

**5th European Regional Meeting
on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention**

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Workshop F Introduction

Implementing the vision for the Ramsar List

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Background

The adoption by CoP7 in 1999 of the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance was a major advance for the Convention. The Framework articulates clearly the collective vision of the Convention's Contracting Parties with respect to the objectives of future Ramsar site designation.

The Vision is expressed thus:

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 ecological and hydrological functions they perform.

The Vision is supported by four objectives:

1. To establish national networks of Ramsar sites in each Contracting Party which fully represent the diversity of wetlands and their key ecological and hydrological functions.
2. To contribute to maintaining global biological diversity through the designation and management of appropriate wetland sites.
3. To foster co-operation among Contracting Parties, the Convention's International Organisation Partners, and local stakeholders in the selection, designation and management of Ramsar sites.
4. To use the Ramsar site network as a tool to promote national, supranational/ regional, and international co-operation in relation to complementary environment treaties.

The Workshop

Workshop F gives an opportunity to explore the implementation of the Strategic Vision in Europe, to discuss progress and to consider future challenges. A number of suggested discussion areas are outlined below which follow from the Vision and Objectives themselves, as well as the workshop presentations. Other discussion points will emerge from the presentations!

Establishing national site networks

The Strategic Framework urges Contracting Parties to take a systematic approach to the selection of national networks of wetlands of international importance. There are relatively few examples of recent progress to this end, suggesting that the process may be challenging. However, there will be presentations on recent review projects in Spain¹ and the UK² that have started to more systematically assess national Ramsar networks and to consider their relationship, in these instances, to the *Natura 2000* site series (see also below).

- Do we have a clear understanding of the (habitat and species) content of the Ramsar network at national and European scales as a first step to developing more strategic approaches to site selection (especially for under-represented habitat types and globally threatened species)?
- How best should we represent ecosystem, habitat and species diversity within national (and thus European) Ramsar site networks?
- What are the constraints to undertaking more strategic designation of national Ramsar networks, and for EU countries, how can this process best be integrated with the implementation of the *Natura 2000* series?

Maintenance of biodiversity

Alongside other necessary wider wetland policies, one of the key functions of Ramsar sites is maintenance of biodiversity, not only for its own sake, but as an important aspect of the provision of goods and services to dependant human communities.

In 2002, world leaders at their World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, expressed their desire to achieve “*a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity*” by 2010. The previous year, the Heads of European Union Member States in Göteborg had expressed their intention “*that biodiversity decline should be halted with the aim of reaching this objective by 2010.*” It is clear that the establishment and wise use of the network of Ramsar sites in Europe has a key role to play, a various scales, in the delivery of this target.

The European network has important functions in conserving the range of variation of wetland habitats and communities, both within countries and across Europe as will be demonstrated by presentations on progress to more systematically designate Nordic peatlands as a wetland habitat under-represented in the Ramsar List³. The consequence of this activity is that the European Ramsar site network now has high significance for peatland conservation in Europe⁴.

For migratory species, such as fish, mammals and waterbirds, there is a need to consider the connectivity between Ramsar sites (and other important habitats that are used) in order to sustain all aspects of life cycles (*e.g.* through the establishment of networks of sites along migratory flyways).

¹ Jose Ramon Picatoste Ruggeroni & Carlos Javier Villalba Alonso. Developing synergies between the implementation of European nature conservation Directives and the Ramsar Convention in Spain. Workshop F.

² Colin McLeod. The review of the UK Ramsar site series. Workshop F.

³ Torsten Larsson. The contribution of Nordic Ramsar sites to global peatland conservation. Workshop F.

⁴ Tatiana Minayeva. The relevance of the European Ramsar site network for peatland conservation. Workshop F.

A changing climate will result in stresses for both wetland species and habitats. Are national and European networks of sites robust enough to aid adaptation to these changes?

- What is the role of Ramsar sites in achieving the global (and European Union's) 2010 biodiversity target(s)?
- How can we maximise the connectivity between sites for migratory species and what information is needed to this end?
- How robust is the European Ramsar network in the face of the challenges of climate changes, especially in terms of network adaptability to the movement/change of semi-natural habitats?

Co-operative wetland conservation

Objective 3 of the Strategic Framework urges international co-operation in the selection, designation and management of Ramsar sites. In this context the significant recent successes in trans-boundary (including shared catchment) wetland conservation in several different parts of Europe is notable. It will be valuable to optimise opportunities for future such cross-border collaborative conservation by learning lessons from recent successful projects.

This topic is specifically addressed in Workshop D which deals with issues related to **Shared catchments and wetland ecosystems**.

Working with other international conservations treaties and structures

Within the European Union (EU15) recent analysis by the European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity⁵ has shown that nearly 70% of the area of Ramsar sites designated by the EU15 has also been classified as Special Protection Areas under the Directive on the conservation of wild birds. There is probably further overlap with the EU network of Special Areas of Conservation. The overlap with Ramsar sites of these two international designations varies markedly between countries, although it is more than 50% in 12 countries and more than 85% in eight EU Member States.

In 2002, at Ramsar CoP8, the EU noted that it has a substantial body of binding legislation that already aims to deliver broad outcomes that are compatible with Ramsar aims. Fulfilling obligations under EU legislation was noted as a substantial contribution towards Ramsar objectives: for example not only under the Birds and Habitats Directives but also the Water Framework and other Directives. The EU indicated that it would welcome the opportunity to share information about sites and species collected under EU legislation with the Ramsar Convention and regarded compatibility of definitions, concepts, advice and guidance as important to enable synergistic approaches – an approach compatible with Objective 4 of the Strategic Framework.

For European Contracting Parties outwith the EU, there are similar issues of overlap that arise between other protected areas (for example Emerald network sites under Council of Europe initiatives) and Ramsar sites.

⁵ Ramão, C. 2004. *A data overview of the network of Special Protection Areas in the EU15*. European Environment Agency, Paris, France. 62 pp.

- What positive steps should we be taking to further build such positive co-operation between different designations/treaties?
- How can we integrate Ramsar actions with the *Natura 2000* network in the EU, and Emerald network and other sites beyond the EU?

In The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a Decision on protected areas⁶ and a draft *Action Guide to the [CBD] CoP-7 Programme of Work on Protected Areas* has recently been issued for consultation⁷.

The Decision adopted a programme of work which had “*the objective of the establishment and maintenance by 2010 for terrestrial and by 2012 for marine areas of comprehensive, effectively managed and ecologically representative national and regional system of protected areas*” — an objective closely related to that of Ramsar’s Strategic Framework. Clearly, for those countries which are Contracting Parties both to the Biodiversity and Ramsar Conventions⁸, Ramsar sites will significantly contribute significantly to the CBD objective and the fulfilment of the associated programme of work.

- What is the rôle of the European Ramsar network with respect to implementation of CBD’s programme of work on protected areas?

⁶ CBD Decision VII/28. Protected areas (Articles 8 (a) to (e)).

⁷ www.biodiv.org in the section “What’s New”

⁸ All European Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention in Europe are also Contracting Parties to CBD.