

Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in general,
and of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002 in particular,
during the period since the National Report prepared in 1995
for Ramsar COP6 and 30 June 1998

Contracting Party: Georgia

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority

Full name of the institution: Ministry of Environment of Georgia

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Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 1

To progress towards universal membership of the Convention.

1.1 Describe any actions your government has taken (such as hosting regional or subregional meetings/consultations, working cooperatively with neighbouring countries on transfrontier wetland sites) to encourage others to join the Convention.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 2

To achieve the wise use of wetlands by implementing and further developing the Ramsar Wise Use Guidelines.

2.1 Has a National Wetland Policy/Strategy/Action Plan been developed, or is one being developed or planned for the near future? If so:

The Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) is expected to include wetlands as one of the most sensitive habitats/ecosystems of the country.

The option of preparing a separate wetland strategy will be addressed after the completion of the BSAP, if wetland conservation matters have not been included sufficiently in the BSAP.

a. What are/will be its main features?

b. Was it, or is it, intended that the Policy/Strategy/Action Plan be adopted by the whole of Government, the Minister responsible for Ramsar matters or through some other process. Please describe.

The BSAP will be approved by the Government and may be adopted by the Parliament

c. How does it relate/will it relate to other national environmental/ conservation planning initiatives (e.g., National Environmental Action Plans, National Biodiversity Action Plans, National Conservation Strategies)?

2.2 If a policy is in place, how much progress has been made in its implementation, and what are the major difficulties being encountered in doing so?

2.3 If a Policy/Strategy/Action Plan is in place, is the responsibility for implementing it with :

a. a single Government Ministry,

b. a committee drawn from several Ministries, or

c. a cross-sectoral committee?

Please provide details.

2.4 For countries with Federal systems of Government, are there Wetland Policies/Strategies/Plans in place, being developed or planned for the provincial/state or regional levels of Government? Yes/No

If yes, please give details.

Has a review of legislation and practices which impact on wetlands been carried out, and if so, has this resulted in any changes which assist with implementation of the Ramsar Convention? Please describe these.

A review of legislation has been carried out recently. A new law on water was developed and adopted by the Parliament. (The Law of Georgia on Water, 1997). This law provides the main legal basis for the protection and wise use of water. All waters in Georgia are declared as state property. The Law defines the licensing system for all forms of use of water resources. Special emphasis is made on the values of all types of wetlands. It prevents wetland drainage and obliges land owners and enterprises to prevent water pollution and sets limits of waste water release.

2.6 Describe the efforts made in your country to have wetlands considered in integrated land/water and coastal zone planning and management processes at the following levels:
national

Kolkheti wetlands are the most sensitive area along the Azerbaijan-Georgian oil pipeline which passes through agricultural land that is adjacent to the Kolkheti wetlands Ramsar site. A very detailed EIA has been carried out.

The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (currently in progress) includes the establishment of Kolkheti National Park. The main purpose of this national park is to protect and ensure wise use of wetlands in Central Kolkheti (Ramsar site as of 07/02/97) and it is expected to cover most important parts of the site.

- b. provincial
- c. local

Have there been any publications produced, or practices documented, which could assist other countries to promote and improve the application of the Ramsar Wise Use of Wetlands Guidelines?

No

2.8 Noting COP6 Recommendation 6.14 relating to toxic chemicals and pollution, please advise of the actions taken since then "to remedy and to prevent pollution impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands" (Operative paragraph 9).

According to the new Law on Water, water pollution limits are set by the Ministry of Environment. Land owners are obliged to prevent or minimise the effect of agricultural practices on wetlands and prevent water pollution with fertilisers and chemicals (Law of Georgia on Water, 1997. Article 15).

2.9 Describe what steps have been taken to incorporate wetland economic valuation techniques into natural resource planning and assessment actions.

Is Environmental Impact Assessment for actions potentially impacting on wetlands required under legislation in your country?

Yes

Is wetland restoration and rehabilitation considered a priority in your country?

Yes

The latest draft BSAP describes wetlands as one of the most sensitive habitats/ecosystems of the country and recommends measures for the restoration or rehabilitation of most important or degraded ones. Relevant international donor organisations are being approached for financial support as the Government has no funds to support this type of projects.

2.12 Describe what actions have been taken to “encourage active and informed participation of local communities, including indigenous people, and in particular women, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.” (refer to Actions 2.7.1-4 in the Strategic Plan).

Describe what actions have been taken to “encourage involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands” (refer to Actions 2.8.1-4 in the Strategic Plan). Has this included a review of fiscal measures (taxation arrangements, etc.) to identify and remove disincentives and introduce incentives for wetlands conservation and wise use?

Yes/No

If yes, please provide details.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 3

To raise awareness of wetland values and functions throughout the world and at all levels

Is there a government-run national programme for Education and Public Awareness in your country which focuses on, or includes, wetlands?

No

3.2 Describe the steps taken to have wetlands issues and Ramsar’s Wise Use principles included as part of the curricula of educational institutions. Has this been at all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary and adult)? Please give details.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 4

To reinforce the capacity of institutions in each Contracting Party to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.

4.1 Describe the mechanisms in place, or being introduced, to increase cooperation between the various institutions responsible for actions which can have an impact on the conservation and wise use of wetlands. If one of the mechanisms is a National Ramsar/Wetlands Committee, please describe its composition, functions and modus operandi.

4.2 Of the following, indicate which have been undertaken:

a review to identify the training needs of institutions and individuals concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands

Yes

A review of the Ministerial Regional Office, which is responsible for the supervision over the Kolkheti wetlands, a Ramsar site, showed an urgent need of capacity strengthening especially in terms of special training and equipment including a boat.

b. a review to identify training opportunities for these people both within your country and in other countries.

No

c. the development of training modules or a training programme specifically for wetland managers.

No.

people from your country have gained wetland-related training either within or outside the country.

No.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 5

To ensure the conservation of all sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).

5.1 Of the Ramsar sites in your country, how many have formal management plans:

a. being prepared

5.2 Of the management plans referred to above, which ones have included a monitoring scheme or programme to allow changes in ecological character to be detected? Please indicate this in the attached table of Ramsar sites also.

Has there been a change in the ecological character (either positive or negative) at any of your Ramsar sites or is this likely to occur in the near future?

No

5.4 In the case of Montreux Record Ramsar sites where the Management Guidance Procedure has been applied, what is the status of the implementation of the MGP report recommendations? What is the expected time-frame for removing the site from the Montreux Record?

5.5 For those countries referred to in COP6 Recommendations 6.17.1-4, "Ramsar sites in the Territories of Specific Contracting Parties", please provide advice on the actions that have been taken in response to the issues raised at that time.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 6

To designate for the Ramsar List those wetlands which meet the Convention's criteria, especially wetland types still under-represented in the List and transfrontier wetlands.

Has a national inventory of wetlands been prepared for your country?

No.

If no, are there plans for this to be done?

Yes

Does there exist a list or directory of "important" wetlands for your country or region?

No.

6.3 If it is known, please provide an estimate of the area of wetlands in your country at present and any information on rates of loss or conversion to other activities.

If this information is available, please indicate what definition of “wetland” was used.

6.4 Have any actions been taken in response to the COP6 Resolutions and Recommendations that Contracting Parties should give priority to listing Wetlands of International Importance which:

- a. meet the criteria for fish habitat (Resolution VI.2),
- b. meet the 1% criterion for waterbird populations using data provided by the International Waterfowl Census (Resolution VI.4),
- c. are subterranean karst or cave wetland systems (Resolution VI.5),
- d. are peatland ecosystems (Recommendation 6.1)
- e. are coral reefs and associated systems (Recommendation 6.7)
- f. are under-represented wetland types (which apart from d. and e. above include mangroves and sea grass beds) (Strategic Plan Action 6.2.3)

No

6.5 If your government indicated at COP6 that it would be proceeding to list further specific sites, please advise of the status of this action.

6.6 Please advise which of the sites included in the Ramsar List from your country are transfrontier wetlands (Refer also to 7.1).

6.7 Describe any plans, or actions being taken for further transfrontier sites to be listed (Refer also to 7.1).

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 7

To mobilise international cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.

7.1 Briefly describe any bilateral or multilateral activities that have been taken, are under way, or are planned for the management of transfrontier wetlands or their watersheds/catchments (Refer also to 6.6 and 6.7).

Do you have Ramsar sites that are “twinned” with others, either nationally or internationally?
No.

7.3 Where your country is also a signatory of any of the following Conventions, describe what mechanism(s) exist to assist regular dialogue and cooperative actions between the personnel responsible for their implementation and the Ramsar Administrative Authority:

- a. Convention on Biological Diversity
- b. Framework Convention on Climate Change
- c. Convention to Combat Desertification
- d. Convention on Migratory Species
- e. World Heritage Convention

The Ministry of Environment has been designated as institution responsible for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Framework Convention on Climate Change in addition to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. So all environmental conventions to which Georgia is a party fall under the responsibility of one institution. This facilitates cooperation

and information exchange between the personnel responsible for their implementation. Recently, a new special division, the Conventions Division, has been set up at the Department of Biodiversity (Ministry of Environment). This Division is still in the process of organisation and we are searching for appropriate personnel. It is expected that it will include several sub-units each responsible for the implementation of each biodiversity related convention.

Is your country cooperating as part of any bilateral or multilateral activities directed at the conservation of migratory wetland species?

No

Are there multilateral and/or bilateral donors supporting projects which contribute to implementation of the Ramsar Convention in your country?

Yes

These donors include World Bank and European Union (through TACIS).

Does your government make an annual budgetary allocation to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands within your country?

No

7.7 If your country has a development assistance programme, does it include funds earmarked for wetland conservation and wise use in other countries? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.

7.8 Is there a formal process in place for consultation between the Ramsar Administrative Authority and the development assistance programme in your country, where one exists? Yes/No

If yes, what is that process.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 8

To provide the Convention with the required institutional mechanisms and resources.

Has your government made voluntary financial contributions, other than the invoiced contributions or to the Small Grants Fund, to further the work of the Convention globally?

No

If your country is in arrears with the payment of its annual contributions to the Ramsar Convention, please indicate the reasons for this situation and the prospects for paying these arrears in the near future.

Georgia has so far failed to pay its annual contributions to the Ramsar Convention due to financial difficulties persistent over the few past years. This issue is being currently discussed with the Ministry of Finances of Georgia.

Optional section - Participation of non-government organizations in the implementation of the Convention

These are optional questions relating to cooperation with and involvement of non-government organizations in the implementation of the Convention.

At COP6 some 42 NGOs made the “Brisbane NGO pledge of support for the Ramsar Convention”. The Standing Committee agreed that for COP7 there should be an effort made to gauge the level and type of cooperation which is occurring between government Administrative Authorities and the national and international NGOs with an interest in wetlands issues.

In this optional section of the National Report, you are asked to describe the nature of the cooperation and relationship with any other international, regional, national and provincial NGOs operating within your country.

9.1 Approximately how many NGOs have wetlands as part of their regular “business” in your country?

There are approximately 6 national NGOs.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), UK, and Fauna & Flora International, UK, (FFI) as well as Bird Life International are considering to expand their activities into Georgia.

9.2 Is there a regular forum or mechanism through which these NGOs express their views on wetland conservation and Ramsar implementation:

- a. to each other? No
- b. to the government? No

Does your government include one or more NGO representatives on its official delegation to Ramsar COPs?

No

Unfortunately, this is not possible due to financial problems

Do any of the NGOs run programmes aimed at Education and Public Awareness about wetlands in your country?

Yes

NACRES (Noah's Ark Center for the Recovery of Endangered Species) with financial support of World Bank has been implementing the project: Photo Archive of Georgia's Ramsar Site and Other Wetlands. This project has been approved by the Ministry of Environment of Georgia. It is aiming to creation of a photo archive a copy of which will be submitted to the Ministry of Environment. It intended to use this material for promoting wetland conservation and public awareness, and designation of other Ramsar sites through preparation of relevant publications, organization of exhibitions etc.

Georgia Youth EcoMovement (SAEM), with support and in-kind contribution of the Ministry of Environment of Georgia, as part of their programme “The Establishment of the Black Sea Youth EcoAcademy” (which in turn has been implemented in the framework of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Programme) has been carrying out various public education and awareness raising activities with an emphasis on Kolkheti wetlands. These so far included publication of the brochure “Bell of Alarm on Kolkheti Wetlands”, organising exhibitions, seminars and meetings. Georgian Centre for the Conservation of Wildlife (GCCW) has organised a series of TV programmes on Javakheti wetlands for Channel 2 of the National Broadcasting Corporation. This NGO also publishes newspaper “Khanchali” The name comes from the name of one of the most endangered

lakes in Javakheti, Southwest Georgia. The Khanchali is solely dedicated to Javakheti wetlands and its inhabitants and problems. It is a trilingual publication (Georgian, Armenian and Russian) since the local population in this area, apart from Georgians, includes Armenian and Russian communities. The Khanchali is distributed among the local population in Javakheti free of charge.

9.5 Where they exist, do Ramsar site management advisory committees include NGO representatives? If yes, please give details

9.6 Describe the themes of the Convention (refer to General Objectives 1-8 of the Strategic Plan) where you perceive the national/provincial NGOs to be most active.

These themes include:

Raising public awareness of wetland values and functions in Georgia

Promote international cooperation and fund-raising for various projects and activities

Components of wetland inventory and identification of important wetlands to be possibly included in the Ramsar List.

Final comments:

General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

While fully understanding the importance of the Ramsar Strategic Plan and its implementation the Ministry of Environment of Georgia is not in the position to implement it on a desired level. Financial shortage and lack of relevant human resources are the main factors. Despite recent progress in terms of legislation development, the common problem of law enforcement has hampered greatly the few activities carried out so far to conserve or protect wetlands.

- 10.2 Observations concerning the functioning of, relations with, and services provided by:
- a. The Ramsar Standing Committee
 - b. The Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel
 - c. The Ramsar Bureau
 - d. The Ramsar NGO partners

The Ministry of Environment of Georgia is grateful for the support of the above bodies and information regularly provided by them.

- 10.3 Any other general observations and/or recommendations for the future.

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According to Georgian legislation (Environmental Protection Act 199999) any activity and any development activity requires an Environmental Permit which is issued on the basis of EIA and State Ecological Expertise (SEE)

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