

Technical session V

PRINCIPLES FOR A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF MANGROVE ECOSYSTEMS

Aide-memoire of the meeting of delegates of the Contracting and Non- Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention in the Americas

Merida, Mexico, 12 November 2004

1. Delegates from Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, the Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela, as well as the non-governmental organizations WWF, Centro Ecológico Akumal, RedManglar and Amigos del Manatí, among others, participated in the meeting.
2. The representative of the Ramsar Secretariat, Margarita Astrálaga, explained that the document was prepared by international experts with the support of the World Bank and circulated to the focal points of the scientific committees of all the regions. She pointed out that there was no intention to establish a Ramsar resolution adopting a code of conduct but technical guidelines to support the taking of decisions in countries. In cases in which countries considered it pertinent, they could use the document as a basis for the preparation of national legislation. A presentation was made that had been prepared by Dr J. Eloy Conde of Venezuela, who could not attend the meeting. Ramsar indicated that this document will be discussed in all the preparatory regional meetings for COP9 at Kampala. It was suggested that review of the document be promoted in each country, perhaps within the Ramsar national committees.
3. The delegation of Cuba commented that the document arrived in its English version with very little time to review it and requested more time for review and presentation of comments. Furthermore, it stated that considering the importance that mangroves have in the national forest cover, any document of this kind requires previous national consultation between relevant national authorities to be able to define a national view, even more so because at the first regional workshop Cuba was not represented, and did not participate in the drafting of the document. Other delegations made comments in this same sense. The delegation of Guatemala pointed out the need to review the document at the national level. The delegation of Ecuador indicated that during preparation of the document there was no official participation and that internal consultations were required. The delegation of Jamaica stated that they had begun a process of consultation and that they supported having more time to review it. The delegations of Panama and Saint Lucia stressed the need to have sufficient time to study the document and consult with other countries.
4. The delegation of Brazil indicated that they had reservations about the process that was used to prepare the document because the Ministry for the Environment was not invited

to participate. The delegation of Mexico indicated that the document did not reflect changes that have occurred in that country. The delegation of Venezuela also stressed that they were not officially consulted and that the document did not reflect changes in that country. The delegation of the Bahamas also indicated that the document does not include existing relevant information about the Caribbean. RedManglar stated their disagreement because it had been impossible to consult about the document among the local communities that will be affected by these decisions.

5. The delegation of Brazil emphasized the need to hold more workshops and requested financing for that. The delegation of El Salvador agreed that resources were required in order to create a process of consultation. It was proposed that financial support be sought in order to carry out a programme of consultations at the national level. This request was backed by the delegation of the Dominican Republic, which urged the members of the Caribbean Region to support the request for resources for the consultations. The delegation of Nicaragua emphasized that the review process might lead to rewriting the document for which they must be prepared and that regardless of the availability of financial resources time will be insufficient between now and February to hold consultations at the community level, making it impossible to have a document ready for COP9. The representative of the Ramsar Secretariat stated that she would transmit this request to the World Bank, because the Secretariat does not have resources for that, and that in principle it is hoped that the processes is first carried out through the National Wetlands Committee in each country.
6. Several delegations requested that the current version be rewritten in order to reflect the change in the name of the document throughout the text.
7. It was agreed that the national focal points would circulate the document at the national level, carry out any consultations considered necessary and transmit specific and concrete comments to the Ramsar Secretariat before 28 February 2005. It was suggested that the Secretariat be informed about the dates of the meetings that will be held in each country in order to report on them in the section "What's new" on the Ramsar Web site.
8. The delegation of Ecuador stressed that the document was not a binding code of conduct but technical guidelines and that this should be specifically indicated at the beginning of the document. The delegation expressed concern that if this were not clear international cooperation and international organizations might exert pressure in order to use it as an obligatory framework. This concern was seconded by other delegations. The delegation of Venezuela asked about the role of Ramsar in the preparation of the document and at which level the World Bank intended to approve it. The representative of the Ramsar Secretariat stated that it is not urging preparation and adoption of a binding code of conduct, the Secretariat felt that it was more practical to develop technical guidelines that would be a useful tool for countries in conserving mangroves in accordance with the needs of each country.
9. The delegation of Ecuador indicated that in its current format the document is too complex for adoption as principles of a code of conduct, that it should be available in several languages and that a document of no more than 10 pages would be required. It was suggested that a short version that could be widely distributed was necessary in addition to the current version. The delegation of El Salvador questioned the relevance of using the

term 'code of conduct' and that perhaps it would be better to focus on technical guidelines, however, it stressed that it will be the process of consultation that determines the type of document that is required (e.g., technical guidelines or code of conduct). Finally, the delegation of El Salvador stated that in the case of a code of conduct elements for the private sector and financial institutions should be included.

10. The delegation of Costa Rica suggested including a new principle referring to the development of infrastructure and minimum measures for the prevention and mitigation of impacts.
11. The delegation of the Dominican Republic expressed concern that tourism in the Caribbean is one of the activities that put the greatest pressure on mangroves, although this element is mentioned only briefly in the document. The delegation stated that something should be included on use patterns and consumption and their effects on mangroves and that the agencies for cooperation and financing should also take into account the principles.
12. WWF suggested to include information about experiences on community based management of mangroves under article 8. The delegation of Ecuador suggested that reference is made to the private sector under article 6.
13. The organization Amigos del Manatí stated that the document does not mention that international agencies sometimes support projects that destroy mangroves through construction of infrastructure and investment for tourism and that this question should be dealt with.
14. The organization RedManglar stressed the need for greater action for the efficient protection of mangroves.
15. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the focal points in each country will submit the document to the consideration of the key actors in each country and that they will submit any comments to the Secretariat before 28 February 2005.
16. Margarita Astrálaga thanks all participants for their attendance to the meeting and wish them a safe trip back home.