

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**11th Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel
Gland, Switzerland, 8-11 April 2003**

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Agenda item 6.2 i)

Background materials concerning agriculture

1. Attached to this note is COP8 Resolution VIII.34 on *Agriculture, wetlands and water resource management*.
2. This provides background for the high priority cross-cutting task and other tasks requested of the Panel for 2003-2005 on this issue.
3. The STRP is requested to familiarize itself with the contents of these materials, as the basis for preparing its Work Plan activities on these matters.

"Wetlands: water, life, and culture"
8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002

Resolution VIII.34

Agriculture, wetlands and water resource management

1. RECOGNIZING that agriculture, whether large- or small-scale, shifting or permanent, extensive or intensive, commercial or subsistence, including crop production, animal breeding, pastoralism, horticulture, and plantation, is an essential activity for human survival and food security at local, national and global levels, and for sustaining livelihoods;
2. ALSO RECOGNIZING that in many parts of the world, agricultural activity has been responsible for creating distinctive and characteristic landscapes, including wetland ecosystems;
3. FURTHER RECOGNIZING that agriculture is also a major form of land use and that river valleys, floodplains, and coastal lowlands in particular have frequently been used for agriculture because of their natural suitability and the demands of agriculture for flat, fertile land and a ready supply of fresh water, and that therefore there is a high priority to ensuring that agricultural practices are compatible with wetland conservation objectives;
4. AWARE that wetlands can play important roles in relation to agriculture, such as abating the effects of storm and flood events, thus helping to protect both habitation and agricultural land, contributing to the replenishment of aquifers that are the source of water for irrigation, and constituting the habitat of wild relatives of cultivated crops and grasses;
5. NOTING the high dependence of local communities on wetland resources, particularly in developing countries and notably in terms of small-scale subsistence agriculture, domestic water supply, and other uses that may contribute directly to poverty alleviation;
6. ALSO NOTING that the poor, in particular women, often depend on wetland resources for their livelihoods and can be severely disadvantaged if wetlands are degraded or lost;
7. CONSCIOUS on the one hand that drainage and intensive cultivation of such areas have led to widespread and continuing wetland loss, and on the other hand that sustainable agriculture supports some important wetland ecosystems;
8. AWARE that agriculture can have impacts on water quantity and quality, and in particular that agriculture is a) a major user of water, and b) in certain cases, a major polluter, for example through pollution of surface and groundwater due to the runoff of fertilizers and plant protection products such as herbicides, fungicides and pesticides; and REALIZING that the precise impacts of agriculture on wetlands and water resources vary within and

between regions, depending upon natural conditions and upon the type of technologies applied;

9. NOTING that uncertainties relating to wetland tenure systems and user rights over wetlands and water resources can have severe negative impacts on sustainable wetland management and in particular on poor communities that depend upon wetlands resources;
10. FURTHER AWARE that economic hardship in many parts of the world is causing people to practice some forms of unsustainable agriculture, resulting in degradation of natural resources, including vegetation, soil and fresh water, and that these phenomena may be exacerbated by the direct or indirect effects of agricultural policies and practices in other parts of the world;
11. CONCERNED that global climate change and accelerated desertification are projected to have major impacts on future patterns of availability and distribution of water, and on the functions and values of wetlands, as well as on agricultural production;
12. CONVINCED that, in conformity with the Ramsar 'wise use' concept (as defined by the Conference of Parties), concerted efforts are required to achieve a mutually beneficial balance between agriculture and the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, and to prevent or minimize the adverse effects from agricultural practices on the health of wetland ecosystems throughout the world, taking into account the precautionary approach as set out in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development;
13. FURTHER CONVINCED of the important role in the area of agriculture and water of United Nations specialized agencies and programmes and relevant international initiatives;
14. AWARE of the Dialogue on Water, Food and the Environment coordinated by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and involving a broad range of international partners;
15. TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the information and guidance contained in the Ramsar Handbooks for the wise use of wetlands, especially the *Guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management* adopted by the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties, as well as the River Basin Initiative being developed jointly by the Secretariats of this Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and Ramsar COP7 Resolutions VII.8 and VII.21, paragraph 15;
16. FURTHER TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the CBD Decision III/11 on Conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity and the multi-year Work Programme in Decision V/5; and TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the relevant sections of the 3rd Joint Work Plan 2002-2006 between the CBD and the Ramsar Convention, in particular Activity 5;
17. REALIZING that the present meeting of the Conference has adopted further guidance relevant to agriculture, wetlands and water resource management, notably the Resolutions on *Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands* (Resolution VIII.1), *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands* (Resolution VIII.14), *The Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VIII.2), *Climate change and wetlands: impacts,*

adaptation and mitigation (Resolution VIII.3), *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* (Resolution VIII.16), and on impact assessment (Resolution VIII.9); and NOTING that the Resolutions on *The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008* (Resolution VIII.25), *Incentive measures as tools for achieving the wise use of wetlands* (Resolution VIII.23), *Guidelines for rendering the use of groundwater compatible with the conservation of wetlands* (Resolution VIII.40), and *Conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources* (Resolution VIII.32) are relevant for the preparation of guidelines on agriculture, wetlands and water resource management; and

18. AFFIRMING that this Resolution is intended to focus specifically on the relationship between agriculture and wetlands and is not in any way intended to be used to support agricultural policies that are inconsistent with trade-related agreements;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

19. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to ensure that management plans for Ramsar sites and other wetlands are developed within wider integrated catchment management approaches which duly acknowledge the need for appropriate implementation of agricultural practices and policies that are compatible with wetland conservation and sustainable use goals, and URGES Parties to identify and enhance positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, including sustainable agricultural systems related to these wetlands;
20. FURTHER URGES the Contracting Parties when reviewing land tenure policies to consider, where appropriate, wetland tenure systems and user rights in a manner that promotes fair, transparent and sustainable management of wetlands and their resources;
21. URGES Contracting Parties, when reviewing their agricultural policies, to identify possible subsidies or incentives that may be having negative impacts on water resources in general and on wetlands in particular, in their territories and/or elsewhere in the world, consistent with their other international rights and obligations, and to remove or replace them by incentives that would contribute to wetland conservation;
22. INVITES Contracting Parties that have not yet done so to initiate intra- and inter-ministerial dialogues including, as appropriate, institutions represented in Ramsar/ National Wetland Committees where these have been established, with a view to enhancing integration of relevant policies related to the conservation of water resources, wetlands, and biodiversity;
23. REQUESTS Contracting Parties, when implementing this Resolution, to ensure that the activities and support measures indicated in paragraph 21 should not support agricultural policies that are inconsistent with trade-related agreements;
24. INVITES the International Organization Partners (IOPs) to the Convention, in close cooperation with the Ramsar Bureau, to work with other relevant bodies, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), to expand upon current reviews of the-state of knowledge concerning the interactions between agricultural practices and wetland functions and values;

25. REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), working in cooperation with relevant international organizations and drawing on the review requested from the IOPs, to:
 - a) establish a framework for identifying, documenting and disseminating good agriculture-related practice, including site-specific and crop-specific information, and policies that demonstrate sustainable use of wetlands for agriculture; and
 - b) use this framework to develop for consideration at COP9, and possible incorporation into the site-management guidelines annexed to Resolution VIII.14, wetland-type specific management guidelines to
 - enhance the positive role that sustainable agricultural practices may have vis-à-vis the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
 - minimize the adverse impacts of agricultural practices on wetland conservation and sustainable use goals; and
 - include examples based on wetland-type specific needs and priorities that take into account the variety of agricultural systems;
26. INVITES the National STRP Focal Points to provide Contracting Parties' input for the preparation of the review and concise guidelines called for in the preceding paragraph;
27. REQUESTS the Ramsar Bureau, with the support of Contracting Parties and IOPs, to identify agriculture-related management practices developed for areas that include Ramsar sites, to contribute this information to the preparation of the guidelines as requested in paragraph 25 above, and to share it with the Secretariats of CBD and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD);
28. FURTHER REQUESTS the STRP to ensure that adequate consideration of agriculture and wetland issues is incorporated into other relevant areas of work that the STRP may be dealing with, including global climate change, groundwater and its interaction with surface water, toxic chemicals, and desertification, as a contribution in the latter case to the implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation between Ramsar and CCD;
29. FURTHER REQUESTS the Ramsar Bureau to ensure that the corresponding information generated by the implementation of this resolution, once approved at COP9, will be incorporated in future updates of the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks and to work closely with the CBD Secretariat to incorporate appropriate joint actions derived from the content of this Resolution in the next review of their Joint Work Plan;
30. FURTHER REQUESTS the Secretary General to seek Ramsar representation in the Dialogue on Water, Food and the Environment and to build on existing links with that Dialogue's secretariat; and
31. INVITES Contracting Parties, IOPs, STRP members and National Focal Points, and others to contribute information on wetlands and agriculture to the Wise Use Resource Centre maintained by the Ramsar Bureau, to the activities of the River Basin Initiative and

to the Dialogue on Water, Food and Environment and future meetings of the World Water Forum.