

Ramsar
Handbooks
4th edition

Handbook 2

National Wetland Policies





About the Convention on Wetlands

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty whose mission is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”. As of October 2010, 160 nations have joined the Convention as Contracting Parties, and more than 1900 wetlands around the world, covering over 186 million hectares, have been designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

What are wetlands?

As defined by the Convention, wetlands include a wide variety of habitats such as marshes, peatlands, floodplains, rivers and lakes, and coastal areas such as saltmarshes, mangroves, and seagrass beds, but also coral reefs and other marine areas no deeper than six metres at low tide, as well as human-made wetlands such as waste-water treatment ponds and reservoirs.

About this series of handbooks

This series has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Convention following the 7th, 8th 9th, and 10th meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP7, COP8, COP9 and COP10) held, respectively, in San José, Costa Rica, in May 1999, Valencia, Spain, in November 2002, Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005, and Changwon, Republic of Korea, October-November 2008. The guidelines on various matters adopted by the Parties at those and earlier COPs have been prepared as a series of handbooks to assist those with an interest in, or directly involved with, implementation of the Convention at the international, regional, national, subnational or local levels. Each handbook brings together, subject by subject, the various relevant guidances adopted by Parties, supplemented by additional material from COP information papers, case studies and other relevant publications so as to illustrate key aspects of the guidelines. The handbooks are available in the three working languages of the Convention (English, French, and Spanish).

The table on the inside back cover lists the full scope of the subjects covered by this handbook series at present. Additional handbooks will be prepared to include any further guidance adopted by future meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The Ramsar Convention promotes an integrated package of actions to ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands. In recognition of these integrated approaches, the reader will find that within each handbook there are numerous cross-references to others in the series.

**Copyright © 2010, Ramsar
Convention Secretariat**

Citation: Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2010. *National Wetland Policies: Developing and implementing National Wetland Policies*. Ramsar handbooks for the wise use of wetlands, 4th edition, vol. 2. Ramsar Convention Secretariat, Gland, Switzerland.

Reproduction of material from this publication for educational and other non-commercial purposes is authorized without prior permission from the Ramsar Secretariat, providing full acknowledgement is given.

**Series Editor: Dave Pritchard
Series Supervisor: Nick Davidson
Design and layout: Dwight Peck**

Cover photo: Vadret da Roseg
Ramsar site, Switzerland (Andreas
Wipf, OFEFP Switzerland)

Ramsar handbooks for the wise use of wetlands
4th edition, 2010

Handbook 2

National Wetland Policies

Developing and
implementing
National Wetland
Policies



This 4th edition of the Ramsar Handbooks replaces the series published in 2007. It includes relevant guidance adopted by several meetings of the Conference of the Parties, in particular COP7 (1999), COP8 (2002), COP9 (2005), and COP10 (2008), as well as selected background documents presented at these COPs.

Acknowledgements

This text would not have been possible without the contributions of a large number of people from many parts of the world. In particular, the Ramsar Secretariat would like to acknowledge the work of the lead author and project coordinator, Clayton Rubec, and the main contributors, Nadra Nathai-Gyan, Paul Mafabi, Dave Pritchard and Bill Phillips. Additional contributions of information and text were provided by Maryse Mahy, Pauline Lynch-Stewart, Roberta Chew, Gilberto Cintron, Joseph Larson and Sundari Ramakrishna.

The final text has evolved through a series of drafts which have benefited from helpful comments from the Pan-African, Pan-American, Pan-Asian and Oceania regional meetings of the Contracting Parties to the Convention. In addition, useful suggestions which have improved the text were willingly supplied by Delmar Blasco, Michael Smart, Ken Cox and Lyle Glowka.

All Resolutions of the Ramsar COPs are available from the Convention's Web site at www.ramsar.org/resolutions. Background documents referred to in these handbooks are available at www.ramsar.org/cop7-docs, www.ramsar.org/cop8-docs, www.ramsar.org/cop9-docs, and www.ramsar.org/cop10-docs.



The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands aims to discourage policies, laws and attitudes that allow unsustainable/unwise practices like this one.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Getting the most out of this Handbook	5
Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies	7
I. Setting the scene for wetland policy	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Opportunities for wetland conservation	10
1.3 The Convention's historical context for wise use and wetland policy	14
1.4 Why are wetland policies needed?	17
1.5 What is a wetland policy?	18
1.6 Review of the status of wetland policies by Ramsar region	20
1.7 Relationship between policy and wise use	23
1.8 Level of approval/adoption of the National Wetland Policy	23
II. Developing a National Wetland Policy	24
2.1 Establishing a lead agency	24
2.2 Considerations for a National Wetland Committee	24
2.3 National issues statement and background paper	27
2.4 Defining wetlands at a national level	27
2.5 Defining stakeholders	28
2.6 Initiating national consultations	30
2.7 Implementing national and local wetland policy workshops	31
2.8 Creating a wetland policy writing team	31
2.9 Ensuring political support for the next steps	33
2.10 Time scales	33
2.11 Completing consultations and preparing additional drafts of the policy	33
2.12 Developing a Cabinet Memorandum	34
2.13 Government endorsement and approval, announcement	34
III. Organizing the policy document	35
3.1 Sections of the policy text	35
3.2 Goals and principles	35
3.3 Objectives for a National Wetland Policy	36
3.4 Policy implementation strategies	36
3.5 Examples of national strategies	41
IV. Implementing the policy	41
4.1 Defining who is responsible for implementation	41
4.2 Developing implementation guidelines	41
4.3 Defining what resources are needed	43
4.4 Legislative requirements	45
4.5 Interministerial harmonization	48
4.6 Coordination needs	49
4.7 Developing an implementation plan	49
4.8 Training	50
4.9 Sharing experience between nations	50
4.10 Establishing a national monitoring programme	53
4.11 Bibliography	53
V. References	53

Appendices

Appendix 1: Priorities for establishment of wetland policies	55
Appendix 2: Recommendation 6.9 Framework for National Wetland Policy development and implementation	57
Appendix 3: Summary of National Wetland Policies and Action Plans/Strategies by Ramsar Contracting Party or region	58

Relevant Resolution

Resolution VII.6: <i>Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies</i>	59
---	----

Getting the most out of this Handbook

The Handbooks in general

The purpose of the Ramsar Handbooks is to organize guidance material from relevant decisions adopted by the Contracting Parties over the years, according to subject themes. This helps practitioners to implement the internationally-agreed best practice in a way that is convenient to handle and more naturally matches their own everyday working environment.

The intended readership includes national and local staff of the government departments, ministries and agencies that act as Administrative Authorities for the Ramsar Convention in each country. Equally important users in many cases are managers of individual wetland areas, as some aspects of the guidance relate specifically to site management.

The Ramsar guidance has been adopted by member governments as a whole, and increasingly it addresses itself to the crucial roles of other sectors beyond the “environment” or “water” sectors. It is thus very important that these Handbooks should be used by **all** whose actions may benefit from or impact upon the wise use of wetlands.

A vital first step in each country therefore is to ensure adequate **dissemination** of these Handbooks to all who need or can benefit from them. Copies are freely available in PDF format from the Ramsar Secretariat in three languages on CD-ROM or by download from the Convention website (www.ramsar.org).

Other early steps would be, in each particular context, to **clarify** lines of responsibility and **actively check** how to align the terms used and approaches described with the reader’s own jurisdiction, operating circumstances, and organizational structures.

Much of the text can be used in a **proactive sense**, as a basis for framing policies, plans and activities, sometimes by simply importing relevant sections into national and local materials. It can also be used in a **reactive sense** as a source of help and ideas for responding to problems and opportunities, navigating subjects by the need of the user.

Cross-references, original sources, and further reading are liberally cited: the Handbooks will often not be the “last word”, but they provide a helpful “route-map” to further sources of information and support.

Strategic direction in the Ramsar Convention is provided by the Strategic Plan, the latest version of which was adopted by COP10 in 2008 for the period 2009-2015. All thematic implementation frameworks, including the Handbooks, sit within the context of the goals and strategies of this Plan and the priorities it highlights for the period covered.

In this fourth edition of the Handbooks, additions to and omissions from the text of the original guidelines, required by the results of COP8, COP9 and COP10, are shown in square brackets [...]. The Handbook series is updated after each meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and feedback on user experience is always appreciated in helping to refine each new edition.

This Handbook (National Wetland Policies)

In relation to national wetland policies, Strategy 1.3 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan (“Policy, legislation and institutions”) is to “Develop and implement policies, legislation, and practices, including growth and development of appropriate institutions, in all Contracting Parties to ensure that the wise use provisions of the Convention are being effectively applied”.

Among the Key Result Areas to be achieved for this Strategy by the year 2015 is KRA 1.3.i: “National Wetland Policy or equivalent instruments fully in place alongside and integrated with other strategic and planning processes by all Parties, including poverty eradication strategies, water resources management and water efficiency plans, coastal and marine resource management plans, national forest programmes, national strategies for sustainable development, and national policies or measures on agriculture”.

The present Handbook therefore provides assistance with a central area of implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

The text in this Handbook is drawn mainly from Resolution VII.6 and its Annex, and the substance of it thus reflects formal decisions adopted by the Conference of Contracting Parties. The Handbook also brings together additional information relevant to this issue. The views expressed in this additional information do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat or the Contracting Parties, and such additional materials have not been endorsed by the Conference of the Parties.

Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies

(adopted as the Annex to Resolution VII.6 by the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties, San José, Costa Rica, 1999)

Relevant implementation commitments made by Contracting Parties in COP Resolutions and Recommendations

Recommendation 4.10, Annex: Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept

(un-numbered): It is desirable in the long term that all Contracting Parties should have comprehensive national wetland policies, [which] should as far as possible address all problems and activities related to wetlands within a national context.

Resolution VII.6: Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

9. ADOPTS as guidance for the Contracting Parties the annex to this Resolution entitled Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies and URGES those Parties that have yet to develop such Policies to give this activity their highest attention;
12. ALSO ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to integrate into their National Wetland Policies, wherever possible, the elements of the other guidance adopted under the Convention [...].

Preface

1. National Wetland Policy is a key feature envisaged in the implementation of the wise use concept of the Ramsar Convention. However, defining, developing and implementing national policies that promote wetland conservation and management remains an elusive goal for many Contracting Parties of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). To assist these interests, the authors have responded to Recommendation 6.9 adopted by the 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties in March 1996, in Brisbane, Australia. This Recommendation called for cooperation by Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Bureau and other contributors to prepare a “framework report” on national wetland policies.
2. *Development and implementation of National Wetland Policies* has been prepared by a team of contributors with governmental or non-governmental work experience and expertise in wetland policy development. The team includes writers from Ramsar administrative authorities in Australia, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, and the United States of America. Several non-government agency contributors also were involved: BirdLife International, the University of Massachusetts, and Wetlands International.
3. The main contributors include Clayton Rubec (acting as the project coordinator and lead author), Nadra Nathai-Gyan, Paul Mafabi, Dave Pritchard and Bill Phillips. Roberta Chew, Gilberto Cintron and Joseph Larson contributed case studies based on experience in the United States as did Sundari Ramakrishna based on the National Wetland Policy initiative of Malaysia. Maryse Mahy of the Ramsar Bureau provided information on many of the national policy documents, particularly in Europe. Pauline Lynch-Stewart of Canada provided helpful suggestions and initial text in

several sections. Delmar Blasco, the Secretary General of the Convention, Michael Smart, Ken Cox of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada), and Lyle Glowka of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) Environmental Law Centre and others have also provided helpful suggestions to improve the text.

4. The authors recognize that some of the language and terms used in this document draws mainly on the governmental system of the British Commonwealth, the national experience of several of the authors. It is hoped readers experienced with other systems of government can “read between the lines” and substitute the needed terms and words as appropriate.
5. It must be stressed that this document is not a model for writing a National Wetland Policy. Rather, it is a collection of the authors’ observations based on first hand experience. The authors first established an outline for the document based upon experience they felt could be most useful. Several drafts were then prepared during 1998 that were provided for review by the participants to the Pan-American, Pan-African, Oceania, and Pan-Asian regional meetings of the Contracting Parties to the Convention. These meetings acted as preparatory sessions for the 7th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention in San José, Costa Rica in May 1999, where these guidelines were adopted after discussion and amendment during Technical Session II of the Conference.
6. These guidelines may prove most useful to countries making or considering a commitment to new formulations of national policy or strategies on wetlands. Sections treat in sequence the suggested steps and issues which may arise. This includes defining the purpose of such an initiative, organizing a suitable process, deciding how to present the content of the policy document, and developing strategies for implementation and monitoring. Any of these topics however may also be of interest in countries with well established approaches to these matters. Some of the topics examined here may not yet be part of such approaches or, through this synthesis of international experience, may shed extra light on how these particular efforts look in the wider context.
7. As indicated in paragraph 3, the text is complemented by seven case studies including: *The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in a National Wetland Conservation Strategy* by Joseph Larson of the University of Massachusetts in the United States of America; *Defining Stakeholders in a National Wetland Policy* by Nadra Nathai-Gyan of Trinidad and Tobago; *Consultations for Wetland Policy Development* by Clayton Rubec of Canada; *Wetland Policies Within a Federal State* by Bill Phillips of Australia; *Review of Sectoral Policies and Legislation Related to Wetlands* by Paul Mafabi of Uganda; *Compliance Strategies* by Roberta Chew and Gilberto Cintron of the United States of America; and *Malaysia Wetland Policy: the Development and Coordination Process* by Sundari Ramakrishna of Wetlands International Asia-Pacific in Malaysia.
8. It is hoped that these guidelines will provide a reference against which all Ramsar Contracting Parties will feel encouraged to review their nation’s policies and strategies at the national level, so that the benefits and experience sharing inherent to the Ramsar Convention can be maximized.

I. Setting the scene for wetland policy

1.1 Introduction

9. Wetlands have been identified as one of the key life support systems on this planet in concert with agricultural lands and forests. This has been a key theme in the evolving global support and political commitment for sustainable development and environmental conservation as articulated in the Ramsar Convention's *Strategic Plan 1997-2002*, the *World Conservation Strategy, Caring for the Earth*, the report of the *Brundtland Commission*, and *Agenda 21*. The role of wetlands has emerged as a key element in the delivery of inland freshwater and coastal ecosystem conservation through the Convention on Biological Diversity. The importance of our wetlands goes beyond their status as the habitat of many endangered plant and animal species. They are a vital element of national and global ecosystems and economies.
10. The seriousness of the continuing loss of wetlands demands a new approach to wetland management. A major portion of the wetland area in settled areas has been converted from its natural state to support alternative land uses including agriculture, urbanisation, industry, and recreational pursuits. Wetlands have also been degraded by land use practices that have resulted in vegetation destruction, nutrient and toxin loading, sedimentation, turbidity, and altered flow regimes. Dredging, intensive aquaculture, logging and acid rain have also affected the natural balance of wetlands.
11. The disruption of wetland functions has a high cost — economically, socially and ecologically. The disturbance of their natural balance can destroy critical gene pools required for medical and agricultural purposes, it can affect their ability to naturally improve water quality and it can ruin their use for educational and recreational purposes. The disruption of valuable wetlands must cease, the diversity of remaining wetlands must be retained, and where possible rehabilitation, restoration and re-creation of wetlands must be attempted. The obstacles and possible solutions to this issue of quantitative and qualitative loss of wetlands are outlined below.
12. It is thus critical that the importance of wetlands and their conservation be demonstrated to be essential to the well being of the citizens of a nation. Wetland conservation is vital to achieving the objectives of biodiversity conservation described in international treaties and their related international obligations. Wetlands play a significant role in delivery of these objectives as can be exemplified in the case of the elements of the *World Conservation Strategy*:
 - **Maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems:** Wetlands perform these functions in various ways; some maintain and improve water quality, some regulate flows to reduce flooding and may augment late summer stream flows, and some recharge groundwater supply. Wetlands are important as reproduction and staging areas for migratory birds, as spawning and nursery grounds for fish, and as habitat for a great many invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and plants.

- **Preservation of genetic diversity:** Wetlands play an essential role in maintaining wildlife populations, providing key habitat for a diverse fauna and flora. Wetlands are home to about one third of the wildlife species that have been identified as endangered, threatened or rare.
 - **Sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems:** Many local and provincial (state)/territorial economies rely directly on wetland resources such as fish and wildlife, plant products and wood. Renewable resources associated with wetlands are central to the traditional subsistence lifestyle of a nation's aboriginal and indigenous peoples. Wetlands also support substantial tourism and recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, bird watching and nature photography.
13. Meeting the challenge of conserving wetlands of international and national significance requires comprehensive national policies so as to provide a basis for domestic action and a framework for international and national cooperation. Such policy for wetlands can be valuable as countries seek to address the management and habitat requirements for wildlife and other biological resources as well as for human needs for the current and future generations.
 14. Within the text of the Ramsar Convention adopted in 1971, Article 3.1 establishes that "the Contracting Parties shall 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."
 15. One of the recommended actions that Contracting Parties consider in acceding to the Convention on Wetlands is the formulation of national policies that promote wetland conservation. In a number of national examples completed to date, this has been observed to sometimes involve a lengthy and complex process. Political, interjurisdictional, institutional, legal and financial constraints affect the formulation of such policies, in addition to social and economic factors that continue to contribute to wetland loss while the policy process is underway.
 16. It is important to recognize that the process of establishing and implementing wetland policy at a national level may take time and needs adequate consultation to overcome barriers such as scarce financial resources or institutional reluctance to change ways of doing business in government agencies and elsewhere. To be broadly effective, a National Wetland Policy must be wide in scope and not just be, or be perceived to be, only a wildlife protection policy. A strict focus on wildlife aspects for a National Wetland Policy may only marginalize its value to society and the nation. Development of such a Policy is in fact a "golden opportunity" to promote cooperation and action at many levels. The Policy can be developed in the face of uncertainty; comprehensive inventory and scientific information are not required before action can occur.

1.2 Opportunities for wetland conservation

17. A number of opportunities for resolving issues and achieving wetland conservation are identified below.

Establishing Wetland Conservation Objectives in Government Policies

18. Federal, provincial, state, territorial and municipal governments have rarely recognized the values of wetland conservation in their policies and programmes. The lack of government direction results in:
- a continuing and cumulative wetland loss because decisions to convert individual wetlands to other land uses are neither subject to, nor related to, overall conservation policies;
 - a lack of full accountability by those national and sub-national agencies charged with the stewardship of natural resources such as wetlands;
 - a lack of profile for wetland issues, which results in inadequate attention being paid to wetland values when land use decisions are made or are subject to review;
 - a lack of guidance to decision-makers (federal, provincial, state, territorial and municipal agencies, landowners) who must balance the advantages and disadvantages of land use decisions; and
 - the failure to enforce existing legislation and policies where they are in place.
19. A National Wetland Policy can assist these government agencies in establishing accountability for their actions and modifying their sectoral policies to the benefit of wetland ecosystems.

Enhancing Coordination and Communication Among Government Agencies

20. Jurisdiction over wetlands in most nations is spread among federal, provincial (state), territorial and municipal governments, and among different government departments and agencies. None of this myriad of departments and agencies at any level is likely to be responsible for all aspects of wetland management, conservation and sustainable use. Although limited efforts have been made, coordination and communication within and among governments remains inadequate. The need is not for one agency to look after wetlands, the need is to stress better communications and consistent, enforced policy that is followed by all government agencies. A National Wetland Policy can be the mechanism to enhance and promote effective coordination and communication among such agencies.
21. In many nations, government agencies with the opportunity to provide leadership to wetland conservation programmes are often poorly supported with few resources in terms of staffing and funding. Their political position in the government hierarchy may also be of a lower rank with less influence, reporting through one or more senior ministries. The linkages needed to be effective, such as coordinating programme opportunities that are good for wetlands to national water, agricultural and development priorities, are often difficult for the government to consider.

Creating More Incentives to Conserve Wetlands

22. Incentives programmes (government and others) often conflict with wetland conservation efforts. In some nations, income and property tax incentives, drainage and diking subsidies, and agricultural production quotas are

often strong financial inducements to a farmer to convert wetlands to cultivated land. Without the inducement, economic factors would usually discourage conversion. Conversely, there are few incentives for landowners to maintain wetlands in a natural state. Since the public generally benefits from wetlands, conservation efforts can be justifiably supported by government-funded or sponsored incentives. The National Wetland Policy can be a tool to foster implementation of new and better economic and sectoral incentives and to retire factors and disincentives that lead to wetland decline.

Fostering Better Wetland Management after Acquisition or Retention

23. Non-governmental organizations, local communities, private landowners, and government agencies often have difficulty managing wetlands they have acquired or retained for conservation purposes. Property taxes and personnel costs are often high, and managers are not familiar with methods to raise revenue from the use of wetlands in an ecologically sensitive manner. Long-term management, which can be aided by revenue generation, is a growing concern of all wetland conservation agencies. The National Wetland Policy is an opportunity to address these factors and find solutions.

Better Knowledge and Its Application

24. There is limited information about the status, ecological functioning, and values (such as hydrologic or economic value) of wetlands. Progress has been made in many nations in classifying and developing inventories of wetlands but, globally, the task is far from complete. Greater effort has to be made to set goals for numbers and kinds of wetlands needed. The National Wetland Policy can assist in setting information priorities and a strategy to acquire and utilize better information needed for wetland management.
25. Wetlands conversion rates and the economic value of wetlands have not been adequately quantified. The economic, social and ecological costs and benefits of wetland conversion are as yet poorly understood, but the evidence is mounting that wetlands are economically, as well as ecologically and socially, important. Existing knowledge about wetlands is not well distributed and is not effectively used in influencing land use decisions. While gaps in knowledge about wetlands remain an important obstacle, conservation actions must proceed without waiting for ongoing results from research activities.
26. In many nations where economic development remains difficult, or in nations where economies are now in transition, existing social and political obstacles to environmental programmes are substantial. Wetland conservation will continue to be a low priority as the links to economic well-being and sustainable water and natural resource uses remain unclear. In countries torn by natural disasters and civil or international border conflicts, the environmental needs of these nations have understandably remained of low priority for government action.

See also Ramsar
Technical Report 3,
Valuing Wetlands

Education Directed to the General Public, Decision Makers, Landowners and the Private Sector



The development of wetland policies should involve consultation with stakeholders from national down to the local level, as here in Niger. Photo: Denis Landenbergue (WWF), Anada Tiéga (Ramsar).

27. Education programmes about wetlands are not strongly supported, inconsistent and have not stressed the importance of stewardship and wise use of natural resources. In many examples at a national or sub-national level, it has been demonstrated that the public is more supportive of conservation programmes if they are better informed about wetlands. This evolves through public awareness initiatives that develop a better understanding of the values, functions and benefits of wetlands and the consequences of continuing wetland loss.
28. Landowners need to know how to improve management of their renewable natural resources to produce sustainable economic benefits. Decision makers need to learn the importance of wetland issues, the close relationship between conservation and sustainable economic development, and how to apply ecological understanding to resource planning and management. Education is an interactive process: political leaders, government officials, scientists, landowners, and wetland users can all learn much from each other about wetlands and their conservation. Equally, construction and tourism development activities, for example, while potentially adding to the pressures facing wetlands, may also offer opportunities to engage important stakeholders in approaches which promote sustainable management.

29. A National Wetland Policy is a significant opportunity to jointly establish the priorities and mechanisms to enhance awareness of wetland resources in a nation.

Promoting Involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations and Local Communities

30. Governments have not fully recognized the fund raising and conservation skills and efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities, nor the potential of these groups to assist in wetland conservation and policy development. These organizations and local communities are often well placed to raise funds from interested members of the public and provide in-kind contributions to defray costs associated with wetland conservation. They can become effective partners with government in delivering wetland conservation projects, particularly for monitoring and wardening, both locally and nationally. The administrative overheads inherent in these organizations and local communities tend to be lower than those of governments. Credible NGOs and community-based groups are frequently able to galvanize the public support needed to overcome political and bureaucratic “roadblocks”. (See Case Study 1.)

1.3 The Convention’s historical context for wise use and wetland policy

31. The Wise Use concept has become a hallmark of the Convention on Wetlands. Wise use was envisaged in Article 3.1 of the Convention by which Contracting Parties are expected to “formulate and implement their planning so as to promote . . . as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory”. Wise use is one of the most challenging components of the Convention’s concepts to implement. As a result, the Convention has formulated Guidelines and additional guidance to assist the Contracting Parties in the implementation of the concept.
32. “Wise use” applies not only to Ramsar listed sites, but to all wetlands in the territory of the Contracting Party. The *Guidelines on the Wise Use of Wetlands* were adopted at the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP3) in Canada in 1987. Recommendation 3.3 calls on the Contracting Parties to use the included definition of wise use¹ and the Guidelines included in the Annex to that recommendation.
33. The Guidelines produced by the Convention have assisted several Contracting Parties in developing national wetland policies. These Guidelines outline the need to improve institutional and organizational arrangements, address legislative and policy needs, increase knowledge and awareness of wetland values, inventory and monitor the status of wetlands, identify programme priorities and develop action plans for specific sites as components of a National Wetland Policy.

¹ Recommendation 3.3 defines the wise use of wetlands as “their sustainable utilization for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem”. [That was amended in 2005 to “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development” (Resolution IX.1, Annex A).]

Case Study 1

The role of non-governmental organizations in a National Wetland Conservation Strategy

Joseph Larson, University of Massachusetts, United States of America

Wetland conservation in the United States of America is achieved through a combination of public and private strategies: government regulation, purchase by government and private non-governmental organizations (NGOs), voluntary gifts of wetlands by private owners to NGOs, gifts or sale of development rights by private owners, and modification of government subsidies. Land use is regarded as the responsibility of state and local governments. National and state constitutions prevent governments from imposing restrictions, without financial payments, on use of land in private ownership. While the federal and some state governments have adopted “no net loss” goals for wetlands, the constitutional restrictions on the ability of government to prescribe particular land uses has been a disincentive to adopt a National Wetland Policy such as developed by other nations.

The wetland protection strategy of longest standing in the United States has been purchase of the land title. Landowners have been encouraged to deed the development rights of wetlands to government agencies or private land conservation trusts. In this approach, the wetland remains in private ownership and generating property taxes to local governments. But the landowner, by sale or gift, transfers forever all rights to develop the wetland to the public or NGO. In many cases, the deed of transfer carries permanent legal obligations to protect against future changes in agency policy. Purchases and gifts of wetlands have been highly significant strategies for wetland protection in the United States since the 1930s but this alone will be insufficient to preserve the values of our wetlands. Ownership of wetlands by NGOs is one of the most important strategies for ensuring protection for wetlands in the United States. Where Government is unable to act quickly enough to respond to opportunities to purchase wetlands from private owners, NGOs often can act more quickly and acquire these sites. The NGO may place in the land deed permanent conservation conditions on a subsequent purchaser or the NGO may reserve rights of perpetual oversight. Sale or gifts of development rights has taken hold in many areas and could have a major role in wetland conservation.

Wetland regulation has developed as a major tool to meet national wetland conservation objectives. In addition to the regulatory programme, all coastal states have adopted state tidal wetland regulation. About 14 states have freshwater wetland regulations. At the local level, wetland regulation is highly variable in application and effectiveness. States in the same region often have different regulatory programmes, making it difficult to establish consistent programmes involving interstate watersheds. The national wetland regulatory programme has a history of inconsistent application between different regions. However, because of the restrictions on the ability of government to apply land use controls, regulatory programmes will remain an important tool in the United States, but this may have little application in other nations.

Wetland regulation requires any private individual, firm or public agency to obtain permission from a government agency before altering a wetland, usually by drainage or filling. The first wetland restriction programme in the United States started at the local level in the state of Massachusetts when, at the request of local coastal communities, the state enacted regulations that have stopped destruction of tidal salt marshes in that state. Citizens in the communities recognized that the marshes were key nurseries and food sources for locally harvested shellfish and commercial marine food fish that are important to the local economy. The courts upheld this regulation, without compensation to the marsh owners, on the grounds of protecting public welfare.

Over time, protection of important fish and wildlife habitats has begun to receive more legal acceptance as a public objective of wetland regulation in the United States. Modifications of flood control, flood insurance and disaster relief policies are also beginning to gain acceptance. These hold promise for floodplain wetlands in large river systems and embody principles that have wide application wherever human uses of floodplains are at odds with regular major flood events. Because agriculture has been a major historical cause of wetland loss in the United States, government subsidies to farmers to support cultivation of certain crops and to adopt land treatment practices have been critical issues in United States wetland protection efforts. More attention is being given to modification of crop subsidy policies, and promotion of revised land use practices in order to reduce the adverse impacts of agriculture on wetland conservation.

[Editor’s note: This case study has not been updated since the first edition of the Handbooks.]

34. At the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP4) held in Switzerland in 1990, the Parties adopted the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* as Recommendation 4.10 (which superseded Recommendation 3.3), reconfirming that the Wise Use Concept extends to all aspects of wetland conservation. The Recommendation indicated that national wetland policies should, as far as possible, address a wide range of problems and activities related to wetlands within a national context. Five categories for national-level action (listed in detail in Appendix 1) were proposed:
- a) improvement of institutional and government organizational arrangements;
 - b) review of existing and future legislation and other national policies affecting wetlands;
 - c) development of awareness and knowledge of wetland functions and values;
 - d) inventory and economic valuation of wetlands for setting site management priorities; and
 - e) establishment of actions on a site-specific basis such as legal protection mechanisms and habitat restoration.
35. Whether or not National Wetland Policies were being prepared, the Guidelines called for several actions that should receive immediate attention at the national level. These would facilitate the preparation of national wetland policies, and avoid delay in practical implementation of wetland conservation and wise use. As expected, Contracting Parties are selecting actions according to their own national priorities. Some are implementing institutional, legislative or educational measures and at the same time initiating inventories or scientific work. Equally, Contracting Parties wishing to promote wise use of wetlands without waiting until national wetland policies have been developed have been urged to:
- i) identify the issues which require the most urgent attention;
 - ii) take action on one or more of these issues;
 - iii) identify the wetland sites which require the most urgent action; and
 - iv) take action at one or more of these wetlands, along the lines set out under “priority actions at particular wetland sites”.
36. Thus the Convention has promoted the wise use of wetland resources since its inception in 1971 and especially over the last 12 years, contributing to each nation’s sustainable development objectives. The concept of wise use seeks both the formulation and implementation of general wetland policies, and wise use of specific wetlands. These activities are integral parts of sustainable development.
37. However, as recognized by the *Report of the workshop on wise use* presented at COP3, elaboration of national wetland policies can be a long-term process. Noting that political and national constraints are important factors that hinder the formulation of such policies, COP4 recommended that all Contracting Parties work towards formulation of comprehensive National

Wetland Policies in the long term, and that such policies be formulated in whatever manner is appropriate to their national institutions and situations.

38. In 1993, the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP5) in Kushiro, Japan, asked why member states [i.e. Contracting Parties] had not adopted national wetland policies, and how wetland policies could be integrated with National Environment Policies or National Conservation Strategies. Furthermore, COP5 noted that social and economic factors were the main reasons for wetland loss, and required consideration during the process of preparing National Wetland Policies.
39. At the Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP6) in Brisbane, Australia, in 1996, the Convention adopted the *Strategic Plan 1997-2002*. In line with other past decisions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Operational Objective 2.1 of the Strategic Plan urges member states to carry out a review, and amend national or supra-national legislation, institutions and practices, to ensure that the Wise Use Guidelines are applied. It urges that each Contracting Party implement this objective by reviewing legislation and practices in their territory and by indicating in the National Reports to the next Conference of the Contracting Parties how the Guidelines are being applied.
40. Furthermore, each Contracting Party in 1996 was asked to promote much greater efforts to develop national wetland policies, either separately or as a clearly identifiable component of other national conservation planning initiatives such as National Environmental Action Plans, National Biodiversity Strategies, or National Conservation Strategies. Recommendation 6.9 of COP6 (see Appendix 2) spells out the need for a framework for the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies for use by these Contracting Parties which as yet have no policy of this kind. It also calls for examples and illustrations drawing upon such policies. The same recommendation directs the Ramsar Bureau to coordinate specific tasks in the production of guidelines for the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies.

1.4 Why are wetland policies needed?

41. Wetlands are seldom explicitly covered at a national level in other existing natural resource management policies such as for water, forest, land, agriculture or other sectors. Development of a unique or “stand alone” wetland policy statement and/or strategy can be an important step in recognition of wetland problems and targeted action to deal with them. A unique wetland policy provides a clear opportunity to recognize wetlands as ecosystems requiring different approaches to their management and conservation, and not being masked under other sectoral management objectives.
42. In many cases, wetland policies or strategies are components of national sustainable development, water or other sectoral environmental policies. The wetland messages can thus become diffused and overpowered by these broader objectives of the Government. In many countries, where staff in management agencies are few and face many demands and new challenges and expectations daily, dedicated staff time for implementation of wetland commitments or objectives may be overridden by the pressure to deal

with the broader issues. This works to the disadvantage of any wetland conservation objective.

43. A stand-alone, unique wetland policy draws considerable attention to wetland issues particularly by legislators and the public. Articulation of clear goals and objectives for these ecosystems identifies clear responsibilities of the Government and an expectation that the Government will actually deliver on these commitments.

1.5 What is a wetland policy?

44. It is important to be clear on what “policy” is, and perhaps more importantly, what it is not. Policy has been defined as “a collection of principles which indicate intended and acceptable activity or direction for an organization or government.” It has also been noted that policy “is like an elephant, you recognize it when you see it, but cannot easily define it”. Certainly, any policy must be viewed as a statement of the considerations which will guide both rational decisions and actions. It is within this definition of policy that the following guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies under the Convention on Wetlands are proposed.
45. The term “National Wetland Policy” has been used elsewhere in the same sense as “National Wetland Plan” or “National Wetland Strategy”. It is



Educating young people about wetland values contributes to the future success of wetland policies: education centre at the Réserve Naturelle du Lac de Réghaïa Ramsar site, Algeria. *Photo: Nassima Aghanim.*

impossible to clearly separate all such terms and to ensure standard English, French, Spanish or other language uses of these terms. However, the authors of this document hope to convey a common concept regarding the idea of “policy”. In this document “policy” generally refers to a clearly published statement by a national or sub-national government, often with measurable goals, timelines and commitments plus budgets for action. In some cases, a “plan” or “strategy” falls short of this benchmark, articulating a vision of where the government wishes to go with a listing of potential activities and partnerships that may require further definition of the specific timelines, budgets and measurable commitments. All National Wetland Policies, Plans and Strategies are recognized as vitally important; there is no attempt here to diminish the effort to achieve them in practice and no attempt is made to signify which terms or particular definitions are the most appropriate.

46. The authors recognize that there remains a lack of precise use and standard definition of the terms wetland “policy”, “plan” and “strategy”. In attempting to survey the global picture regarding National Wetland Policies, the authors indeed have noted that many agencies and governments have used these words interchangeably.
47. A policy is perhaps most commonly thought of as a document, and it is certainly convenient to package it in a usable form like this. It may also be helpful to think of policy making as a process, involving consensus-building, encapsulation of ideas and commitments, implementation, accountability and review. Policy might be seen as the highest level in a hierarchy. It is a mechanism for an administration to capture the public will or mandate on an issue, and refine it with its own vision. How a national legislature or government then deals with this may go beyond policy by means of legislation. An implementing agency may also deal with a Policy by means of strategies and programmes of action.
48. Policies derive their effectiveness and legitimacy from many sources. Some policies are approved by either a Government as a whole or by an individual Minister. One must bear in mind that political approval of a policy does not guarantee its “on the ground” success. In many cases, the process used to develop the Policy is its greatest source of strength, particularly when dealing with broad issues and multiple stakeholder interests.
49. The Policy will reflect attitudes, express desired principles, state intentions (e.g. often phrased in the form of goals/objectives/aims), show what choices have been made about strategic directions, make commitments, provide a focus for consensus, express concerns and provide advice, and make roles and responsibilities clear.
50. A National Wetland Policy is understood to be nationwide in scope but it may be developed simultaneously or in sequence at several levels of government. In Australia and Canada, for example, both the federal government and component state (or provincial) governments have developed wetland conservation policies. This reflects the federal nature of these two nations, wherein constitutional authority for natural resources management (including wetland management) is divided between the levels of government.

51. In some nations, policy can be formally adopted by an appropriate process by the national government at a level (e.g. Cabinet) which can commit all relevant arms of government to its implementation. In federal states with shared constitutional jurisdictions, this may not be the case. A federal government may express its commitments to wetland conservation through a federal policy. Such a policy would, however, only apply to federal authorities and areas of federal control. The extent to which it was applied, as opposed to setting a good example or non-binding guidance for sub-national jurisdictions (e.g. provincial, state, township governments), would depend on the circumstances of each nation.
52. A National Wetland Policy will function as a framework that enables clear conclusions to be drawn about what actions are required (but does not in itself set out detailed prescriptions for actions) and what end result is expected. It must be clear how things would be different if the policy did not exist – and thus demonstrate its own net added value. If purporting to be the definitive expression of national policy about wetlands, then it can be short and just a “framework” in nature. Depth is not critical but it must be complete in its coverage of key policy issues which affect wetlands (so breadth is critical), even if the jurisdiction for some of these lies outside the originating agency. These include jurisdictional authority for natural resources management such as water resources, development planning, pollution control, education and foreign relations.

1.6 Review of the status of wetland policies by Ramsar region

53. A paper on the status of wetland policies in Ramsar Contracting Parties was presented at COP6 (Rubec 1996). The paper was organized by the seven Ramsar Regions that existed at that time, incorporating 92 nations. The Convention now (April 1999) has 114 Contracting Parties.
54. Rubec’s paper separated reporting on development of stand alone “wetland policies” from “wetland strategies and plans” based on the terminology used in national reports by the Contracting Parties. Rubec (1996) felt this was an important distinction based on his national experience that a separate “policy” is more often an expression of government commitment with clearly defined goals, time table, budgets and structure to proceed with implementation. On the other hand, the author felt that “plans and strategies” refers more frequently to a longer term process without immediate commitment to proceed and a less defined set of goals.
55. It is recognized that in many cases there can be considerable overlap in how these terms are used by different organizations and national governments. Hence, the analysis presented here (see Table 1) must be tempered with the knowledge that the decision as to what national wetland initiatives are listed as “policy” versus “strategy/plan” is as imprecise as the sources of information used to gather the numbers. The authors wish in no way to suggest that any such national initiative is better or less developed or appropriate than other examples.
56. Rubec’s paper was based upon the information derived from Regional Reports prepared for the 1995 Meeting of the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee and the National Reports prepared for COP6 in Australia in March 1996. It has been updated with information in the National Reports

- submitted for COP7 of the Convention in Costa Rica in May 1999 and posted on the Ramsar Bureau Web Site (Ramsar Bureau 1998c).
57. As of April 1999, a total of 44 of the 114 Ramsar Contracting Parties indicated they were engaged in development or implementation of a National Wetland Policy. The majority (39) of these nations also reported they were developing a parallel National Wetland Action Plan or Strategy through other mechanisms or as a stand alone document in addition to the National Wetland Policy. These initiatives were distributed across the seven Ramsar Regions. Only 12 Ramsar Contracting Parties reported that such a Policy had been adopted by the Government. An additional six Contracting Parties indicated that a National Wetland Policy was in draft form, and 26 reported that development of such a Policy was under consideration or proposed. Several nations, such as Cambodia, that were not yet Ramsar Contracting Parties, were also developing National Wetland Programmes. Some 70 Ramsar Contracting Parties had not yet indicated that a National Wetland Policy was being planned in any fashion.
 58. A number of nations, particularly those with a commonwealth or federal structure such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Pakistan and the United States of America, reported wetland policy and strategies development, or consideration, at the sub-national level also. This reflects shared constitutional authority for wetland conservation at both the national and sub-national (e.g. state or provincial) levels in these nations. In some cases, no national wetland initiative would be expected as wetlands are under the authority of sub-national jurisdictions. Some of these sub-national policies or strategies are listed in Appendix 3.
 59. In the COP7 review, National Wetland Strategies and Action Plans were considered separately from National Wetland Policies. As of May 1999, some 50 Contracting Parties reported they had National Wetland Strategies or Action Plans adopted, 12 were in draft form, and 39 Contracting Parties had such an initiative under consideration or proposed. These were distributed among all seven Ramsar Regions. Only 13 Contracting Parties have not reported any steps towards developing such a national strategy or action plan. Thus, the majority of Ramsar Contracting Parties were now putting into effect National Wetland Conservation Programmes separately from, or in addition to, National Wetland Policies.
 60. The COP6 analysis (Rubec 1996) was the first attempt to compile wetland policy information under the Convention. A review of the Proceedings of COP3 through to COP6 and the National Reports for COP7 indicates that, by 1999, significant progress is now evident on a global scale since the Ramsar Convention was initiated in 1971. This trend is expected to continue beyond COP7.
 61. Table 1 summarizes the status of the development and adoption of National Wetland Policies, National Wetland Strategies and Action Plans from 1987 through [June 2008]. This table was developed by reviewing the conference papers [including National Reports] that summarized national wetland policies and strategies as reported by each country for all aspects of the implementation of the Convention. [. . .]

Table 1: Status of National Wetland Policies (NWP) and National Wetland Strategies (NWS) or Action Plans (NWAPs)

[Editor's note: the data in the original table have been updated with information from COPs 8, 9 and 10. In addition, to facilitate analysis, all figures have been recalculated as percentages. For COP9, although 110 reports were submitted in time for analysis, only 88 completed the full report which included the questions on the status of National Wetland Policies. For COP10 the equivalent figures were 143 and 139 respectively.]

	1987 Regina COP3	1990 Montreux COP4	1993 Kushiro COP5	1996 Brisbane COP6	1999 San José COP7	2002 Valencia COP8	2005 Kampala COP9	2008 Changwon COP10
Status of National Wetland Policies								
(a) Adopted	0%	0%	6%	7%	11%	32%	40%	44%
(b) In [preparation]	0%	2%	12%	9%	5%	6%	28%	22%
(c) Development Under Consideration or Proposed	n.d.	2%	12%	14%	23%	21%	9%	11%
(d) No Action Yet Reported	100%	96%	71%	71%	61%	41%	23%	23%
Status of National Wetland Strategies/ National Wetland Action Plans								
(a) Adopted	24%	20%	18%	35 38%	44%	*	*	*
(b) In Draft Form	6%	2%	8%	12 13%	11%	*	*	*
(c) Development Under Consideration or Proposed	n.d.	n.d.	10%	8 8%	34%	*	*	*
(d) No Action Yet Reported	71%	78%	65%	37 40%	11%	*	*	*
Number of National Reports Tabled	17 of 35	45 of 60	51 of 76	92 of 92	107 of 114	120 of 133	88 of 146	139 of 158

Sources: Ramsar Secretariat (1987, 1990, 1993, 1998a, 1998c, [National Reports Database 2002, 2005 and 2008]); Rubec (1996); Smart (1993).

n.d. = no data.

[* Comparable data not available from the 2002, 2005 or 2008 National Reports: figures in the National Wetland Policies section of the table include "equivalent instruments" for these years]

62. Over th[e] period [1987-1999], the number of nations with a National Wetland Policy officially adopted grew from zero to 12, with an additional 23 nations having initiated or currently considering such a Policy. Over this same period, the number of nations that indicated they have finalized a National Wetland Strategy or Action Plan ha[d] grown from four to 50.
63. In 1987, only five Contracting Parties indicated they were involved in any sort of National Wetland Policy, Strategy or Action Plan; by 1999 this ha[d] grown to at least 101. Many of these same nations are included in the 44 [39%] nations reporting progress by April 1999 in developing or adopting a separate National Wetland Policy. [. . .] [COP8 National Reports recorded that 71 (59%) Contracting Parties reported progress in adopting, drafting or considering drafting a National Wetland Policy; while 49 (41%) countries reported "No action". COP9 National Reports recorded that 72 (77%)

Contracting Parties reported progress in adopting, drafting or considering drafting a National Wetland Policy; while 20 (23%) countries reported “No action”. [COP10 National Reports recorded that 107 (77%) Contracting Parties reported progress in adopting, drafting or considering drafting a National Wetland Policy; while 32 (23%) countries reported “No action”.]

1.7 Relationship between policy and wise use

64. Wise use of wetlands is a concept that can operate at all levels. Hence, it is a guiding principle which helps to shape choices about specific actions on the ground as well as choices of strategic direction at the level of policy. Wise use may help to test each main plank of a National Wetland Policy against the adopted wise use definition established by the Convention on Wetlands, to ensure that they are true to this key aspect of the Convention.
65. In principle, a nation acceding to the Convention accepts the obligation to promote, as far as possible, the wise use of wetlands in its territory (Article 3.1 of the Convention text). This is therefore automatically its minimum policy on the subject. A National Wetland Policy could further refine a particular country’s view of its own way forward with this goal, reflecting its own circumstances. It could of course present a more exacting standard to aim for than the common one adopted under the Convention on Wetlands (but not less exacting).
66. Thus a National Wetland Policy is one tool in the spectrum of actions proposed in the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* and the *Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept* of the Convention. No one should expect that a National Wetland Policy is the overriding or, indeed the only, action needed in a wise use programme for wetland conservation.

1.8 Level of approval/adoption of the National Wetland Policy

67. Many factors will govern what constitutes the most effective or most desirable level at which a National Wetland Policy (or sub-national initiative) is adopted or approved. Ideally, the Policy would be adopted by the national Cabinet. In some cases, this means having it adopted under national law or through constitutional amendment. Such action may not always be appropriate in some nations where continuity of government policies from one government regime to the next is standard procedure. In countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States, in fact, an array of supporting legislative and policy tools are used together. No one specific national wetland law covering all jurisdictions is workable. In smaller nations with less complex jurisdictional situations, one national wetland law may, however, be a very appropriate tool. Thus, ensuring flexibility as to where and when legislative tools are considered is important.
68. In some nations, things that are not enshrined in law are sometimes overlooked or ignored by subsequent governments. Adoption of the Policy by Cabinet or a Government Decree could thus be seen as a minimum level of recognition and endorsement by the Government.

II. Developing a National Wetland Policy

69. The following parts of Section II and all of Section IV of these guidelines explore considerations and steps that might be used in developing and ultimately implementing a National Wetland Policy. Figure 1 provides a very general flow chart of some of the steps through two phases leading to adoption and implementation of a National Wetland Policy: Phase 1 – Policy Development; and Phase 2 – Policy Adoption and Implementation.

2.1 Establishing a lead agency

70. An agency has to lead the development and implementation of a National Wetland Policy. Initially, development of an issues statement, planning of meetings and workshops and then in due course, actual writing of a policy or strategy, requires coordination and resource support (e.g. staff time, office support, travel costs).
71. A national government agency should coordinate and facilitate the development phase in cooperation with appropriate regional or local authorities. In many cases it is quite appropriate to immediately consider involving the non-government and private sector in the planning phases. In some cases, a national or international non-governmental organization has been contracted by the Government to facilitate this process.
72. The agency that leads the development phase, however, may not be the one that leads the implementation phase. What and who leads that phase will be governed, to a major degree, by the results of national consultations and the Government's wishes.

2.2 Considerations for a National Wetland Committee

73. Through its various meetings, the Convention on Wetlands has given guidance to the establishment of a National Wetland Committee that may or may not serve direct roles in national-level implementation of the Convention's objectives. In some nations, creation of such a Committee has been shown to be an effective tool to assist the Government in developing a National Wetland Policy.
74. One example of this is Trinidad and Tobago where a National Wetland Committee greatly facilitated national discussion of their proposed National Wetland Policy over several years. Representatives from several sectors (government, academia, non-governmental organizations, industry) were invited by the Government to act as an advisory body in the planning of written material and consultations on a national policy. Having a cross-section of appropriate disciplines and expertise resident in the carefully selected members of this Committee has been observed to be helpful in the policy development process (Pritchard 1997).
75. The Committee could consist of representatives from all the various jurisdictions (e.g. regional, provincial, states or township government, etc.) and the federal government who are responsible for land use and land-use policy in their jurisdictions. Strategic inclusion of one or more senior government representatives may be effective in moving the Policy forward within the government system.

Figure 1: Flow Chart of the Major Steps in the Development and Implementation of a National Wetland Policy

Phase 1: Policy Development

Preparatory Initiatives
 Establishment of a Writing Team
 Creation of National Wetland Advisory Committee
 Preparation of Background Paper(s) and National Issues Statement
 Circulation of Papers and Issues Statement
 Legislative Review
 Interministerial Consultations
 Draft Policy Development
 Targeted Consultations and National and Local Workshop(s)
 Intergovernmental Consultations
 Revised Policy Drafts
 Additional Interagency Consultations
 Formulation of Final Draft of Policy

Phase 2: Policy Adoption & Implementation

Interdepartmental Review
 Preparation of Implementation Plan and Budget
 Preparation of Cabinet Document
 Central Agency/Treasury Board Submission
 Cabinet/Government Approval
 Public Announcement
 Work Plan Implementation
 Creation of National Implementation/Lead Agency
 Establishment of Ongoing Roles of National Wetland Committee
 Development of Implementation Guidelines
 Harmonization with Other Policies
 Development of Training Programme for Affected Agencies
 Legislative Implementation or Revision

76. The National Wetland Committee might also involve representatives of non-governmental organizations and other interests, such as industry, deemed to be important to the success of the process by the national government. A range of expertise and disciplines can be effective in this Committee and it could serve in a support capacity to a Policy Writing Team. This Committee, in becoming more active in information exchange, programme, policy and research coordination and cooperation, would deal more directly with national wetland issues. The results of a national consultation workshop (see Section 2.7) can guide the National Wetland Committee in its consideration of a possible wetland policy framework. [Editor's note. In terms of the composition of National Wetland Committees, in addition to the considerations in Recommendation 5.7, COP10 Resolution X.29 recommends participation by the nominated national focal points for CEPA and the STRP; and, for Contracting Parties where implementation occurs significantly through provincial, state or other subnational governments, to include subnational focal points in such Committees.]
77. A National Wetland Committee has been created in some cases as a result of adoption of a National Wetland Policy or implementation of comprehensive national wetland programmes. These Committees, in an advisory role, can assist the Government(s) managing the nation's wetland resources in designing and implementing wetland management, policy and science initiatives.
78. In either case, before or after adoption of the Policy, creation of a National Wetland Committee is an astute action by the Government to encourage and establish support from many sectors and stakeholders. The Committee can greatly assist in avoiding and resolving conflicts in wetland conservation.

Figure 2: Example of a National Wetland Conservation Vision Statement

Vision: The government, non-government and private sectors, jointly and cooperatively, will work towards the long-term securement of wetland ecosystems for the sustainable use by the nation's wildlife and its people. To achieve this vision, six objectives are established.

Objective 1. Implement Comprehensive Wetland Conservation Policies

- Develop and implement wetland conservation and management policies and strategies in all jurisdictions in the nation.
- Develop and implement wetland management policies in resource-based industries.
- Include wetland conservation goals in governmental land and water use policies.
- Convene a national wetland conference to evaluate and review national wetland conservation objectives.

Objective 2. Improve Cooperation with National and International Jurisdictions

- Establish a National Wetland Committee with a comprehensive mandate to foster cooperation for the conservation of wetland types, resources and biodiversity in all regions of the country.
- Share national expertise and experience nationally and internationally.
- Support international environmental conservation initiatives and treaties (e.g., the Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity) and the programmes of IUCN - the World Conservation Union and Wetlands International.

Objective 3. Ensure Wetland Data Management

- Establish a standardized national approach to wetland classification, inventory and data integration.
- Establish a national wetland status and trends survey on a regular cycle.
- Establish standardized national protocols for description of the functions and values of the biodiversity of wetland ecosystems.
- Establish a comprehensive national data base on the location and status of wetlands.

Objective 4. Promote Effective Wetland Science

- Establish national priorities for wetland scientific research with regular review.
- Link wetland science agencies, researchers and managers in an effective national communications network to serve management and policy objectives.
- Sponsor regular national and regional wetland science symposia and workshops.
- Establish catalytic programmes to promote priority national and regional wetland research and centres of expertise.
- Establish national wetland scholarships to promote innovative scientific, socio-economic and technological research on wetland issues of importance to the people of the country.
- Support effective wetland research in alignment with national priorities and initiatives to conserve the nation's biodiversity and sensitive lands and waters.

Objective 5. Achieve Local Wetland Conservation

- Support programmes to secure wetland habitats in all regions of the nation.
- Establish or expand a national network of protected wetland areas in national, provincial, state, territorial and regional parks, wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, and other protected and wilderness areas.
- Secure priority wetlands for targeted conservation objectives across the country.

Objective 6. Educate People on the Value of Wetlands

- Establish a comprehensive national wetland education and awareness programme through innovative technologies in cooperation with all governments and the non-government and private sectors.
- Highlight the economic, social and beneficial functions and values that wetland ecosystems provide to society.

2.3 National issues statement and background paper

79. In developing national consensus on the need for wetland policy or strategies, it has been found valuable to prepare a short national “issues statement” or “vision statement” as the basis for introducing a national consultation on a proposed policy. An example of a national wetland vision statement, based upon one developed in Canada (North American Wetlands Conservation Council Canada 1998), is presented in Figure 2. Such a statement would express the Government’s concerns and the national interest with regard to wetland conservation. The statement can be used as a preliminary “think piece” to generate discussion in consultation meetings or a national workshop.
80. A detailed background paper on the scope and status of the nation’s wetlands is a valuable tool to assist in national discussions towards a wetland policy or strategy. Such a paper could include:
 - a) the functions and values of wetlands in the nation;
 - b) the types of wetlands and resources present in the nation’s existing wetlands;
 - c) an historical review of the uses and impacts of development on wetlands;
 - d) a review of existing statistics on inventory and wetland loss;
 - e) an examination of the relationships of wetlands to other sectoral resource management issues;
 - f) a summary of existing legislative and government responsibilities for wetlands;
 - g) an examination of opportunities for programme development, partnerships and support; and
 - h) the value of wetlands to the environment and people, with quantified economic values.
81. The background paper can include a preliminary definition of potential goals, objectives, principles and strategic directions for a National Wetland Policy. The background paper could be designed for public release and used widely as a communication and education tool. Extensive use of graphic and photographic illustrations would be useful. It could be developed with the cooperation of educators and environmental organizations across the nation.

2.4 Defining wetlands at a national level

82. The term “wetland” should be established clearly either through the use of the Convention on Wetlands’ definition or one tailored to the country. The definition adopted by the Convention is: “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres” including areas which “may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands” (Articles 1.1 and 2.1).
83. “Wetland” is used collectively to describe permanently or intermittently wet land, shallow water and land-water margins. Wetlands may be found in all

types of waters whether fresh or saline, and are characterised in their natural state by flora, soils and fauna that are generally adapted to wet conditions.

84. Where a nationally-adopted definition of wetlands exists and is soundly based on national scientific expertise, it is appropriate to use it. This is particularly helpful if tied to a national wetland classification system that establishes a detailed reference point for wetland inventories and conservation programmes. The existing *Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type* is designed to be quite general, a valuable source in the absence of more detail nationally.
85. In countries such as the United States, Norway or Canada, wetland definitions have been in place for many years and are frequently enshrined in legislation and in policy. These definitions are generally compatible with the broad definition adopted by the Convention (see paragraph 82) and are the basis of these nations' wetland programmes. They may differ from the Ramsar definition in the full scope of what is included as a wetland, particularly with regard to coastal and marine systems. Such nationally-developed wetland definitions and classification systems are an important element of the flexibility of the Ramsar Convention. The differences are not a limitation; it is only important to recognize that these exist and ensure the appropriate management agencies are aware of this.
86. Several examples of differences between nationally-based wetland definitions, in comparison to those used either in other nations or under the Convention, are cited below. Numerous others could be cited.
 - a) *Water depth limits for wetland systems* — the Convention uses six metres [of permanent inundation, for marine waters only] whereas some nations limit shallow water wetlands, especially in marine zones, to two metres at low tide;
 - b) *Limits for defining water presence on an annual basis* — the number of days per year when water is present at the surface of a wetland is used in some nations as a diagnostic tool. The Convention has not provided any guidance in this area whereas some countries specifically require 7, 14 or an undetermined but measurable number of days per year when free water of a minimum depth can be observed; and
 - c) *Depth of organic materials in defining peatlands* — 30, 40 and 100 cm are examples globally and are nationally adopted to allow data consistency with national soil surveys. The Convention has not provided guidance in this area.

2.5 Defining stakeholders

87. A key step in any National Wetland Policy initiative is to define who is either affected by, or potentially involved with, the design, discussion and implementation of the Policy. This is important to ensure consultations include all those groups with a vested interest or capacity to make the end result as effective and achievable as possible. Stakeholders include those agencies, institutions, and groups who have an interest in, or are affected by, the National Wetland Policy. It includes government departments, non-governmental organizations, local governments and many others. The spectrum this covers will be quite variable by nation. (See Case Study 2.)

Case Study 2

Defining stakeholders in a National Wetland Policy

Nadra Nathai-Gyan, Wildlife Section, Government of Trinidad and Tobago

The preparation of National Wetland Policy in Trinidad and Tobago, although seen as a major obligation for implementation of the Ramsar Convention at a national level, became a matter of urgency as a result of the extremely topical debate on the destruction of the Nariva Swamp, the nation's only Ramsar site. This issue assumed national and even international importance and was championed and sustained by several organizations including: (a) the Wildlife Section, Forestry Division (the Ramsar Convention's National Administrative Authority), (b) the Pointe à Pierre Wildfowl Trust (an NGO focused on wetland issues), (c) concerned individuals from other environmental NGOs, (d) user groups from the Nariva area and (e) sensitized members of the general public. Effective use of, and support by, the media, both print and electronic complemented this cadre of stakeholders.

This process led to a natural elaboration of stakeholders by an overall lead agency, the National Wetland Committee (NWC). Some of the agencies and individuals involved in the Nariva Swamp "issue" were members of the NWC and thus brought to bear their experiences and expertise in the compilation of a first draft of the National Wetland Policy for stakeholders' inputs. Certain key stakeholders were directly involved in the writing of this draft. An important point to emphasize is that in seeking stakeholders' inputs, some form of a consolidated document is necessary to focus discussions and facilitate meaningful contributions.

Taking into account the broadest definition of a stakeholder as "anyone with an interest in the issue", and in rationalizing the implementation of the stakeholder process, two strategies were employed. The first was a national consultation to capture interested members of the public, relevant agencies and ministries, NGOs, academic institutions and key user groups. The draft Policy was presented to this audience by members of the NWC followed by a structured discussion period (with copies having been provided to everyone in advance of the meeting). Ministerial support through the delivery of a keynote address signalled the commitment of the Government to this undertaking.

It was obvious following this national consultation that inputs from communities living in close proximity to wetland areas, most of whom were dependent to a large degree on the resources of the areas, had been insufficient. A number of factors, including social and economic, had caused them to shy away from this formal environment. Hence, the decision was taken by the NWC to assign members familiar to the communities to hold more consultations within these areas. This series of local consultations was undertaken with vigour and advertised through the posting of flyers at strategic locations within the communities. The meetings took on an informal nature and after simple presentations, participants were invited to make their comments, including those of a seemingly peripheral nature. It was interesting to note that the concerns expressed served to assure the relevancy of the policy objectives.

The important lesson learned from this experience is that stakeholders must be involved at all levels, that the nature of involvement must adapt to the particular environment, and that all effort must be taken to capture the most relevant stakeholders within the net.

[Editor's note: This case study has not been updated since the first edition of the Handbook.]

Trinidad and Tobago's National Wetland Policy can be viewed in HTML on the Ramsar Web site at http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-wurl-policies-national-wetland-21182/main/ramsar/1-31-116-162%5E21182_4000_0__.

2.6 Initiating national consultations

88. The scope of national consultations in advance of a National Wetland Policy will be different in each nation. The lead agency must define how broadly to design these consultations in terms of stakeholders, time, travel and complexity. In federal states, for example, jurisdiction for wetland management may in fact clearly rest at a lower level of government than at the national government's level. In a large nation, those agencies charged with these consultations will face a more complex task of extensive travelling to seek input.
89. One useful approach is to seek input through the hosting of a national stakeholders' workshop (see Section 2.7). It would draw together representatives of major government, business and non-governmental organizations, aboriginal or indigenous peoples, local communities and private citizens as appropriate. Such a meeting would build a supporting constituency and be a useful device to create a network of informed partners who can "spread the word" about the Policy and its proposals. These individuals could organize and lead local consultations, particularly at the community level. In this context, the national consultation meeting could be used as a training workshop to a degree.
90. Direct consultations may also involve many small meetings at the local level or with targeted groups or organizations. A standard consultation presentation in audio-visual format and hand-out written materials can be developed. Such "face-to-face" meetings are often essential for interministerial and intergovernmental consultations as well as with key local government and non-governmental organizations.
91. Indirect contacts not involving visits or locally arranged meetings, may involve the same consultation materials but be conducted by telephone or mail. This requires more frequent follow-up contacts to ensure responses but is cheaper overall in terms of travel and staff time.
92. Interministerial consultations with potentially affected or influential government agencies at this stage is quite important. This can be initiated through appropriate correspondence between Ministers and an invitation for their Departments' involvement and contributions.
93. Public consultation may require sophisticated public media programmes that can be very costly. Such consultation requires extensive travel, detailed logistical planning and expertise in order to be effective. However, in many jurisdictions such public consultation is required by law to introduce new government initiatives and is thus not avoidable. Public consultation may require many types of printed and electronic meeting products and numerous, potentially difficult, public meetings.
94. The key issue here is to find the right balance in providing consultative suggestions which are early and open-ended enough to genuinely benefit from consultative input. It is critical to create a sense of empowerment and ownership among those people and agencies consulted (i.e. not presenting a *fait accompli*), while at the same time having information that is sufficiently thought-through to show clearly the various implications of policy options.

95. It is advantageous to provide a basic outline in order to define the scope of the process and focus discussions. A degree of reiteration in some of these processes may be appropriate, e.g. an evolving draft text. This should be kept within sensible bounds so that the process is resource-effective and is completed!

2.7 Implementing national and local wetland policy workshops

96. National Wetland Policy stakeholder workshops have been shown in several nations to be an effective consensus-building mechanism. They may be organized to reach a common understanding of the issues related to wetland conservation and management, to identify obstacles and problems in dealing with these issues, and to suggest solutions or means to overcoming existing problems. These workshops may be organized at several levels. In some cases, local and informal meetings are essential as people in small communities may find larger, centralized meetings intimidating or impossible to attend. In other cases, a formal national policy workshop can be quite appropriate. (See Case Study 3.)
97. The goal is to develop guidance for the drafting of the concepts and general approach for a Wetland Policy. A secondary goal is to act as an educational forum, with the materials to be discussed designed to suit the level and complexity of the issues and the interests and expertise of the people attending, from local to national. These workshops are designed to be of use to the government(s) in the nation in writing and implementing effective wetland policy in their respective jurisdictions. The merits of such a workshop are discussed below.
98. A major impetus for a workshop can come through the interest and commitment of the federal or national government to lead the development of a National Wetland Policy (or in some countries, a state by state set of policies). Guidance is required to formulate a set of policy statements. The workshop, bringing together a wide variety of government and/or non-governmental organizations and interest groups, can be an important source of such guidance.
99. Another aspect is to develop a focal point for discussion of land use planning and community-based issues affecting wetland resources. At a national scale, such discussions could be between the national government, industry interests, national non-governmental organizations, and other provincial and state levels of government. Locally, this would involve community organizations and the local government in cooperation with a national agency. Consultations could be lead by a National Wetland Committee (see Section 2.2 above).

2.8 Creating a wetland policy writing team

100. The designated lead agency must take responsibility for writing drafts of the Policy and other required consultation and briefing materials. A selected group of knowledgeable staff with the resources needed for report production and with good writing skills should be established. Some or all of these people may also lead interaction with stakeholders and with consultation groups. The group can draw upon other agencies and sectors through temporarily assigned staff to assist in establishing a Writing

Case Study 3

Consultations for wetland policy development

Clayton Rubec, Department of Environment, Government of Canada

The Government of Canada initiated development of *The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation* in early 1987. An immediate step was to consider the scope and complexity for consultations with stakeholders across Canada. The first such step was to consult with non-governmental organizations through a National Advisory Workshop in February 1987. This meeting brought together 25 representatives of national environmental organizations and wetland resource user groups such as trapping, farming and recreational fisheries. The report of this meeting was published and delivered directly to selected Ministers in both the federal and provincial governments. It laid out a course of action which the federal Government used to guide its implementation of consultations. Subsequently, a meeting of the Canada Committee on Land Use, involving senior representatives of federal, territorial and provincial governments, also developed a paper, charting the course to proposed creation of jurisdictional wetland policies, thus recognizing that a suite of policies versus one national document was needed.

Staff of the Federal Government, in late 1987, wrote a First Draft of the Federal Policy and undertook an initial round of information meetings. These involved headquarters and regional office staff of Environment Canada and selected federal agencies. These meetings helped focus and redesign the length and complexity of the Draft Policy. A Second Draft was prepared and became the basis for a detailed, nation-wide consultation process. The Federal Government recognized it could undertake three levels of consultation: (i) interministerial, (ii) intergovernmental and national environmental/stakeholder organizations; or (iii) the general public. As it was felt that the Federal Policy would not directly influence local land use decisions by any private landowner in Canada, being restricted to federal land management and areas of federal jurisdiction, the second option for limited consultations was chosen. It was noted that this was less complex and less costly in terms of travel and staff time reflecting available resources for such consultations.

Over a six-month period in 1988-1989, 18 meetings across Canada were arranged with combinations of federal and provincial agencies in all the 12 capitals and other cities. A professionally-designed audiovisual presentation summarizing the proposed Policy was prepared in English and French for these meetings. It included a standardized Question and Answer package. In most cases, two federal Consultation Team members attended each meeting, one to lead presentations, the second to record comments and questions. A few meetings were attended by only one team member, particularly for the most expensive travel destinations in northern territorial locations. Consultation meetings, written correspondence and telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of 36 non-governmental organizations and 20 resource user/industry associations. Presentations were made to federal meetings such as the Annual Conference of the Treasury Board Real Property Bureau and Federal Interdepartmental Committee on Water. In each meeting, printed bilingual consultation materials were distributed to all participants. The Consultation Team traveled by air extensively to make these presentations at the above scheduled meetings. Local arrangements were complex, requiring assistance in establishing sites, facilities and invitations to key personnel from many agencies.

Based on the comments and concerns expressed through the consultations on the Second Draft, a third draft of the Policy was ready by early 1990. A professional policy writer with Privy Council experience was contracted to rewrite the specific language of this third draft to enhance its presentation to the Federal Cabinet. The draft was then circulated again to federal agencies that would be affected by the implementation of this Policy. Discussions focused on implementation resources and strategies and the final step of drafting a complementary Treasury Board Submission. The Policy was distributed to federal departments for a final review as part of a Government Environmental Initiative and Memorandum to Cabinet called the *Green Plan* in late 1991. It was adopted in December 1991 and finally, through further interagency consultations on appropriate communication opportunities, was publicly announced by the Minister of State for the Environment in March 1992.

[Editor's note: This case study has not been updated since the first edition of the Handbook.]

Canada's national Wetland Policy can be viewed in HTML on the Ramsar Web site at http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-wurl-policies-national-wetland-21188/main/ramsar/1-31-116-162%5E21188_4000_0__.

Team. Their work will be based on results of national consultations. Once established, the Writing Team should stay intact until all of the Policy's writing requirements are completed. Some staff may only meet with the other members during periodic team sessions, as they may be required to travel back and forth from another location. Too many trips becomes expensive and difficult for the individuals involved. Each team member should bring a range of policy, scientific and political expertise to prepare the first draft of the Policy.

101. At least one member of the Writing Team should have central government agency experience, thus having a strong awareness of "how the system works" in the respective government department(s) leading the initiative.

2.9 Ensuring political support for the next steps

102. At each step (i.e the major drafts), interaction with senior government staff and media releases at the minister, prime minister or presidential level can be used to demonstrate the Government's support for the ongoing process and ultimately its adoption. Press releases or major policy speeches by the Minister or Head of Government (Prime Minister, etc.) are tools to announce the Government's commitment to both completing the Policy and financially supporting it, if appropriate, by some fixed date.
103. Throughout these steps, the Minister responsible for the development of the Policy should be in regular contact with colleagues in the Cabinet and their departments and agencies. Staff must be prepared to keep these agencies and their Ministers informed and supportive to ensure smooth processing of the document through to the Cabinet level. Early resolution of concerns raised by these Ministers through such consultations is critical to the subsequent adoption of the Policy.

2.10 Time scales

104. As noted above, time is an important factor in wetland policy development. All of the steps in the process require a reasonable understanding and commitment in terms of time. At the outset, sufficient time for staff involvement and for seeing the process through should be anticipated and properly planned. A flow-chart detailing scheduling of text development, meetings and interagency consultations through to expected Government announcement should be developed and updated regularly.
105. Once adopted, the Policy itself requires a time factor to be built in. It must not become a static and dated document. A regularized review and reauthorization clause may be helpful to allow updating and addition of future material to the Policy. The implementation of the Policy also should be based upon a work plan that specifies delivery dates of actions and the results expected by clearly measurable dates.

2.11 Completing consultations and preparing additional drafts of the policy

106. As each of several possible drafts is completed, a limited round of additional consultation may be valuable or legally required. These drafts may or may not be open for public and/or non-government agency review. Selected further consultation with affected ministries of the Government and other



National Wetland Policies should cover all types of wetlands, from coastal mangroves to high mountain glacial forelands, as here at the Vadret da Roseg Ramsar site, Switzerland. *Photo: Andreas Wipf, OFEFP Switzerland.*

sectors seeking response to their concerns will be expected. Further drafts developed through continued consultation, legal advice and response to the directions and wishes of the Government should be expected.

2.12 Developing a Cabinet Memorandum

107. After all consultations with other ministries are completed, the governmental system of the particular nation will establish the next steps. In some nations, a formal Memorandum-to-Cabinet, White Paper or other documents will be prepared in a prescribed format that must be endorsed by all Ministers on the advice of senior departmental experts and managers. Adoption by Parliament, enactment of new legislation or creation of a constitutional amendment, are all variations of such national level endorsement and are appropriate to particular national systems of government. Careful political manoeuvring will ensure a lack of conflict at the Cabinet level during this final Ministerial review stage and ensure smooth adoption of this document, the culmination often of years of effort.

2.13 Government endorsement and approval, announcement

108. Once this Cabinet (or as appropriate Presidential, etc.) approval is received, the lead agency may consider communication strategies for public distribution of the Policy. A public event and announcement by the Government can be planned. This includes printing sufficient copies for short- and long-term distribution, press materials, media interviews, selected popular press articles and meetings with specific implementation

partners. There is a need for concise, easily read and attractively presented communication pieces.

III. Organizing the policy document

3.1 Sections of the policy text

109. A National Wetland Policy may contain some or all of the following sections:

- *Background Review* - historical context, actions to date;
- *Foreword* - how did this arise and why, the commitment of the Government;
- *Overview* - a look at the nation's wetland resources and their economic/ social and environmental values;
- *Role of the National Government* - in the context of constitutional jurisdiction and planning authorities;
- *Role of Partnerships* - with other levels of government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector;
- *Definitions* - of wetlands and terms to be used;
- *Goal of the Policy* - brief and tied to sustainable development and biodiversity objectives;
- *Guiding Principles* - examples would include recognition of stakeholder and government aspirations, aboriginal peoples, landowner rights, global concerns and local needs; and
- *Specific Objectives* - about five objective statements are reasonable;
- *Policy Strategies* - 10 to 15 strategies followed by action items, tailored to national needs.

3.2 Goals and principles

110. The Policy should include one, or at most a few, simple goal statement(s) and appropriate principles with regard to other national policies and cultural considerations. Many of the existing wetland policies developed to date have presented simple and short goal statements. The wording varies but revolves around two themes: that the wetlands of the nation will be used in a sustainable manner for current and future generations of the people and that their conservation is essential to the environmental and economic well-being of the nation.

111. Principles are essentially statements of commitment as to how the Government views its responsibilities to implement the National Wetland Policy, consistent with its constitutional jurisdiction and the cultural practices of the nation. A set of perhaps eight to ten principles drafted in a concise manner is reasonable. This could include a principle that none of the Government's actions implemented through this Policy will infringe on the rights of its component provincial or state governments and that these actions will ensure a spirit of cooperation with them. A similar principle with regard to aboriginal or indigenous peoples and local communities could be identified. Principles can note the linkages of the Policy to the Government's commitment to sustainable development, the environment, or biodiversity conservation, as appropriate.

Additional information

Goals and principles of Uganda's National Policy

The Ugandan Government has adopted a *National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources* to promote the conservation of wetlands in order to sustain their values for the present and future well being of the people.

In support of this aim the Policy sets five goals:

- to establish the principles by which wetland resources can be optimally used now and in the future;
- to end practices which reduce wetland productivity;
- to maintain the biological diversity of natural or semi-natural wetlands;
- to maintain wetland functions and values; and
- to integrate wetland concerns into the planning and decision making of other sectors.

Three principles apply in pursuit of these goals:

- Wetland resources form an integral part of the environment and their management must be pursued in the context of an interaction between conservation and national development strategies and activities.
- Wetland conservation can only be achieved through a coordinated and cooperative approach involving all the concerned people and organizations in the country including the local communities.
- It is of vital importance for wetland conservation and management that the present attitudes and perceptions of Ugandans regarding wetlands be changed.

Thirty-six specific policy statements are made on how the goals will be achieved, and a preliminary set of guidelines for wetland resource users is annexed.

[Editor's note: This policy can be viewed in HTML on the Ramsar Web site at http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-wurl-policies-national-wetland-21174/main/ramsar/1-31-116-162%5E21174_4000_0__]



3.3 Objectives for a National Wetland Policy

112. Objectives will need to focus on a variety of key words as they often become the image of the Policy. A list of objectives (five to ten have been noted in several National Wetland Policies adopted to date) is required with the intention that all are of equal importance in the announcement of the Policy. However, practical implementation of the Policy may result in the observation that only one or two of these receive the greatest public attention. For example, Canada's announcement of its federal wetland policy in 1992 contained seven objectives focusing on maintenance of wetland functions, advance land use planning affecting wetlands, no net loss of wetland functions on federal lands, enhancement and rehabilitation

of wetlands, securement of sites of national significance, mitigation of the impact of all federal activities on any wetland in the nation, and wise use of wetland resources. The no net loss goal however has proven to be the single most noted aspect of this Policy.

113. The following potential objectives are useful to consider in the drafting of a National Wetland Policy:
- Ensure that a National Wetland Policy, as well as any programmes formulated under it, are linked to other land, soil, water, air, wildlife conservation and economic development policies in order to secure the wise use of the nation's wetlands and meet international wetland conservation responsibilities.
 - Promote the prevention of further wetland loss and encourage the rehabilitation of the nation's wetlands by maintaining their integrity; preserving the genetic diversity of these wetlands; and ensuring that the enjoyment and economic use of wetlands are sustainable.
114. A National Wetland Policy Stakeholders Workshop (see Section 2.7) would examine how to encourage these objectives and how they could be acted upon by the appropriate federal, provincial (state), territorial and municipal levels of government through a set of policy implementation strategies.

3.4 Policy implementation strategies

115. The Policy should include specific, measurable implementation strategies. Policy strategies must address key areas that demonstrate the priorities of the Government but also foster the desired level of cooperation and involvement of other interests. Several areas that can be incorporated in strategies are discussed below. This is not a comprehensive list and serves only to provide general ideas.
116. Linkages through these strategies to other national water, biodiversity and sustainable development policy initiatives should be further explored. Other themes than those below will be important to some National Wetland Policies. Section 3.5 examines the titles of themes adopted by several Governments in their National Wetland Policies. The discussion below only focuses on eight areas that can be considered for policies and does not cover all of the possible themes.

I. *Create common wetland conservation objectives through the development and coordination of federal, provincial (state), territorial and municipal wetland policies; and link those wetland policies to other land, soil, water, air, wildlife conservation and economic development policies to ensure wetland conservation is part of comprehensive national land use planning.*

- Recognize that wetlands are both land and water.
- Clarify government (at all levels) jurisdictional and legal responsibilities concerning wetlands, particularly those in marine and intertidal areas.
- Relate government initiatives and existing policies or guidelines (e.g. federal, provincial and state agriculture policies, fish habitat

policies, waterbird and shorebird management, forestry and agriculture-food agreements) to wetland conservation.

- Establish within each province, state or territory, a process or lines of communication for translating policy recommendations for all agencies involved into reasonable land use decisions at the local level.
- Urge all provinces, states and territories to develop a comprehensive wetland conservation policy or strategy.
- Include wetland conservation as an integral component of national biodiversity, water and other conservation strategies.
- Develop exemplary management practices and practical guidelines for protected wetland area management.
- Make better use of international agreements for conservation and sustainable development as well as model policies on successful wetland policies developed in other nations, with examples derived from the Ramsar Wise Use Concept.

II. *Improve coordination and communication among government agencies and non-government agencies.*

- Identify at the national level (and the provincial, state and territorial levels as appropriate) lead agencies with a broad mandate for natural resources management to orchestrate coordination and communication about wetlands.
- Develop a structured approach to implementing coordinated national wetland programmes that will foster effective wetland projects, such as through a National Wetland Secretariat or Committee.
- Establish a national forum for wetland conservation communications to systematize wetland references and ecological data on wetlands and establish an information clearing house.

III. *Recognize and encourage the role and efforts of local community and non-governmental organizations in conserving wetlands; local communities and non-governmental organizations from all disciplines can assume a strong role in the development and implementation of wetland conservation programmes.*

- Provide financial resources for these groups to enable them to assist in the development of policies and/or programmes under a strategy for wetland conservation.
- Facilitate additional fund raising activities for wetland conservation.
- Promote partnership projects with local communities and local, national and international non-governmental organizations with expertise on wetlands.

See also Handbooks 7, Participatory skills and 18, Managing wetlands

- Facilitate the role of the private sector in voluntary, non-regulatory stewardship of wetland resources and as partners in conservation projects with local communities, government and environmental non-governmental organizations.

IV. *Coordinate and rationalize government programmes to minimize their adverse effects on wetlands and to encourage wetland conservation; create programme incentives that will encourage the landowner and conservation agencies to maintain wetlands in a natural state.*

- Identify all government programmes which influence or impact wetlands and assess the influence that such programmes are having on wetlands and agricultural and forested lands.
- Focus on the wise use of natural resources in wetlands and economic benefits to land owners and users through their involvement in wetland conservation.
- Remove government funded incentive programmes that result in unnecessary wetland diking, drainage or filling.
- Ensure that environmental impact assessments are conducted on major government and non-government projects.
- Examine tax relief for protected wetlands, particularly through local voluntary action by landowners and through federal, provincial and state and municipal programmes, drawing on successful examples from other jurisdictions.
- Develop use of landowner conservation agreements and other voluntary legal mechanisms for individual sites.
- Evaluate the requirements under law, and the implications in terms of compensation to landowners, for wetland retention in many localities.

See also Handbooks 15, Wetland inventory, and 16, Impact assessment

V. *Ensure proper maintenance and management of protected wetlands after designation, acquisition and/or retention.*

- Ensure that adequate financial and human resources are provided within federal, provincial, state, territorial and municipal budgets for the management of protected wetland areas.
- Fund a national wetland programme through the coordinated, cooperative efforts of the government, non-governmental organizations and corporate as well as private landowner sectors in the nation.
- Design no net loss or net gain projects focusing on wetland functions and values (including wetland area where administratively required) within national, regional or municipal wetland programmes.
- Develop, where appropriate, enabling policy and legislation to facilitate fund raising activities that can be used by government and non-governmental organizations to conserve wetlands.

See also Handbooks 18, Managing wetlands, and 19, Addressing change in wetland ecological character

- Encourage non-governmental organizations that wish to retain ownership of the wetlands they purchase to examine opportunities, where compatible with the maintenance of the ecological character of the site, for revenue generation. This may include revenues derived from continued crop production particularly with local communities, or leasing revenues from agriculture, hunting or trapping, tourism and scientific study of plants and animals.
- Support the education of scientific, technical and administrative staff to encourage innovative land conservation and land management mechanisms.
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of women, local communities and volunteers in wetland management.

VI. *Close gaps in knowledge that currently exist in wetland classification, inventory, research and evaluation, and ensure the proper synthesis, storage and retrieval needed to access this knowledge.*

- The implementation strategies should address areas of national and international interest or priority. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - (a) socio-economic valuation, inventory and wetland classification;
 - (b) hydrology and impacts of climate change;
 - (c) environmental and ecological cost/benefit accounting;
 - (d) impacts of government programmes;
 - (e) restoration, rehabilitation, mitigation and compensation for loss of wetlands; and
 - (f) maintaining the ecological character of wetlands.

See also Handbook 13, Inventory, assessment, and monitoring

VII. *Improve public awareness.*

- Present wetland conservation in combination with soil, land, water, air and wildlife conservation as well as sustainable development and wise use principles in an ecological context rather than in isolation.
- Demonstrate and explain the linkages of wise use of natural resources and water quality and quantity issues to wetlands conservation.
- Emphasize public and decision maker education programmes in addition to those of school children.
- Utilize national communications opportunities (e.g. World Wetlands Day, public service announcements, videos, bus signs, Internet) to advertise wetland conservation.
- Broaden agricultural, water and other sectoral programmes to promote wetland conservation awareness.
- Encourage networking through use of landowner participation programmes, recognition signs and other awareness techniques.

See also Handbook 6, Wetland CEPA

See also Handbook
20, International
cooperation

VIII. *Ensure delivery of international commitments.*

- Foster cooperation across international borders for the management of shared watersheds/ river basins and their wetlands.
- Develop national delivery mechanisms for the principles of, and Government's commitments to, the Ramsar Convention.
- Explore integration of wetland goals consistent with the objectives and interests of international treaties on water, biodiversity and sustainable development.

3.5 Examples of National Strategies

117. Appendix 3 lists examples of government and non-government wetland conservation policies and strategies in place or being developed around the World. This includes national and sub-national initiatives. Table 2 provides a summary of the titles of the implementation strategies listed in nine examples of existing National Wetland Policy documents. These include the adopted or draft [as at 1999] National Wetland Policies/Action Plans of Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Jamaica, Malaysia, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda. In some cases, these documents are only "draft" or non-government "consultation" papers but are used here to illustrate opportunities for developing strategic approaches.
118. In the examples cited, common emphasis on several strategic approaches is evident. These include the need for improving public awareness and education; developing cooperation and partnerships between levels of government from national to local; developing supporting legislation and interrelated land and water use policies and programmes; implementing wetland site management responsibilities; developing a sound basis for the policy through scientific research and expertise; developing logistical and financial capacity for policy implementation; and meeting international commitments. Overall, five to thirteen strategies have been developed in the examples outlined in Table 2, drafted to give a clear vision of the subject matter and ready acceptance across the nation.

IV. Implementing the policy

4.1 Defining who is responsible for implementation

119. It is essential that a clear agreement emerges through the consultation process as to who will take the lead in implementing the National Wetland Policy. This may involve one national department or organization acting as a lead coordinator and facilitator to work closely with the many ministries, partners and stakeholders involved. It is also important to define the roles for other agencies with responsibilities for wetland management. (See Case Study 4.)

4.2 Developing implementation guidelines

120. Several options exist but all lead to one fact: the implementing agencies require assistance and training to understand what the Policy says and

Table 2: Implementation Strategies in Proposed or Adopted National Wetland Policies/Plans

Australia:

1. managing Commonwealth lands and waters
2. implementing interrelated policy and legislation
3. involving people in wetland management
4. working in partnership
5. scientific base
6. international commitments

Canada:

1. public awareness
2. managing federal lands
3. conservation of special sites
4. cooperation with others
5. a national network of sites
6. scientific support
7. international commitments

Costa Rica:

1. general issues
2. wetland classification
3. landscape classification
4. administrative organization
5. financial aspects
6. wetland protection
7. activities permitted in wetlands
8. management of wetlands on public and state agency lands
9. wetlands on private lands
10. integration of the public benefits of wetlands
11. exclusions and allowed actions

France:

1. rationale
2. wetland inventory and strengthening of evaluation tools
3. harmonization of public policies
4. restoration of wetlands
5. information and awareness programme

Jamaica:

1. mangrove and coastal wetlands planning
2. protecting and enhancing site functions and values
3. addressing local impacts
4. roles and responsibilities of key agencies
5. enforcement and compliance
6. review of legislation and regulation

Malaysia:

1. cross-sectoral coordination and linkages
2. legislation and other policies
3. economic incentives and disincentives
4. land and water use planning
5. site management
6. sustainable use
7. assessment and monitoring
8. information, awareness and training
9. international actions
10. institutional development and financial support

Peru:

1. institutional considerations
2. legal aspects
3. research studies
4. sustainable development
5. education
6. public awareness
7. capacity building
8. international cooperation

Trinidad and Tobago:

1. education, public awareness and training
2. management of publicly-owned wetlands
3. protected wetlands
4. cooperative wetlands protection
5. wetland studies
6. institutional and legal considerations

Uganda:

1. no wetland drainage
2. sound environmental management
3. sustainable use
4. conservation
5. water supply and treatment
6. land use, ownership
7. restoration of sites
8. environmental impact assessment, monitoring
9. public awareness
10. research and inventory
11. capacity building
12. international actions
13. legislation, institutional arrangements

means, who is in charge, what expertise is available and where, how roles and responsibilities are distributed, and many related questions. A publication entitled an *Implementation Guide* can be developed in tandem with development of the Policy itself. In some cases, this *Guide* may be easier to develop after several years of practical experience with the Policy.

121. The *Guide* must be useful to stakeholders and wetland resource users. Thus it is targeted at the managers of wetlands: this could be government agencies, local communities, public or private landowners, and other stakeholders. In the case of government agencies, this may include all land managers and policy makers under the jurisdiction of the respective government which is leading the adoption of the Policy. A *Guide* can assist in the following areas:
 - (a) interpretation of terminology and objectives articulated in the text of the Policy;
 - (b) description of sources of expertise available, the nature of partnership and the role of key agencies; and
 - (c) understanding the roles and responsibilities of stakeholder and implementation agencies.
122. Through an *Implementation Guide*, clear communications can be developed on whom the Policy applies to through the production of public awareness materials.

4.3 Defining what resources are needed

123. In some cases, definition of resource requirements may interfere with the ability to even discuss the goals and objectives or design of a National Wetland Policy. When resources are scarce in government agencies, significant posturing and argument over who is in a best position to manage any new resources for implementation may arise. It may be effective in such cases to separate discussion of *what* needs to be done from *who* and *how* to do it. This separation of policy development from discussion on who is responsible and how it will be funded, may avoid issues that make it difficult to come to any national consensus.
124. A budget for implementation of a National Wetland Policy initiative may only become required once it is to be presented to the Government for approval, i.e. after consultations on what needs to be done are completed. The resourcing aspects of such a National Wetland Policy are then best presented in a single section, rather than throughout the document. A “resource needs assessment” made at the outset may need updating during the life of the Policy, so detailed costings may not be appropriate in the document itself.
125. An “Action Plan” may be a suitable vehicle. Typically, this will involve a list of actions to deliver the objectives and goals of the Policy with measurable timelines. When budgeted staff and financial resources are added this can be considered a “Work Plan” (see Section 4.8 below). It might be organized under the titles of the adopted implementation strategies.
126. Much of the Policy will be delivered across a variety of sectors and activities that are already provided for - that is, where the specific wetland-related components may be difficult or impossible to isolate. For this point, it is

Case Study 4

Wetland policies within a federal state

Bill Phillips, formerly with Environment Australia [and the Ramsar Convention Secretariat]

In countries with a federal system of government, the development of appropriate policy instruments designed to ensure the conservation and wise use of wetlands is especially challenging. In Australia's case, as with most federal states, it is the provincial governments that have the day-to-day legislative responsibilities for the management of land and water resources. Thus, when Australia decided to follow the guidance of the Convention on Wetlands and develop a national approach to wetland policy, it needed to ensure that all State and Territory jurisdictions, as well as the Commonwealth (National) Government were involved.

When Australia's national government launched its *Wetlands Policy of the Commonwealth Government of Australia* on World Wetlands Day in 1997, one (out of eight) provincial jurisdictions already had a similar policy in place; namely, New South Wales. The Federal Government's wetland policy includes among its six strategies one entitled "Working in Partnership with State/Territory and Local Governments" and under this a priority is to "work co-operatively and in partnership with the State/Territory Governments to assist them with their development of wetland policies or strategies for their jurisdictions."

From this time on, the Australian Government has encouraged and supported the state and territorial jurisdictions to prepare wetland policies complementary to that of the national government. In late 1997, the Government of Western Australia adopted a state wetland policy. The Government of Victoria has adopted a state-wide Biodiversity Strategy which incorporates a specific section on wetlands. Four other jurisdictions are at different stages in the preparation of policies also — the Northern Territory and the states of Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. This leaves only the Australian Capital Territory to follow the lead of the national government and the other seven jurisdictions*.

There are a number of lessons to learn from this Australian case. It was important for the Commonwealth Government to show leadership to the provincial governments by enacting its own wetland policy. This Policy served as a model in terms of the broad coverage of issues it addressed. Equally important was that the Commonwealth Government consulted the provincial governments throughout the development of its own policy. This was recognized in the text relating to working in partnership with these jurisdictions.

Once the Commonwealth's Wetland Policy was adopted, the process for encouraging the other jurisdictions to develop their own has been achieved partly through political and partly through financial means. Australia has a Council of Environment Ministers wherein the Commonwealth Government and those of the provincial governments meet regularly to discuss and agree on collaborative actions. The development of a complementary framework of wetland policies has gained the support of this forum. A Task Force dealing with the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands is charged with working towards an agreed national approach.

The Commonwealth Government has also established a major biodiversity conservation and natural resource management funding programme (the Natural Heritage Trust). Through this programme, it is dispersing funds for on-the-ground projects at the community level as well as for priority policy development and other activities by the provincial jurisdictions. Under this programme, the Commonwealth Government is providing financial assistance to all eight provincial governments for suitable wetland projects, including in some cases the

development of their own wetland policies. This cooperative funding approach is helping to accelerate the policy development process. It is also providing the provincial jurisdictions with the much needed resources to enhance their capacity and knowledge base for managing wetlands in a better manner.

[*Update from the Australian National Report to the Ramsar Convention, 2008:

“Wetland policies are in place in individual government jurisdictions across Australia:

- Commonwealth: Commonwealth Wetlands Policy, 1997;
- Queensland: Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Queensland Wetlands, 1999;
- Victoria: Victoria’s Biodiversity Strategy, 1997;
- New South Wales: Wetlands Management Strategy, 1996;
- South Australia: Wetlands Strategy for South Australian, 2003;
- Tasmania: Tasmanian Wetlands Strategy, 2000;
- Western Australia: Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia, 1997;
- Northern Territory: A Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity of the Wetlands of the Northern Territory of Australia, 2000; and
- Australian Capital Territory: Think water , act water - a strategy for sustainable water resources management, 2004.”

[Editor’s note: The main text of this case study has not been updated since the 2nd edition of the Handdbook.]

Australia’s National Wetland Policy can be viewed in HTML on the Ramsar Web site at http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-wurl-policies-national-wetland-21200/main/ramsar/1-31-116-162%5E21200_4000_0__.

important to describe rather than attempt to exhaustively quantify the resources involved. A summary description of what new resources may be needed to give effect to the Policy will thus be useful. A statement should also be provided of what type of resource savings might be expected from effective implementation of the Policy.

4.4 Legislative requirements

127. One of the components of the Wise Use Concept of the Convention is that Contracting Parties review legislation that has negative impacts on wetlands as well as develop, where appropriate, new legislation to promote wetland wise use and protection. This is a crucial step and can involve a complex series of studies to evaluate and propose alternatives to existing programmes, policies and legislation that involve disincentives to conservation practices and negatively affect wetlands.
128. To assist in the review and development of national legislation supporting wetland conservation, the Convention on Wetlands and IUCN Environmental Law Centre cooperated in the production of Resolution VII.7 on *Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands* and its associated Annex, which were adopted at the Convention’s COP7 in May 1999 [also available in Handbook 3]. These documents followed an international workshop, convened in July 1998, entitled *Designating Methodologies to Review Laws and Institutions Relevant to Wetlands* in which a group of national case studies from Australia, Canada,

Case Study 5

Review of sectoral policies and legislation related to wetlands

Paul Mafabi, National Wetlands Program, Government of Uganda

There are often several policies that affect the management of wetlands either directly or indirectly. Wetland conservation and management is a shared responsibility of many institutions and organizations. The development of a National Wetland Policy should, as a matter of necessity, take into account the successes, failures and relevance of these sectoral policies in order to avoid duplication. Similarly, National Wetland Policies should consider existing legislation that is relevant to wetlands to ensure that new policies do not conflict with the existing legislation.

This review of existing policies and legislation can be helped by the establishment of an Interministerial Committee to guide the policy formulation process and ensure that issues relevant to the various Ministries and their institutions are properly articulated and integrated into the National Wetland Policy.

In Uganda's case, a series of studies were commissioned to specifically review existing legislation. These studies identified that there was almost no legislation in Uganda directly related to wetlands as an entity. However, there was reference to swamps (only one type of wetland) in the *Public Lands Act* and *Public Health Act*. The studies also noted that the enforcement of these laws was not sufficient to guarantee wetland conservation. The studies proved to be very crucial in the preparation of the initial draft of the Uganda National Wetland Policy.

Legislation, while in itself not sufficient, does serve as a good backing for specific policy. The inclusion of wetland issues in sectoral legislation is only relevant in as far as it relates to those sectors and may not reflect the cross-sectoral nature of wetlands. Putting legislation ahead of, or in the place of, wetland policy could have negative connotations. This is because legislation, in Uganda's case, was in the past often designed to restrict human activities but included few or no incentives for wetland conservation.

Legislative review is also important as it helps to identify the negative aspects of policies affecting wetlands and those actions that need to be taken to modify such legislation. This can ensure that new laws do not conflict with laws in place or make them unworkable. The review further helps to identify the mandate of institutions with responsibilities for wetland management.

Once the Policy was adopted in Uganda, it was felt that it would be imperative that legislation be put in place to support the implementation of this Policy. It was recognized that this legislation could take the form of a separate law, such as an Act of Parliament, or be a part of an umbrella of environmental legislation, regulations and bylaws. In Uganda, the Cabinet approved guidelines for the preparation of legislation to enforce the National Wetland Policy. At the same time, the Government was formulating a National Environmental Policy. As a result, provisions for wetland protection were incorporated into the *National Environment Statute*. This is to be followed by detailed regulations at the national level and appropriate ordinances and bylaws at the district and local levels respectively.

[Editor's note: This case study has not been updated since the first edition of the Handbook.]

Uganda's National Wetland Policy can be viewed in HTML on the Ramsar Web site at http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-wurl-policies-national-wetland-21174/main/ramsar/1-31-116-162%5E21174_4000_0__.

Case Study 6

Compliance strategies

**Roberta Chew, Department of State, and Gilberto Cintron, Fish and Wildlife Service,
Government of the United States of America**

In the United States of America, almost half of the estimated 89 million hectares of wetlands that once covered the area of the lower 48 states has been lost since the 1700s. Although the rate of loss has been dramatically reduced in recent years, the United States continues to sustain a net loss of approximately 40,000 hectares of wetlands every year. Our approach to wetlands has evolved over the years through a patchwork of laws granting authority to various federal agencies that regulate private and governmental actions with regards to lands that include wetlands.

Over 25 federal statutes relating to wetlands have been enacted since 1899. The first was the *Rivers and Harbors Act* of 1899 which required permits from the Army Corps of Engineers for dredge, fill and other activities that could obstruct navigable waterways, including wetlands. In general, these laws cover (1) regulation of activities undertaken in areas designated as wetlands; (2) acquisition of wetlands through purchase or protective easements that prevent certain activities, such as draining and filling; (3) restoration of damaged wetlands or the creation of new wetlands; and (4) disincentives to altering wetlands or incentives to protect them in their natural states.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the numerous laws and involvement by 36 federal agencies, it was not until the late 1970s that efforts were made to better coordinate the federal effort on wetlands. President Carter issued two Executive Orders to direct the federal agencies to take action. The first Executive Order directs these agencies to minimize the destruction of wetlands, to preserve and enhance the benefits of wetlands in carrying out their responsibilities in acquiring and disposing of federal land, to avoid aiding new construction in wetland areas, and guides them in their conduct of programmes that affect land use, including water and related land resources planning, regulating and licensing activities. The second Executive Order focuses on floodplain management.

In 1989, President Bush established the national goal of “no net loss of wetlands”. He also established the first Inter-Agency Task Force on Wetlands under the Domestic Policy Council’s Working Group on Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources to examine ways to achieve no net loss of wetlands as a national goal. The Task Force’s mandate was to: (1) provide clear direction to federal agencies for strengthening, implementing and enforcing wetlands protection, maintenance, and restoration, (2) coordinate agencies’ involvement in achieving the no net loss goal, and (3) assess implementation of the no net loss goal by federal, state, and local governments to determine what further steps might be necessary. In 1993, the Clinton Administration issued a wetlands plan which stated the interim goal of no overall net loss of the nation’s remaining wetlands and a long-term goal of increasing the quality and quantity of the nation’s wetlands. In the *Clean Water Action Plan* of 1998, the Administration announced a strategy to achieve a net gain of up to 40,000 hectares of wetlands each year, beginning in the year 2005. Currently, the Interagency Working Group on Federal Wetlands Policy (White House Wetlands Working Group) focuses on concerns about federal wetlands policy. The Working Group is committed to reducing the federal government’s reliance on the regulatory programme as the primary means to protect wetlands resources and to accomplishing long-term wetland gains by emphasizing non-regulatory programmes. In June 1998, an Executive Order directed the federal agencies to utilize their programmes and activities to protect the nation’s coral reefs.

Wetland regulation and enforcement will continue to play an important role in the overall wetland strategy of the United States as improvements in programme effectiveness continue to reduce losses. Achieving a net increase in wetlands will require working cooperatively with landowners and communities to encourage and support the restoration and enhancement of wetlands, while at the same time ensuring that the regulatory programme results in no overall net losses. Federal efforts to restore wetlands as well as achieving continued progress in state, tribal, local and private efforts are important parts of the strategy. Strengthening partnerships among federal programmes and non-federal efforts also will be necessary to achieve the net gain goal.

[Editor’s note: This case study has not been updated since the first edition of the Handbook.]

Costa Rica, India, Peru, Uganda and the Wadden Sea Secretariat were presented.

129. In some countries, new wetland legislation is needed or expected; in many African nations for example clearly defined laws and penalties for non-compliance are encouraged. In other nations, new or additional legislation is often felt to be less effective than encouraging non-regulatory solutions with voluntary compliance and land stewardship approaches. Non-government agencies and local organizations can be effective partners in the implementation of these policies. There is no standard rule or formula in this area as legal needs and arrangements vary from country to country. (See Case Studies 5 and 6.)
130. An analysis of compatibilities, synergies and conflicts in legislation and policy (aiming to resolve any conflicts identified) is needed. Wherever possible, existing legal mechanisms can be used and enactment of new legislation considered where necessary. Legislative review also means modifying and repealing legislation and policies of the Government that may be inconsistent or outmoded in terms of the Government's wetland conservation objectives. This is difficult and can be the subject of rivalry by competing interests within the Government system.
131. It is recognized that legislative needs and opportunities will vary from nation to nation, in particular between developed and developing nations with radically different economies and political systems. The introduction of new legislation and successful implementation and enforcement of these can be severe tests of endurance for those involved in making them work.
132. Voluntary action is, in principle, often preferred over compulsory legislatively-driven approaches. However, a basic ability to bring about the right result, even where parties do not volunteer it, must be assured by the provision of last resort enforcement powers.

4.5 Interministerial harmonization

133. Policy should be implemented in consultation and harmony with other (possibly conflicting) government agency priorities and policies. This must be lead by an agency with enough influence and/or authority to make the process work. An Interdepartmental Wetland Policy Committee directly reporting to Cabinet Ministers with senior level representatives (Deputy Minister level for example) may be effective here.
134. There is no simple answer to the question of "what takes precedence?" in the Policy. The responsibilities, mandates or legislative authorities of other agencies may be in conflict with the Government's desired wetland conservation and wise use objectives. In some nations, a central agency is empowered to develop and enforce the Policy, in others it acts in a less formal, advisory capacity. The degree to which any agency leads and reacts is often a function of the strengths and weaknesses of individual arms of the national government and the constitutional powers of such organizations.
135. It is essential, as noted in earlier sections, that all affected Ministers and their agencies be involved early in the development and consultation phases of the National Wetland Policy exercise. An Interdepartmental Wetland Policy Committee has in some cases been effective in advance of, and after,

adoption of the Policy. This Committee can serve to develop consensus on issues, resolve conflicts, and ease implementation procedures between ministries.

136. It should also be recognized that many of the Policy's strategies can be implemented through existing government (and non-government) programmes and agencies in a cooperative manner. This can involve minor reshaping of such programmes. A key aspect of this approach is that it may mean significant reduction in new budgetary measures for the Policy's implementation, through effective use of existing budgets and staff. It can also assist countries in focusing requests for international assistance, with only clear and discrete needs requiring such support.
137. Techniques for reshaping these existing programmes include evaluation of existing priorities, refocusing the direction of specific staff responsibilities and integration of new approaches and technology in a rationale and cautious manner allowing for training of staff. All such means must be conducive to generating the support of the bureaucracy rather than their fear of overload or the unknown.

4.6 Coordination Needs

138. One national body needs to be designated as the lead for implementation with some resources for ongoing expert policy/scientific staff. It would coordinate and/or provide advice, training and interministerial interaction. This ideally should be an agency with resident wetland expertise and institutional experience at the national and international level in wetlands and environmental conservation. In many cases, this will correspond with the nationally designed lead agency for implementation of the nation's obligations under the Convention on Wetlands. (See Case Study 7.)

4.7 Developing an implementation plan

139. An *Implementation Plan* (a "Work Plan") can describe how each strategy is to be achieved, over the short- and long-term, and by whom. If new resources are available, it will define budget and staff needs on a planning horizon appropriate to the nation, e.g. five to ten years. In some cases resources are not supplied so this budget step is not necessary. A strategy requiring implementation of the Policy by the individual agencies within their existing budgets and programmes is then needed.
140. Circumstances will often dictate the best way to present work plans and programmes — for example they might be presented as part of the Policy document itself (e.g. as an annex), or might best be worked into existing instruments of responsible agencies.
141. The key for the National Wetland Policy is to assure delivery of the Government's commitments. This involves providing clarity about who has to do what, by when and to what standard, and where this information is available. Those responsible for this "delivery assurance function" should, at this stage, test completeness of coverage, i.e. whether every action indicated by the Policy can actually be found in the Implementation Plan and take steps to fill any gaps. Phasing and sequencing of actions should be made

clear where relevant. Work plans should (at some level) indicate what has to happen if actions are not delivered as planned.

4.8 Training

142. Implementation of training for wetland managers on environmental impact assessment or planning staff on the scope of the Policy, and training on wetlands in general, are essential to the success of wetland policy implementation. This should not be thought of as optional: as well as being good sense, promotion of training in wetland research, management and wardening is an obligation under Article 4.5 of the Ramsar Convention.
143. There are many examples of wetland training initiatives. These include numerous regional and national courses and workshops organized by various agencies. For example, the Japanese Foreign Aid Agency (JICA) set up a national training course on wetland conservation and migratory birds in 1994 for an initial five-year period. The International Course on Wetland Management [was] run by the Wetland Advisory and Training Centre in Lelystad, The Netherlands [from 1994-2004 and provided] a six-week comprehensive programme each year. [. . .]
144. Few nations have developed a specific implementation guide and training course geared to a National Wetland Policy or Strategy. One example is the *Implementation Guide for Federal Land Managers* (Lynch Stewart *et al.* 1996). The Government of Canada and its partner agency, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada), are implementing a course entitled *Working with Wetlands*. It has been presented in several formats tailored to federal government agencies in Canada. The course is marketed to groups of a least 20 managers and includes lectures, case studies and field visits to wetlands. A similar course is under consideration by the Government of Australia. An Implementation Program for the National Wetland Policy has also been established in Uganda.
145. Soon after adoption of a National Wetland Policy, a wetlands training “needs assessment” could be carried out at the national level. This need not be highly detailed in character, but should provide an outline, in terms of issues and centres of delivery, of where the main needs and shortfalls exist. Another aspect worth considering at the national level is an evaluation of training providers. This includes an inventory of resources, courses, institutions and consultants that may be relevant to meeting the needs identified.

4.9 Sharing experience between nations

146. One of the most interesting aspects of the Ramsar Convention is its capacity to foster sharing of experience. In the area of National Wetland Policies, interchange and visits of wetland policy specialists and experts are now occurring internationally. Several of the authors of these Guidelines have shared their experience with nations initiating a National Wetland Policy. For example, Canada has informally provided advice to Malaysia, Australia and several other Ramsar Contracting Parties in their development of National Wetland Policies. Similarly, Australia and Uganda have provided informal advice to Botswana and BirdLife International provided an informal advisor to Trinidad and Tobago.

Case Study 7

Malaysia Wetland Policy: the development and coordination process

Sundari Ramakrishna, Wetlands International Asia-Pacific, Malaysia

Malaysia, a signatory to the Ramsar Convention since 1994, received a grant from the Convention's Small Grants Fund in 1995 to help develop a National Wetland Policy. This is overseen by the Ramsar National Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (MOSTE). Its members include representatives from relevant federal and state government agencies, universities, research organisations, and Wetlands International-Asia Pacific (WIAP).

During the initial phase, many examples of wetland policy from other countries were examined and studied. A Canadian wetland policy expert was invited to Malaysia to give a presentation at the National Ramsar Steering Committee meeting on the development of the Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation based on Canadian experience. Pertinent issues were raised regarding the three types of wetlands ownership: federal, provincial and private. A policy development process and framework were proposed and the Committee agreed to it. A Review Team composed of representatives from Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry, Irrigation and Drainage, Fisheries, Wildlife and National Parks, and Environment as well as the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, the Economic Planning Unit, Attorney General's Chambers, National University of Malaysia, MOSTE and WIAP. The task of the Review Team was to prepare a background paper and policy outline and assist in reviewing this paper as it evolved and took shape.

The background paper was circulated to all key and relevant state and federal agencies in Malaysia. There are 13 states in Malaysia. A National Workshop on the Development of the National Wetland Policy Framework was organised by WIAP and MOSTE in April 1996. The main aim of the workshop was to brainstorm and get feedback from the various stakeholders to improve the background paper. The paper had three sections: (a) Rationale for a Wetland Policy, (b) Goal Statements, and (c) Strategies and Action Plans for each of the proposed strategies. All recommendations arising from the Workshop were incorporated into the background paper. Consultative workshops were then held in several Malaysian States that had been sparsely represented at the National Workshop. The feedback from these discussions were incorporated into the document and it was then further revised by the Review Team.

In July 1997, a Drafting Committee was created to prepare the Policy based on the background paper. The Secretary General of MOSTE appointed the Director of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) to head the Committee. Its members were representatives from FRIM, MOSTE, the Federal Economic Planning Unit, Ministry of Irrigation and Drainage, Ministry of Environment, National University of Malaysia and WIAP. The Committee met five times from July 1997 through May 1998 to formulate the Policy. Thus, the document took shape and was strengthened by members who had experience in the formulation of the National Biodiversity Policy for Malaysia launched in March 1998. In June 1998, the draft Policy was submitted to the Secretary General of MOSTE for review.

On the recommendation by the National Committee, MOSTE was asked to organise one final National Workshop to discuss the draft Policy. WIAP and MOSTE organized this workshop held in November 1998. Prior to this workshop, the draft Policy was distributed to federal government agencies, the various state economic planning units, and NGOs so that they had sufficient time to make comments before attending the workshop. At the workshop there were many comments and suggestions. These focused on the definition of "wetlands"; the rationale for the Policy; functions and benefits of wetlands; major threats to wetlands; administration of wetlands; the legislative framework; goal statements, objectives, guiding principles, strategies and the appropriate action plans; and the glossary of terms. All written comments were requested to be sent to the Secretariat by the end of December 1998.

[4th edition update: In 2003, MOSTE placed the wetland policy document under the larger legal framework of the Malaysian Biodiversity Policy. The wetland policy was launched in 2005, and the next step (subject to funding) is the development of an Implementation Plan.]

Additional information

The Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP)

The **Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP)**, adopted as the Annex to Resolution VIII.17 by the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties, Valencia, Spain, 2002, have not been included as a separate volume in this 4th edition of the Handbooks. The text below, taken from these guidelines, provides the actions relevant to policy and legislative instruments included in the GGAP.

Guidelines for Action

- C1. Contracting Parties should review their present frameworks of national policies, laws and incentive programmes relevant to peatlands utilizing the Ramsar *Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands* (Ramsar Handbook no. 3) so as to identify the main barriers to, and opportunities for, making wise use of peatlands more effective. These measures should be strengthened where peatlands are at significant risk owing to resource development or other pressures.
- C2. Contracting Parties should endeavour to ensure that national legislation and policies relating to peatlands are compatible with other international commitments and obligations.
- C3. Contracting Parties should ensure that the particular importance and requirements of peatland wise use are fully incorporated into national wetland and biodiversity strategies and plans and land use planning instruments, and that national wetland policies developed in line with the guidelines adopted by Ramsar Resolution VII.6 (Ramsar Handbook no. 2) fully incorporate the implementation of the wise use of peatlands.
- C4. Reviews of national networks of peatland protected areas should be undertaken. Where there is a currently incomplete network of peatland sites within a national system of protected areas, as appropriate, the number of peatland reserves, parks or other types of protected peatlands should be increased.
- C5. The conservation of nationally, regionally and globally important and representative peatland types should be further secured through the expansion of the global network of Ramsar sites, applying the *Guidance for identifying and designating peatlands, wet grasslands, mangroves and coral reefs as Wetlands of International Importance* adopted by COP8 (Resolution VIII.11).
- C6. Contracting Parties should, in line with Resolution VII.17, establish policies to implement peatland restoration and rehabilitation, where appropriate seeking the assistance of countries, and the private sector, with knowledge in these fields, utilizing the *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* adopted by COP8 (Resolution VIII.16).

147. Such interchanges have involved short-term invited visits or sabbaticals in some cases, and in others, informal exchanges of documents including confidential advice and review of draft policy text. Suggestions for implementation of consultation workshops, working with non-government groups, meeting with senior government officials, exploring funding mechanisms, and drafting of text have been involved. These have been regarded as helpful and positive initiatives by those involved. To date,

this has been relatively informal, allowing the invited specialists from one Contracting Party to travel to one or several others, acting as short-term consultants and advisors. Hence, experience gained in one nation's development of these Policies is shared and local expertise enhanced. In each case, a significant degree of adaptation is needed to fit local needs and circumstances. The Ramsar Bureau can be of assistance in fostering such exchanges between the Ramsar Convention Contracting Parties.

4.10 Establishing a national monitoring programme

148. A separate but critical element in the implementation of a National Wetland Policy and any related programmes is the establishment of two types of monitoring: (a) wetland health and land use monitoring and (b) programme success monitoring. Both will assist in the targeting of wetland initiatives within the context/rationale of the Policy.
149. Monitoring of wetlands may involve recognition of their changing ecology, i.e. of their flora and fauna, hydrology or chemistry, in response to climate change, pollution and other long-term impacts. Habitat/land use studies on a national or regional scale will permit evaluation of the success of direct conservation initiatives — is wetland loss still occurring and why?
150. Monitoring of the success of the Policy is usually at the programme and institutional level. Are the resources expended on staff time well-targeted, for example? Are the data systems in place providing adequate information to the Government on where and how the programme is working? Are the goals of the Policy being met? The Policy needs to have measures built in for defining if it is working, for self-monitoring and, ultimately, adjustment if needed.

See also Handbooks 13, Inventory, assessment, and monitoring, and 18, managing wetlands

4.11 Bibliography

151. A final piece of the Policy document is a bibliography of references cited in the document. The report could also include a comprehensive annex with references of national or international interest that are selected to enhance the cited literature as additional reading. In all cases, it is helpful to include only those documents that are accessible to the public. Such references are of little use if in some restricted access category or if they are out of print.

V. References

- Lynch-Stewart, P., P. Niece, C. Rubec and I. Kessel-Taylor. 1996. *The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation, Implementation Guide for Federal Land Managers*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa, Canada. 32 p.
- North American Wetlands Conservation Council Canada. 1998. *A Wetland Conservation Vision for Canada*. Booklet. Ottawa, Ontario. 8 p.
- Pritchard, D. 1997. *Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Trinidad and Tobago*. Royal Society for Protection of Birds and BirdLife International. RSPB Sabbatical Report. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom.
- Ramsar Bureau. 1987. *Review of National Reports Submitted by Contracting Parties and Review of the Implementation of the Convention Since the Second Meeting*

of the Conference in Groningen, Netherlands in May 1984. Document C.3.6, Proceedings, Third Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. pp. 231-236. Regina, Canada.

Ramsar Bureau. 1990. *Review of National Reports Submitted by Contracting Parties and Review of the Implementation of the Convention Since the Third Meeting of the Conference in Regina, Canada in May/June 1987.* Document C.4.18, Proceedings, Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. Vol. 3: pp. 351-354. Montreux, Switzerland.

Ramsar Bureau. 1993. *Review of National Reports Submitted by Contracting Parties and Review of the Implementation of the Convention Since the Fourth Meeting of the Conference in Montreux, Switzerland in June/July 1990.* Document C.5.16, Proceedings, Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. Vol. 3: pp. 469-485. Kushiro, Japan.

Ramsar Bureau. 1998a. *Regional Overviews of the Implementation of the Convention since the Sixth Meeting of the Conference in Brisbane, Australia in March 1996.* Proceedings, Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. San José, Costa Rica.

Ramsar Bureau. 1998b. *Directory of Wetland Management Training Opportunities.* First Edition. October 1998. [no longer available]

Ramsar Bureau. 1998c. *National Reports of Contracting Parties* submitted for COP7. Available from Ramsar Web Site [http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-natl-rpts-cop7-national-reports-for-the/main/ramsar/1-31-121-280%5E18708_4000_0__]; also summary papers by Regional Coordinators for Ramsar Standing Committee Meeting, October 1998.

Rubec, C.D.A. 1996. *Status of National Wetland Policy Development in Ramsar Nations.* Proceedings, Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. Vol. 10/12A: pp. 22-29. Brisbane, Australia.

Shine, C. and L. Glowka. 1999. *Guidelines for Reviewing Laws and Institutions to Promote the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands and Reviewing Laws and Institutions to Promote the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands*, by Clare Shine. Ramsar Bureau. IUCN Environmental Law Centre Report to COP7 Ramsar Convention. San José, Costa Rica. {See Ramsar Handbook 3, www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-03.pdf}

Smart, M. 1993. *Summary of Comments in National Reports: Guidelines for the Establishment of National Wetland Policies.* Proceedings, Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. Convention on Wetlands. Vol. 2: pp. 152. Kushiro, Japan.

Appendix 1

Priorities for establishment of wetland policies

A major expectation under the Convention on Wetlands is implementation of the wise use principle through a National Wetland Policy. National Wetland Policy actions were grouped into five categories in support of the implementation of wise use (as per *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept*, Recommendation 4.10):

Priority Actions for Establishment of National Wetland Policies

1. Actions to improve institutional and organizational arrangements, including:
 - (a) establishment of institutional arrangements which will allow those concerned to identify how wetland conservation can be achieved, and how wetland priorities can be fully integrated into the planning process; and
 - (b) establishment of mechanisms and procedures for incorporating an integrated multidisciplinary approach into planning and execution of projects concerning wetlands and their support systems, in order to secure wetland conservation and sustainable development.
2. Actions to address legislation and government policies, including:
 - (a) review of existing legislation and policies (including subsidies and incentives) which affect wetland conservation;
 - (b) application, where appropriate, of existing legislation and policies of importance for the conservation of wetlands;
 - (c) adoption, as required, of new legislation and policies; and
 - (d) use of development funds for projects which permit conservation and sustainable utilization of wetland resources.
3. Actions to increase knowledge and awareness of wetlands and their values, including:
 - (a) interchange of experience and information on wetland policy, conservation and wise use between countries preparing and or implementing national wetland policies, or pursuing wetland conservation;
 - (b) increasing the awareness and understanding of decision makers and the public of the full benefits and values, within the terms of wise use, of wetlands. Among these benefits and values, which can occur on or off the wetland itself, are:
 - sediment and erosion control,
 - flood control,
 - maintenance of water quality and abatement of pollution,
 - maintenance of surface and underground water supply,
 - support for fisheries, grazing and agriculture,
 - outdoor recreation and education for human society,
 - provision of habitat for wildlife, especially waterbirds, and
 - contribution to climatic stability;
 - (c) review of traditional techniques of wise use, and elaboration of pilot projects which demonstrate wise use of representative wetland types; and

- (d) training of appropriate staff in the disciplines which will assist in implementation of wetland conservation action and policies.
4. Actions to review the status of, and identify priorities for, all wetlands in a national context, including:
- (a) execution of a national inventory of wetlands including classification of the sites;
 - (b) identification and evaluation of the benefits and values of each site (see 3b above);
 - (c) definition of the conservation and management priorities for each site, in accordance with the needs and conditions of each Contracting Party.
5. Actions to address problems at particular wetland sites, including:
- (a) integration, from the outset, of environmental considerations in planning of projects which might affect the wetland (including full assessment of their environmental impact before approval, continuing evaluation during their execution, and full implementation of necessary environmental measures). The planning, assessment and evaluation should cover projects upstream of the wetland, those in the wetland itself, and other projects which may affect the wetland, and should pay particular attention to maintaining the benefits and values listed in 3b above;
 - (b) regulated utilization of the natural elements of wetland systems such that they are not over-exploited;
 - (c) establishment, implementation and, as necessary, periodic revision of, management plans which involve local people and take account of their requirements;
 - (d) designation for the Ramsar List of wetlands identified as being of international importance;
 - (e) establishment of nature reserves at wetlands, whether or not they are included in the List; and
 - (f) serious consideration of restoration of wetlands whose benefits and values have been diminished or degraded.

Appendix 2

Recommendation 6.9

(adopted by the 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties, Brisbane, Australia, 1996)

Framework For National Wetland Policy Development And Implementation

1. RECALLING Recommendation 4.10, which calls on Contracting Parties to formulate National Wetland Policies as an important step toward facilitating conservation and wise use of wetlands and the implementation of the Wise Use Guidelines of the Convention, thus reconfirming that “the wise use concept extends to all phases of wetland conservation, including policy development, planning, legal and educational activities, and site specific actions”;
2. NOTING that Recommendation 4.10 calls on all Contracting Parties to work towards the formulation of comprehensive national policies in the long term and that such policies be formulated in whatever manner is appropriate to their national institutions;
3. MINDFUL of the direction by the Ramsar Standing Committee to the organizers of Technical Session A at the present meeting to foster: (a) Guidelines that will accelerate the formulation and implementation of such National Wetland Policies; and (b) Guidelines that will promote stronger links between National Wetland Policies and the wise use of wetlands on the one hand with regional planning, especially in coastal zones, on the other hand; and
4. RECOGNIZING that there are many national models and mechanisms for development and implementation of National Wetland Policies, and that dissemination of knowledge of national experience in this area would be of significant value to many Contracting Parties considering the development of wetland policy and to the Convention in the implementation of its Strategic Plan 1997-2002;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

5. RECOGNIZES that there is a need for the production of a framework for development and implementation of National Wetland Policies, for use by Contracting Parties which as yet have no policy of this kind, and including examples and illustrations;
6. CALLS on the Ramsar Bureau to produce a report including such a framework and, in addition, an analysis of the status of wetland policies world-wide, together with examples of national processes and considerations for the consultation on, and writing and implementation of, National Wetland Policies within a range of national political and constitutional situations and with respect to National Biodiversity or Conservation Action Plans or Policies;
7. URGES Contracting Parties to provide summary information and copies of relevant National Wetland Policy documents to the Ramsar Bureau, as source materials for the preparation of this framework;
8. FURTHER URGES Contracting Parties with experience in development and implementation of National Wetland Policies to share staff time and expertise with other Ramsar Parties initiating such a policy; and
9. REQUESTS the Ramsar Bureau to coordinate the publication of the report, in cooperation with those partners that may offer to lead or participate in its production and provide resources for this purpose.

Appendix 3:

Summary of National Wetland Policies and Action Plans/Strategies by Ramsar Contracting Party or Region

[Editor's note: This Appendix in the original guidelines annexed to Resolution VII.6 gave an initial list of national wetland policy documents in existence, by Contracting Party or Region, at the time of the Resolution (1999). The information presented has become considerably out of date and has been excluded from this 4th edition of the Handbook. For further information, readers are referred to the regional overviews of the implementation of the Convention presented at COPs 8, 9 and 10 and available on the Ramsar Web site at www.ramsar.org/cop8-docs, www.ramsar.org/cop9-docs, and www.ramsar.org/cop10-docs.]



Meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention offer the Parties opportunities to compare notes on the development of their National Wetland Policies, as here at Ramsar COP9 in Kampala, Uganda, November 2005. *Photo: D. Peck.*

Relevant Resolution

Resolution VII.6

(adopted by the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties, San José, Costa Rica, 1999)

Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies

1. RECALLING Article 3.1 of the Convention, which states that Contracting Parties “shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory”;
2. FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation 4.10 and Resolution 5.6, and their annexes, which provide *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* and *Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept* respectively, and, in particular, urged Contracting Parties to develop and apply National Wetland Policies as an important step towards achieving the wise use of wetlands;
3. AWARE that Recommendation 6.9 called for the production of a framework for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies and an analysis of the status of wetland policies worldwide;
4. ALSO AWARE that Operational Objective 2.1, Action 2.1.2, of the Strategic Plan 1997-2002 urged Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Bureau, and Partner Organizations to “promote much greater efforts to develop national wetland policies, either separately or as a clearly identifiable component of other national conservation planning initiatives”;
5. NOTING WITH PLEASURE the advice given in the National Reports to this Conference of the Contracting Parties that 77 Parties have National Wetland Policies or Strategies in place or under development;
6. FURTHER NOTING that Technical Session II of this Conference, on National Planning for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use, had presented to it and considered in detail the annex to this decision entitled *Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies*;
7. RECOGNIZING that the development of policies and related initiatives may require efforts to build capacity where human, technical and financial resources need to be augmented; and
8. EXPRESSING ITS THANKS to the authors of the annex to this Resolution for providing their combined advice, based on experience, so that Contracting Parties preparing or considering the preparation of such Policies can finalise or undertake the task with improved efficiency and effectiveness;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

9. ADOPTS as guidance for the Contracting Parties the annex to this Resolution entitled *Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies* and URGES those Parties that have yet to develop such Policies to give this activity their highest attention;
10. URGES Contracting Parties to note and apply with equal vigour the related guidance provided as an annex to Resolution VII.7, *Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands*, aware of the close relationship between policy instruments and legislation;
11. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to recognise the benefits of incorporating into National Wetland Policies appropriate measures to ensure that wetland restoration is given priority

consideration in the administration of programmes and government expenditure, and in the promotion of local actions to rehabilitate degraded wetlands;

12. ALSO ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to integrate into their National Wetland Policies, wherever possible, the elements of the other guidance adopted under the Convention such the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* (Recommendation 4.10) and *Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept* (Resolution 5.6), the *Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands* (Resolution 5.7), the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19), and the Convention's Outreach Programme (Resolution VII.9), having regard also to Resolutions VII.16 on impact assessment and VII.15 on incentives; and
13. FURTHER URGES, in accordance with the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19), Contracting Parties with experience in the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies to promote opportunities for the sharing of this knowledge and experience with other Ramsar Parties initiating such a process.

The Ramsar Convention 'toolkit' for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, 4th ed. (2010)

Convention pillar 1: Wise Use

Handbook 1	Wise use of wetlands Concepts and approaches for the wise use of wetlands
Handbook 2	National Wetland Policies Developing and implementing National Wetland Policies
Handbook 3	Laws and institutions Reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands
Handbook 4	Avian influenza and wetlands Guidance on control of and responses to highly pathogenic avian influenza
Handbook 5	Partnerships Key partnerships for implementation of the Ramsar Convention
Handbook 6	Wetland CEPA The Convention's Programme on communication, education, participation, and public awareness (CEPA) 2009-2015
Handbook 7	Participatory skills Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands
Handbook 8	Water-related guidance An Integrated Framework for the Convention's water-related guidance
Handbook 9	River basin management Integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management
Handbook 10	Water allocation and management Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands
Handbook 11	Managing groundwater Managing groundwater to maintain wetland ecological character
Handbook 12	Coastal management Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management
Handbook 13	Inventory, assessment, and monitoring An Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment, and monitoring
Handbook 14	Data and information needs A Framework for Ramsar data and information needs
Handbook 15	Wetland inventory A Ramsar framework for wetland inventory and ecological character description
Handbook 16	Impact assessment Guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment

Convention pillar 2: Ramsar sites designation and management

Handbook 17	Designating Ramsar Sites Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance
Handbook 18	Managing wetlands Frameworks for managing Ramsar Sites and other wetlands
Handbook 19	Addressing change in wetland ecological character

Convention pillar 3: International cooperation

Handbook 20	International cooperation Guidelines and other support for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
-------------	--

Companion document

Handbook 21	The Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan 2009-2015 Goals, strategies, and expectations for the Ramsar Convention's implementation for the period 2009 to 2015
-------------	---

Ramsar
Handbooks
4th edition

Handbook 2

National Wetland Policies



Ramsar Convention Secretariat
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 999 0170
E-mail: ramsar@ramsar.org
Web: <http://www.ramsar.org>

