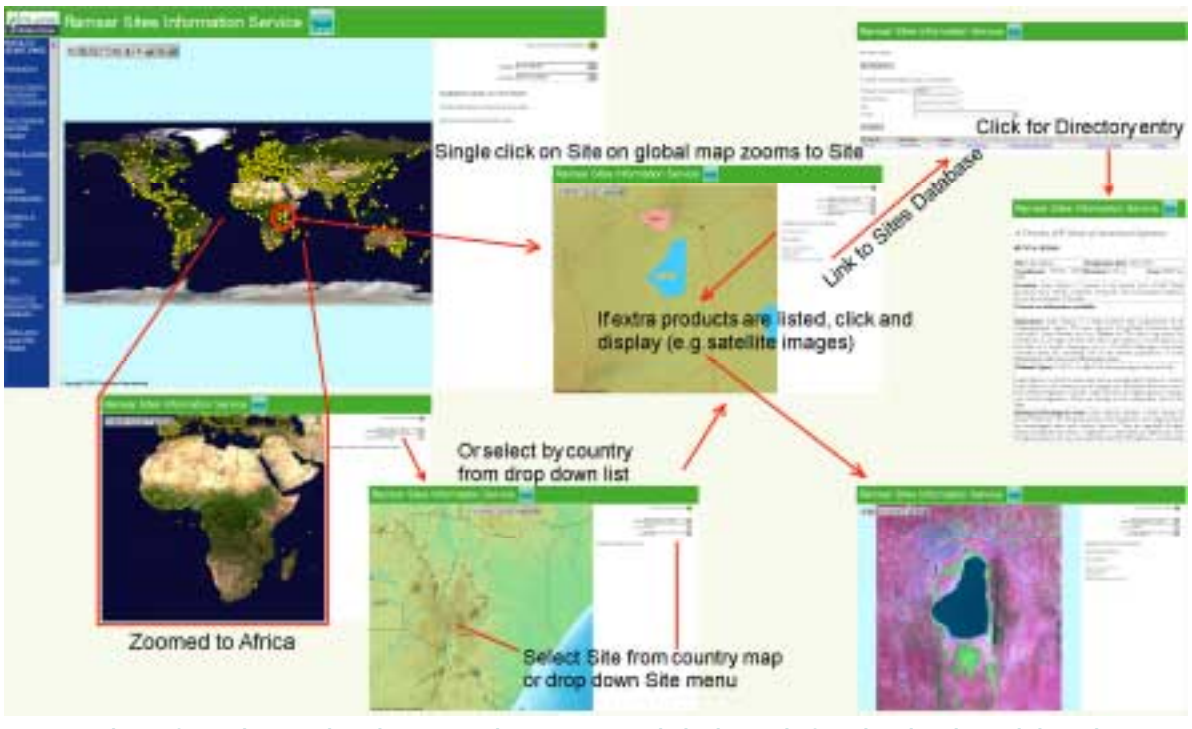
Case Study: Avian Influenza and knowledge needs

The threat of Avian Influenza and the need to track and quantify the pattern of migration of birds in order to advise governments on risk management, highlights the importance of the Convention in ensuring that there is sufficient investment in developing and maintaining the baseline information of wetlands and wetland-dependent species. The large-scale poultry industry is very much aware of the problem and is in need of high quality information for quantitative risk assessment. On the other hand, the potentially enormous impact on livelihoods of communities that are involved in (small scale) domestic bird keeping in Asia and Africa is far less understood and has so far not received a lot of attention. There is an urgent need to come to understand the magnitude of this problem.

In the absence of a sound information base and advice it is likely that inappropriate and counterproductive actions may be taken to control waterbirds and to modify wetlands. In turn this would cause suffering and loss to people who depend on wetlands and the services they provide.

We encourage Contracting Parties to agree and adopt appropriate strategies and actions at COP9 to tackle the Avian Influenza threat. We further urge Contracting Parties to strengthen their commitment to support the development, management and analysis of networks of expertise and databases such as the International Waterbird Census that provides information that is critical to the work of the Convention.

Long term, well focused data gathering for monitoring the hydrological regime of wetlands is essential for informing wise use management objectives



Ramsar Sites Information Service: the Convention's own Knowledgebase platform hosting the Web-based wetland inventory meta-database