



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

# *The List of Wetlands of International Importance* (“Ramsar List”)

At the time of joining the Convention, each Contracting Party designates at least one site for inclusion in the **List of Wetlands of International Importance** (the “Ramsar List”). The addition of a site to the Ramsar List confers upon it the prestige of international recognition and expresses the government’s commitment to take all steps necessary to ensure the maintenance of the ecological character of the site. While inscription on the Ramsar List acknowledges the international importance of the site, Article 2.3 of the Convention established that “the inclusion of a wetland in the List does not prejudice the exclusive sovereign rights of the Contracting Party in whose territory the wetland is situated.”

Following accession, Contracting Parties are expected to designate additional “suitable” wetlands for the List (Article 2.1) or extend the boundaries of those already included. They select wetlands within their territories on the basis of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology, as measured by reference to the Convention’s **Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance**. The information on each listed site is included in the Ramsar Sites Database maintained by Wetlands International under contract with the Ramsar Convention.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (May 1999) adopted a *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)* (Resolution VII.11). The Vision for the List adopted under the framework, as amended by Resolution IX.1 Annex B (2005), is:

**To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/ services.**

In addition, the *Strategic Framework* covers the Ramsar principle of “wise use”; includes guidelines for a systematic approach to identifying priority wetlands for designation under the Convention; and updates the *Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance*, as well as the guidelines for their application and long-term targets. A **Classification System for Wetland Type** has also been developed, by which means the different wetland types within a site can be recorded in the Ramsar Sites Database in a simple and consistent manner.

Wetlands to be added to the Ramsar List must be designated **by the national government**, specifically by the agency within the national government that has been authorized to represent the nation in implementing the Ramsar Convention, i.e., the “Administrative Authority”. Thus, by designating a new Ramsar site, the national government is making a

As of 1 September 2007, the 155 Contracting Parties had designated 1,675 sites for the Ramsar List, covering an area of 150.2 million hectares (1,502,000 square kilometres).

commitment to “promote the conservation” of the site. The various Parties have their own procedures for the nomination of potential Ramsar sites within their countries prior to the national decision to designate them, and individuals and NGOs wishing to have wetlands added to the Ramsar List would do well to contact the Administrative Authority in their country at an early stage.

Exceptionally, a Contracting Party may, because of its “**urgent national interests**”, delete or restrict the boundaries of a wetland already included in the List (Article 2.5). The Convention provides, however, that such deletions or restrictions should be compensated for by the designation as a Ramsar site of another wetland with similar habitat values, either in the same area or elsewhere (Article 4.2). In practice, only a handful of boundary restrictions have occurred, and for the only sites ever deleted from the Ramsar List, the “urgent national interests” clause was not invoked – they were three which had been designated prior to the adoption of the Criteria and were then found not to fulfil any of them (three new sites were designated in compensation). Resolutions VIII.20 (2002) and IX.6 (2005) offer guidance on interpretation of these issues.

Sites on the List at which changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur can be placed by the Contracting Party concerned on a special register known as the **Montreux Record**, a list of Ramsar sites requiring priority conservation attention. These sites may benefit from the application of the **Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism**, by which the Ramsar Secretariat organizes technical missions to seek solutions and provide advice to the relevant authorities. **Article 3.2** of the Convention commits the Parties to make themselves aware of potential changes to the ecological character of listed sites and to report these to the Ramsar Secretariat without delay.

Designating a wetland for the Ramsar List does not in itself require the site previously to have been declared a protected area. In fact, listing under the Ramsar Convention, especially in the case of sites subject to intensive use by human communities – either to extract resources or to benefit from the natural functions of the wetland – can provide the necessary protection to ensure its long-term sustainability. This can best be achieved by preparing and implementing an appropriate management plan, with the active participation of all stakeholders.

The **Ramsar List** is arranged alphabetically by member State and shows the site name, date of designation, location, total area, and centre coordinates of each Ramsar site. In addition, the Secretariat publishes an annotated version of the List, including a descriptive paragraph about each Ramsar site – the 420-page printed version (reprinted every three months) is available free of charge from the Secretariat, and the continuously updated texts are also available on the Ramsar Web site, [www.ramsar.org/profile/profile\\_index.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/profile/profile_index.htm). The original **Ramsar Information Sheets** (RISs) submitted by the Parties with each Ramsar site designation, or their most recent updates, can be downloaded for most sites from the Ramsar Sites Information Service ([www.wetlands.org/rsis/](http://www.wetlands.org/rsis/)) maintained by Wetlands International.

**The Ramsar List and its annotated version are available on the Ramsar Web site and in hard copy from the Secretariat. The *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List* is available at [www.ramsar.org/key\\_guide\\_list2006\\_e.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/key_guide_list2006_e.htm) and in Handbook 14 of the Ramsar Toolkit, [www.ramsar.org/lib/lib\\_handbooks2006\\_e14.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/lib/lib_handbooks2006_e14.pdf).**

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