

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: Iceland

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority

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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.

None

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:

A National Wetland Policy has not yet been developed but on the other hand elements of NWP have been integrated into Nature Conservation Policies. A Sustainable Development Action Plan prepared by the Minister for the Environment and submitted by the Icelandic Government along with the Minister's Action Plan for the period 1996-1999 puts emphasis on protection and restoration of wetlands.

a. What are/will be its main features?

Wetland restoration and strengthened protection of wetlands.

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.

It is based on the Nature Conservation Act from 1996 (earlier acts from 1956 and 1970) and concerns all ministries. The implementation is in the hands of the Nature Conservation Agency under the auspices of the Ministry for the Environment.

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)?

At the moment the Ministry for the Environment is preparing a National Biodiversity Action Plan and a National Conservation Strategy in which protection of wetlands and restoration of wetlands will be an integrated part. See also above.

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?

The three Ramsar sites are either protected by special legislation (Act on Conservation of Lake Myvatn and River Laxa) or by governmental regulations based on the Nature Conservation Act. For the Myvatn-Laxa Ramsar site, the Myvatn Research Station and the Nature Conservation Agency are continuously adopting conservation/management policies based on scientific knowledge from monitoring different physical and biotic factor in the area. During the year 1996 a new Ramsar site, Grunnaafjörður was established and an extensive wetland area, the bay Breidafjörður, was protected by a special Act.

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.

Nature Conservation Agency is responsible for the implementation of the Nature Conservation Act under the auspices of the Ministry for the Environment.

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 No

If yes, please give details.

2.5 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.

The Nature Conservation Act is currently under review and an amendment will be introduced for the Althing, the Legislative Assembly, during the autumn of 1998. In the review process a number of amendments are being discussed that will strengthen the implementation of the Ramsar Convention and further protection of wetlands and habitats.

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:

- a. national
- b. provincial
- c. local

2.7 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? Yes/No Yes

If Yes, please provide details and copies.

Scientific publications, mainly in international journals regarding the Myvatn-Laxa Ramsar site (monitoring of physical and biotic factors) as well as population studies and reports and papers in local and international journals regarding vegetation and groundwater levels and changes.

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).

Does not apply, since toxic chemicals are not in use near the Ramsar sites or released into wild nature.

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

2.10 Is Environmental Impact Assessment for actions potentially impacting on wetlands required under legislation in your country? Yes/No

The Environmental Impact Assessment Act does not apply to actions potentially impacting on wetlands but according to a EIA regulation the Minister for the Environment has the authority to decide if certain actions require Environmental Impact Assessment.

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

Yes/No.

Yes, it has been identified as a priority subject by the Minister for the Environment and Agriculture.

If Yes, describe the actions that have been taken to identify wetlands in need of these actions and to mobilise resources for restoration or rehabilitation.

The Minister has established a Committee for restoration of wetlands that has been working for two years, identifying and locating potential wetlands for restoration and restoring a few wetlands.

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).

For the Myvatn-Laxa Ramsar site there is a steering board for the Myvatn Research Station with members from the local authorities and local landowners, the University of Iceland, the Institute of Natural History and Nature Conservation Agency (chairman).

2.13 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. Involvement of farmers and local municipalities, especially in reclaiming disturbed wetlands.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 3

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

3.1 Is there a government-run national programme for Education and Public Awareness in your country which focuses on, or includes, wetlands? Yes/No? If yes, what are the priority actions under this programme and who are the target groups? (Refer also to question 9.4)

It is the responsibility of the Nature Conservation Agency to inform and educate the public on the value of natural protected areas, including wetlands. It is done through publications and nature wardens operating in protected areas during the summer.

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.

No

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.

Management of protected areas is made within the framework of the Nature Conservation Act or special Acts such as the Conservation Act of Lake Myvatn and River Laxa and the Act on the Breidafjörður area. There exists a steering board for the Myvatn Research Station (with participation of scientists and stakeholders) which is advisory to the Nature Conservation Agency regarding the protection of the Myvatn-Laxa Area

For both of the other Ramsar sites the Nature Conservation Agency has advisory committees of stakeholders and local authorities regarding management of the sites. This also applies for the Breidafjörður protected area.

4.2 Of the following, indicate which have been undertaken:

a. a review to identify the training needs of institutions and individuals concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands Yes/No? If yes, please indicate the major findings of the review.

b. a review to identify training opportunities for these people both within your country and in other countries. Yes/No?

c. the development of training modules or a training programme specifically for wetland managers. If yes, please give details.

d. people from your country have gained wetland-related training either within or outside the country. Yes/No? If yes, please give details.

The Nature Conservation Agency runs courses for nature wardens to implement Nature Conservation Policies within protected areas. Scientists, with training skills from several countries are advisory in implementing the policies at the Myvatn-Laxar Ramsar sites.

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?
- b. fully prepared?
- c. being implemented?

According to the Nature Conservation Act adopted in 1996 a management plan is supposed to exist for all the protected areas. Currently, only one management plan has been finished, for the National Park at Jokulsárgljúfur, and an other one for the bay Breidafjörður is about to be finished. Additionally, a special Act and Regulation on the Conservation of Mývatn and Laxá are in force.

Please indicate in the attached table of Ramsar sites which sites these are and what category they fall into.

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.

For the last 20 to 25 years scientist have monitored and surveid fluctuations and changes in biological, chemical and physiological factors in the Lake Mývatn and River Laxá in order to detect and follow changes in the ecological character of the ecosystem.

5.3 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? Yes/No. If Yes, please give details.

All natural ecosystem are subjected to natural fluctuations in different parameters.

Monitoring programme for the Myvatn-Laxa Ramsar site has been operated since the early 70s but there are some indications that the sediment dredging for diatom production may have adverse effect on the benthic communities in Lake Myvatn and from there through the food web.

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.

6.1 Has a national inventory of wetlands been prepared for your country? Yes/No. Yes

If no, are there plans for this to be done? Yes/No.

Where a national inventory exists please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept and what information it contains.

It was made in 1987 and is kept by the Nature Conservation Agency and ICBP (see ICBP Technical report no. 9)

6.2 Does there exist a list or directory of "important" wetlands for your country or region? Yes/No. Yes

If yes, please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept, what criteria for "important" were used, and the types of information it contains. See 6.1

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. Iceland has an area of 103,000 km². Mires and swamps are 8000 km² lakes and river 2800 km². It is estimated that up to 97% of mires in some of the lowland areas have been disturbed, but negligible areas in the highlands. Many of the intertidal mud flats in vicinities of urban areas have been filled up and a few of the fjords have been dammed for road construction. This accounts how ever only for a small proportion of total areas of intertidal mud flats.

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)

Yes/No? If yes, please describe these actions.

No, however, the Nature Conservation Agency is providing local protection to these areas (especially b) for future listing.

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). None

6.7 Describe any plans, or actions being taken for further transfrontier sites to be listed (Refer also to 7.1). Does not apply

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). N/a

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

If yes, please give details.

Myvatn-Laxa is “twinned” with Oxford Island Ramsar site in the Lough Neagh in Ireland, especially regarding exchange of scientific information.

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

Iceland is a signatory to a) Convention on Biological Diversity, b) Framework Convention on Climate Change, c) Convention to Combat Desertification and e) World Heritage Convention.

7.4 Is your country cooperating as part of any bilateral or multilateral activities directed at the conservation of migratory wetland species? Yes/No. Yes

If yes, please provide details.

Research institutions in Iceland (Institute of Natural History) and Britain have cooperated for several years on research, monitoring and tagging of greylag geese *Anser anser* and pink footed geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*.

7.5 Are there multilateral and/or bilateral donors supporting projects which contribute to implementation of the Ramsar Convention in your country? Yes/No. Yes

If yes, please provide details. The WWF has supported the preparation of the Conservation Management Plan for the potential Ramsar site the Breidafjordur area.

7.6 Does your government make an annual budgetary allocation to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands within your country? Yes/No. Yes

If yes, is this a specific allocation to a wetlands programme or as part of a larger environment or natural resource management budget?

Yes, direct budgetary contribution to the Myvatn-Laxa Ramsar site through the Myvatn Research Station and in addition to all Ramsar sites through the budget of the Nature Conservation Agency.

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. No

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 No

If yes, what is that process.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 8

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

8.1 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? Yes/No.

If yes, please provide details.

Yes. The government pays 10 times its annual subscription fee to the Wetland Conservation Fund

8.2 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.

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?

One, the Icelandic Society for Protection of Birds.

Please break this down between international, regional and national/provincial organizations.

National

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? Yes/No

b. to the government? Yes/No, Yes

If yes in either case, please give details.

The NGO's have a direct access to the government and its agencies through the Nature Conservation Assembly

9.3 Does your government include one or more NGO representatives on its official delegation to Ramsar COPs? Yes/No No

9.4 Do any of the NGOs run programmes aimed at Education and Public Awareness about wetlands in your country? Yes/No. If yes, please give details (Refer also to question 3.1).

Yes, the Icelandic Society for Protection of Birds

9.5 Where they exist, do Ramsar site management advisory committees include NGO representatives? If yes, please give details. No

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.

Final comments:

10.1 General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

The Nature Conservation Agency is incorporating the Strategic Plan in its general nature conservation policy, where it had not already implemented the policies.

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

Does not apply

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

Plans are being made to designate Breidafjörður wetland as a Ramsar site, which will make it the most important intertidal flats in Iceland and in Northern Europe. Breidafjörður islands and intertidal zones are protected by the Breidafjörður Conservation Act from 1996.

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National Reports form, page

National Reports form, page