



"People and Wetlands: The Vital Link"
**7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971),
San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999**

**Technical Session II:
National Planning for wetland conservation and wise use
Paper 1**

**Taking a more systematic approach to identifying Wetlands of
International Importance¹**

Background

1. The 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties requested that the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) undertake a number of review actions with respect to the Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance (Resolution VI.3 and Operational Objective 6.2 of the Strategic Plan 1997-2002). Accordingly, at its 19th meeting, the Standing Committee approved the 1996-1999 Work Programme for the STRP which included activities under 12 work themes, one of which was a review of the Criteria.
2. At the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee in 1997, the STRP reported on its consideration of the issue of developing new Criteria to reflect so-called "cultural values and/or benefits derived from wetlands" (Resolution VI.3). The STRP also provided a preliminary report on their work to reorganize the existing Criteria into more logical thematic groupings. The STRP was instructed by the Standing Committee to continue its work on re-grouping and to revisit the matter of human use/value/benefit Criteria with the involvement of some experts in the social sciences field.
3. At the STRP's 7th meeting, in April 1998, two experts in the social sciences field were present and the Panel again reviewed the issue of developing "human use" Criteria. The STRP members' conclusion was the same as at the previous meeting of the Panel, that "human use" values of wetlands were better addressed in the context of the Guidelines for Wise Use than through the development of specific new Criteria. At this same meeting the STRP reviewed the work on re-grouping as well as the language of the present Criteria. In addition to finalising the re-grouping, the STRP concluded that the Criteria would benefit from being modernised and by the removal of some of the areas of ambiguity arising from the language. Therefore, appended to the minutes of the STRP's 7th meeting were its proposed revised Criteria presented in two groupings. These revised Criteria were endorsed by the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee in October 1998 for transmission to and consideration at COP7.

¹ See also the associated draft resolution, Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.11.

4. Running parallel to the STRP's work on the Criteria, the Bureau responded to the suggestion made by Canada at the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee that a "vision" be developed for the Ramsar List. This evolved to the point where a number of individuals from Ramsar Administrative Authorities, the Convention's Partner Organizations, and the Bureau prepared revised guidelines to complement the re-arranged Criteria and at the same time developed a vision statement, objectives, and long and short-term targets for the List, as well as a comprehensive glossary of terms. Together these are designed to provide Contracting Parties with a clear understanding of the long-term goals in terms of applying each of the Criteria in a more strategic way. General guidelines have also been prepared to assist Contracting Parties with developing and implementing a comprehensive, scientifically-based strategy for identifying priority sites for designation.
5. During the second half of 1998, several drafts of the so-called Strategic framework document were circulated to interested Contracting Parties and the Convention's Partner Organizations. In December 1998, a further draft was circulated to officials within the Administrative Authorities of the following Contracting Parties within each region in order to seek informal reactions and comments before finalising it for consideration at COP7: Australia, Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Hungary, Islamic Republic of Iran, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, People's Republic of China, Slovenia, South Africa and the United Kingdom. A number of these Contracting Parties provided comments which were taken into consideration in the preparation of Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.11.
6. At COP7, the paper Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.11: "Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance" will be presented in Technical Session II: *National Planning for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use* in recognition of its relevance to policy and planning actions by each Contracting Party.
7. Assuming COP7 adopts the Strategic framework for the Ramsar List, it is proposed that following the Conference it be prepared by the Bureau as a handbook for widespread distribution within Contracting Parties and among other relevant organizations. The document has been prepared with this in mind – to provide a comprehensive handbook of information to assist with the identification, description and designation of Ramsar sites.