



National Wetlands Policy workshop in Botswana

2 December 1997

Botswana

"Towards a National Policy on Wetlands" Conference

convened by the National Conservation Strategy Agency (NCSA), Botswana

Maun, Botswana, 24-26 November 1997

The Conference was opened by the current Vice-President of Botswana, the Hon. F G Mogae (it was announced the following day that he is to become the President in April 1998), who gave a strong commitment to the concept of a National Wetlands Policy. The keynote paper given by the Deputy Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, Bill Phillips, was well received, as was a paper by Mr Robert Wabunoha of the National Environment Management Authority of Uganda. Both papers highlighted the experiences of other countries in formulating wetland policies; copies of these are available from the Bureau.

Overall, the Conference was very successful in terms of planning out the process for Botswana to move towards adopting a National Wetland Policy and in terms of identifying the issues now to be addressed through an "Issues Paper". It is hoped that the latter can be prepared by a consultant using funds allocated recently by UNDP to the NCSA for the purposes of developing a National Wetland Policy.

Through the workshop the framework for the Policy was clarified, with good progress being made on describing the Mission and the Guiding Principles. The Wetlands Coordinating Committee recommended the use of the Ramsar definition for "wetlands", and this was not a point of contention.

A further recommendation from the meeting will be that the current ad hoc Wetlands Coordinating Committee (WCC) should be reviewed to ensure that the membership and Terms of Reference are appropriate for it becoming the National Wetlands Committee. The Conference will recommend that the Committee be given official status by the Government.

It is also notable that at present the UNDP is supporting an inventory of wetlands in Botswana and a report of the findings for part of the country is soon to be available. It is expected that this will also identify and recommend other possible Ramsar sites.

A major issue of concern which kept emerging during the Conference was the continuing threat to the water supply of the Okavango Delta Ramsar site from upstream diversions in Namibia. The Conference was given information about the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM), which has as its stated purpose to prepare "an Integrated Basin Management Plan".

-- reported by Bill Phillips, Ramsar Bureau

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