

**National Report of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in advance of the
7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999**

**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: The Kingdom of the Netherlands

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority

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Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries

The Netherlands Antilles

Environment and Nature Section

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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.

The Netherlands is the lead country for the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention). The Netherlands see the Ramsar convention as the main instrument to achieve the goals of the AEWA on habitat conservation in the whole geographical region of the AEWA, which includes almost 120 countries. Since the Final Act on the Agreement was adopted (1995), over 20 countries have signed and eight have ratified. The first meeting of the contracting parties will take place in 1999 in South-Africa.

The Netherlands hosted an international workshop (July 1997) on Inland Water Systems and Biodiversity as a contribution to a workplan on inland waters by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Through the Programme International Nature Management substantial support has been given to a number of countries such as the Baltic Republics, Ukraina, Russian Federation, countries in West Africa, for activities related to the Ramsar Convention and their accession to the Ramsar Convention and AEWA has strongly been promoted.

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 Netherlands

The policy on wetland protection has been described in the national Nature Policy Plan (NBP/1990), already discussed in the National Reports 1990-1992 and 1993-1995. A new document on biodiversity (including the policy concerning national wetlands) will be prepared in 1999/2000. It is most likely that in the years to come three documents: Nature Policy Plan, National Forest Policy Plan and National Plan on Landscapes, will be integrated into a new policy document for nature conservation in the Netherlands e.g. as a major implementation of the Biodiversity Vision, which also will include aspects as agrobiodiversity, biosafety etc. Furthermore a new Species Protection Plan for Marsh Birds has been developed in 1997/1998.

A third important action is the publication of a recent inventory of internationally important wetlands in the Netherlands to be followed by an action plan for designation of new wetland Ramsar sites in the years 1998 and 1999. The Netherlands' support and responsibility for international nature conservation is described in the Programme International Nature Management 1996-2000.

The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

Recently the Parliament of the Netherlands Antilles has adopted the new Nature Management Law in 1998. This is a framework for island nature conservation regulations in general, not only for wetlands. On Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten "Island Nature Policy Plans" are being prepared.

a. What are/will be its main features?

The Netherlands

The above mentioned integration of the three policy plans will in the near future replace the Nature Policy Plan of 1990. Wetland policy, strategy and action will be derived from it; it is not the intention to prepare a specific National Wetlands Policy; we also do not have one for grasslands, deciduous forests, heathlands or any other specific habitat.

The new Species Protection Plan for Marsh Birds can be considered as a kind of Action Plan for wetlands, specifically freshwater marshes. It aims not only at birds, but also at other species groups characteristic for marshes, namely amphibians, dragonflies and some semi-aquatic mammals.

Based on the national inventory of important wetlands an action plan for the designation of about 28 new internationally important wetland sites has been developed. A document concerning the Netherlands' national wetland inventory will be prepared and published during the Meeting of Contracting Parties in Costa Rica. The Programme International Nature Management pays special attention to wetlands (see also annexes with a list of projects).

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 new Integrated Policy Plan as described above will be adopted by the Netherlands' Government as a whole.

The Action plan for Marsh birds will be adopted and implemented by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, i.e. the Minister responsible for Ramsar matters. The action plan concerning the designation of new wetland sites has been adopted by all Ministers, directly involved in the national policy on nature conservation and economic and physical planning.

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).

The policy on wetlands is part of the national Nature Policy Plan.

The goals of the Nature Policy Plan are strongly integrated with and supported by the National Water Management Plan, the National Environmental Policy and the National Spatial Planning Policy Plan and the planning for the rural areas.

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?

As said before, there is not a specific National wetlands Policy, however the Government of the Netherlands has adopted the establishment of a National Ecological Network as the main implementing policy of the Nature Policy Plan. The internationally important wetland areas in the Netherlands are included in this network and may be considered to be the backbone of it.

Part of the policy plan is focused on establishing wetland reserves. Based on a agreement between government and the 12 provinces in the Netherlands, the provinces will complete the formal designation and delineation of the National Ecological Network in 1999. The national ecological network features core areas (including wetlands), nature development areas and ecological corridors. The physical delineation of the network is laid down in the Structure Plan for the Rural Areas. In pursuance of the Structure Plan, the following procedures apply in finalising the delineation of the national ecological network:

- Regional visions at the provincial level provide information about potential core areas (including wetlands) and nature development areas which are currently used for agriculture. Regional visions also form the basis of proposals regarding the size and boundaries of existing nature reserves forests and estates. Final delineation is laid down in regional plans which are a statutory spin-off of the Spatial Planning Act.
- Special procedures are used to delineate core areas and nature development areas in agricultural hands (including bufferzones for wetlands sites). The applicable procedure for the core areas is laid down in a regulation on management agreements and nature development.
- Special provisions apply for large areas of open water in the Netherlands, lakes, rivers and coastal waters. Many belong to the most important wetlands in the Netherlands.

These are realised through regional integrated policy implementation plans in accordance with the principles of the Structure Plan for the Rural Areas. Main themes of these plans are sustainable use (s.a. recreation and fishery), restoring appropriate water quality, restoration of more natural water management (s.a. waterlevel dynamics) and restoration of natural transitions between land and water.

The development of the National Ecological Network will be completed before 2025 according to the Nature Policy Plan. The main problem at present is the high price of agricultural land which have to be purchased to establish the Ecological Network.

Important: The new government, elected in August 1998, has decided to increase the budget for the development of wetlands by 870 million NLG; i.a. 8,000 ha additional new wetland areas will be created before 2010. These areas will be developed in close reation to existing wetlands.

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

a. a single Government Ministry,

no

b. a committee drawn from several Ministries, or

no

b. a cross-sectoral committee?

no

The Government of the Netherlands, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, is responsible for implementing the Nature Policy Plan in strong co-operation with the 12 provinces. Important implementing responsibilitities lies with the Regional Water Boards (rather powerfull) and to a minor extend with the Municipalities if it comes to the decisions on spatial planning.

Please provide details.

See for more details the national reports for 1990-1992 and 1993-1995.

- 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?

The Netherlands is not a federal state.

There are separate “Island Nature Policy Plans” in preparation for the Netherlands’ Antilles in the Carrebean Region.

- 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.

No specific review of legislation has taken place in realtion to wetlands. That is not the way the Netherlands policy on integrated nature management is operating.

However in 1998 the new Nature Conservation Act has been adopted by Parliament. This act will come in force in 1999. This act is a very important instrument for the preservation of important nature areas, including wetlands. Designation of areas based on international agreements (Ramsar Convention, European Bird Directive, European Habitats Directive) are included in this act, so, in the near future designation will take place on a national legal basis. to be followed by all levels of government (now separate permission from various levels was to be needed).

At the same time the new Act for the Protection of Flora and Fauna (replacing various separated, species oriented legislation) has been adopted by Parliament. Based on this act, hunting will be banned in designated Ramsar sites, except when hunting is necessary for good management.

- 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/provincial/local

As described under objective 2 the policy document “The Nature Policy Plan” contains the principles on integrated land/water and coastal zone planning and management. In the Fourth Water Management Policy Plan and the National Environmental Policy Plan these principles are described in more detail. In general the above mentioned principles are becoming more and more integrated in all policy plans on national level but also on provincial and local level. This also holds strong co-ordination and co-operation between the various ministries and departments, provinces and organisations on local level such as the Water Boards and municipalities as implementing agencies.

- 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?

A background document has recently been drawn up of areas in the Netherlands qualifying as wetland reserves according to the criteria of the Ramsar Convention. This document drawn up by the Netherlands’ branch of Birdlife International (*Vogelbescherming Nederland*) and financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries forms the basis of

the national inventory of wetlands of international importance and further designation of Ramsar sites, which presently are under way.

The 1993-1995 National report is dedicated to the wise-use principle, in particular for the Ramsar site “ De Weerribben” .

- 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).

Eutrophication, pollution and extraction of groundwater and surface water in and around wetlands are still matters of great concern in the Netherlands although a significant downward trend in the input of most harmful heavy metals and nutrients into wetland ecosystems has been achieved. In many cases there are clear results by improved water quality.

The improved water quality of the Wadden Sea and the rapidly recovering population of the common seal as a consequence, is a good example in the respect.

Much is yet to be achieved especially in respect to dispersed sources of pollution (by air and by water) and the effectiveness of waste water treatment plants will be further improved.

As part of the national scheme to restore natural ground water regimes, around several wetland hydrological buffer zones are established to prevent drainage effects on wetlands. Practical measures to avoid eutrophication are taken in several wetlands, such as the Ramsar site “Engbertsdijksvenen”. For example, in the wetland area “Naardermeer” an action plan is now carried out with financial support from the European Commission and a twenty year schema to restore water quality in the Border Lakes of the IJsselmeerpolders will successfully be completed soon.

Dredging and removal of polluted soils of water bodies is an important issue all over the country as a part of the National Water Management Policy Plan. The results of this costly clean-up operation will benefit ecological values of these wetlands. As a symbolic result of improved water quality the otter will be reintroduced in one or two wetland areas within a few years. In a growing number of cases an integrated catchment area approach, based on co-operation between a number of stakeholders, is implemented to water management projects to ensure more sustainable results in the long term.

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

Economic valuation is, as part of the Nature Policy Plan, incorporated in all policies concerning interventions in and around wetland sites (see also National Report 1993-1995). These interventions are only allowed in the case that the nature values of the area are not physically or significantly damaged. This condition needs not to be applied in the case of an overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature. However, before this condition is lifted, all reasonable efforts should be made to find an alternative means or location to realise this crucial activity. In any event, provisions are made for mitigating measures, supplemented with compensating measures if the former are insufficient. The principles of this policy are laid down in various spatial policy plans, including the Structure Plan for the Rural Areas and the Key Planning Decision for the Wadden Sea. Legislation, such as the Physical Planning Act and the Nature Conservation Act, are policy-makers’ tools.

Since 1-1-1994, decisions regarding improvement of existing and planning of new roads, railways and waterways who may effect the natural values of the National Ecological Network, including Ramsar sites, must follow the procedures laid down in the Infrastructure (Planning Procedures) Act and the Environmental Management Act (for

environmental impact assessments). The purpose of the Infrastructure Act is to finetune specific infrastructure decisions and general decisions on the incorporation of the infrastructure in spatial plans. Of course the rights of individual citizens and so called grass roots and action groups must be respected, and decisions should be taken with due consideration of the consequences. These rights are protected by law: individuals and institutions have two opportunities to object to the plans during the decision making procedure and may file an appeal with the Council of State after a decision has been taken.

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

Yes.

The Environmental Management Act provides the legal basis for the environmental impact assessment. Environmental impact assessments measure the effect of proposed projects on the environment. Each scenario must include measures to counteract the negative effects of a plan, or to compensate for them. The most environmentally friendly alternative (MMA) which still satisfies the goals of a project must be identified. The Structure Plan for the Rural Areas and the national ecological network provide important guidelines for measuring environmental impact.

Plans which involve works cutting through a Ramsar site are basically considered undesirable and should be a last resort only. Should such a plan need to be carried out because vital national interests or a lack of reasonable alternatives, some compromises regarding the implementation of a project in the interests of nature conservation are to be expected. Any remaining disturbance or destruction of nature areas should be compensated by improving the quality of existing nature areas nearby or by establishing new nature areas (compensation principle).

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

Yes, in the national report 1993-1995 examples have been given and the policy on wetland restoration has been described. New restoration and rehabilitation plans are in preparation in the Wadden Sea (Neerlands Reid), Grote Peel, Biesbosch, Weerribben, Oostvaardersplassen. In fact restoration activities are being studied, planned or implemented all over the country along streams, in fresh water lakes but also in peatlands to be revitalised.

Also the larger water bodies in the Netherlands are subject of ecological restoration plans. Along the big rivers Rhine and Meuse ecological restoration is an integrated part of a long term scheme to improve protection against flooding of surrounding areas by increasing the flow-through and storing capacity of the floodplain ('Room for the Rivers'). This was particularly stimulated after the big and dangerous floodings in february 1995. In the Lake IJssel area ecological restoration focuses on developing natural lake shores in combination with a more natural water level management. Also restoration of a permanent brackish zone between lake IJssel and the Wadden Sea is being studied.

Restoration of estuarine conditions, which have become rare in the Netherlands in the last decades, is a major topic in Nature and Water Management Policy. Final decisions on restoration of part of the Rhine/ Meuse estuary (the Haringvliet/ Hollands diep area) are to be made in 1999 based on a EIA, completed in 1998. In the Westerschelde-estuary ecological restoration is an integrated part of a plan to improve navigation conditions for ships visiting the harbour of Antwerp.

With other countries (Denmark), the Netherlands is active in promoting wetlands restoration and rehabilitation projects.

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 actions includes the establishing of hydrological bufferzones, land acquisition, restoration of natural processes, protection measures for saving internationally important salt marshes and zoning measures for recreation.

Identification of the need for restoration is a regular part of the management planning process for Ramsar sites, other protected areas and areas with major wetland values and is directly connected with the main goals of national and regional nature and water management policy plans. The resources needed for restoration are mainly part of the total budget needed for the implementation of these plans, but also major budgets are raised by NGO's like The Society for the Preservation of Nature (Natuurmonumenten) and the WWF from private sources, lotteries and the corporate world.

- 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).

Participatory planning and decision making is being strongly developed in the Netherlands. This also goes for projects related to conservation and wise use of wetlands. For instance, several ecological restoration projects along the big rivers and a development and management plan for border lakes of Flevoland are based on this approach.

The Netherlands has a general policy to be gender balanced and stimulates the involvement of women in the field of nature conservation. The issue of indigenous peoples does not play a role within the Netherlands. However, in 1997, the Netherlands signed and ratifies ILO decision 169, better known as the Convention on Indigenous Peoples. This to further implement this convention in the Dutch Policy on International Nature Management (the Arctic!) and support for developing countries.

- 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, this kind of actions have been taken, but no fiscal measures in general, but only in relation to the opening for the public of access to private owned nature reserves, estates and forests

If yes, please provide details.

The Netherlands

There are clear examples of direct involvement of the private sector in protection, wise use and development of wetlands. Along the big rivers private companies, active in gravel, sand and clay extraction, participate in wetland development projects. Individual farmers in designated Environmentally Sensitive Areas are stimulated to use their land in such a way that wetland values of agricultural grassland are protected.

The Netherlands' government has started a process of inter-ministerial briefing and exchange of knowledge in order to promote and strengthen the objectives for wetland conservation and wise use in its private sector activities abroad, namely dredging and hydraulic engineering.

The government has entered into a consultation and negotiation process with private companies and non-governmental organisations on this matter. Much emphasis has been placed on the possibilities for further strengthening the market position of the Netherlands' exporters by improving ecological and environmental quality standards "green engineering".

Details of this process have been given in the national report 1993-1995 and by the presentation during the Brisbane Conference (see reports technical sessions). Since then a little progress has been made. In co-operation with the private sector a video has been produced. This video paid attention to the impact the Netherlands' commercial and state supported activities have on wetlands and the way these damages can be avoided. In 1999 a overview report of the Netherlands' involvement and activities in wetlands world-wide will be published and presented at the CoP in Costa Rica. Further joint activities are being discussed but not yet implemented.

The whole above mentioned process does not work out as to be an easy going one, but moving very slowly forwards instead.

The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

Tourism, in particular scuba diving is placing increasing pressure on the coastal wetlands in the Netherlands Antilles. To minimise the negative impact of this important economic activity the island of Bonaire has installed a Marine Environment Ordinance, which legally protects the Bonaire Marine Park, including Ramsar sites, such as "Klein Bonaire". The ordinance includes special regulations with regard to sustainable use of the marine resources and it gives the possibility for real management by means of collecting diving fees which flow directly towards management.

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

If yes, what are the priority actions under this programme and who are the target groups? (Refer also to question 9.4)

Environmental education (EE) has a long tradition in the Netherlands. It started in the sixties as nature conservation education. Nowadays, apart from schools, hundreds of organisations and thousands of individuals are involved in EE. There are EE-support offices in all provinces, many larger and smaller cities have one or more EE-centres, nature museums or cityfarms and there is an extensive network of voluntary EE-association on the local level. As a result of co-operation between six ministries a multi-year plan (1996-2000) has been developed. This plan is focused on stimulating and strengthening environmental education in primary education, secondary education, vocational and adult education. Furthermore more general projects in field of EE will financial supported. The multi-year plan has a budget of 34.5 million guilders.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, in its website, has include the various elements of the Programme on International Nature Management.

The Coastal Zone Management Centre, established by the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management in 1993, maintains since 1995 an English website on the

management of coastal wetlands, URL <http://www.minvenw.nl/projects/netcoast>. The Institute for Inland Watermanagement and Wastewater Treatment of the same Ministry has got also an English website, URL <http://waterland.net/riza/riza/english/>. Both are connected to the Netherlands' contribution to the Clearinghouse Mechanism Biodiversity under the Convention on Biodiversity, URL <http://www.agro.stoas.nl/NICBN>.

- 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.

see under 3.1

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*.

In the Netherlands different Ministries (Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; DG for Development Co-operation, Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management) are directly involved in establishing policies in the light of objective 4. The Netherlands' government supports these actions in close co-operation with various institutes in the field of wetland conservation. There is a very close co-operation between the designated Ramsar Administrative Authority at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management in particular. Also the research facilities of the above mentioned ministries (IBN-DLO;SC-DLO;RIZA;RIKZ;RIVM etc.) have sometimes substantial applied research facilities in the field of wetlands, its biodiversity, water quality etc.

Very close cooperation between all ministries and institutions mentioned above exist since 1998 when the National Planning Office on Nature and Environment was established; this institution is comparable to the activities of the National Planning Office for Economy, Social Welfare and Culture; both are important monitoring institutions within the Dutch society and important knowledge centers underpinning governmental policies.

Eight national and regional NGOs work together since 1984 in their campaigns to promote wetland conservation. In 1992 this group has been appointed officially as "National NGO Ramsar Committee", National Focal point; Mrs. Drs. Rita van de Tempel, c/o *Vogelbescherming Nederland*, Dribergseweg 16c, NL-3708 JB ZEIST.

Its members are

- The Dutch Society for Nature and Environment
- The Society for the Preservation of Nature (*Natuurmonumenten*)
- Birdlife International the Netherlands (*Vogelbescherming Nederland*)
- World Wide Fund for Nature the Netherlands
- Working Group International Wetland experts (WIW)
 - Centre for Environmental Science, University of Leiden
 - The Dutch society for the Preservation of the Wadden Sea
- Environmental Federation for the Province of Zeeland.

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

No; there is, on a national level, not a particular need to do so as wetland ecology, conservation etc, are integral parts of many training facilities.

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.

No; see above.

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

Yes, in particular aiming at the international market.

If yes, please give details.

Since 1993 an International Course on Wetland Management is given at the Wetland Advice and Training Centre in Lelystad. Participants from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, GOS countries attended this course, in which the Ramsar guidelines for management plans and wise use play a leading role. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management all make financial contributions to allow the participation of people from regions like Africa and Eastern Europe.

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

Yes.

Wetland related training is also an integrated part of many of the university programmes in the field of ecology and conservation.

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?

All designated sites have formal management plans which are being implemented. Each of the listed wetlands in the Netherlands, except the Wadden Sea, is managed by a responsible organisation according to an adopted management plan. The Wadden Sea is managed by a number of organisations on the basis of a common management plan, which is coordinated with Germany and Denmark. These plans include clear objectives to maintain and conserve its wetland character by maintaining the essential ecological conditions.

- 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.

The nature values of all Ramsar sites are being monitored. This monitoring is part of the management plan of the wetland site and part of the various national monitoring schemes for flora and fauna as implemented by a number of NGO's, often on a voluntary basis. Funding for these monitoring schemes comes from many sources both GO and NGO. The Ministries of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and Transport, Public Works and Water Management are important funders.

- 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.

No additional information; but there is a strong public debate on the Dutch Waddensea in relation to shell fisheries.

- 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?

No sites on 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.

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

In 1994 an inventory has been undertaken of the sites which meet the Ramsar Convention's criteria for birds and/or the criteria for the Birds Directive of the European Union: van den Tempel, R. & Osieck, E.R. 1994. Areas important for birds in the Netherlands. Vogelbescherming Nederland, Zeist. The report is available for free at the National Reference Centre for Nature Management (Mr. Johan Thissen), P.O. Box 30, NL-6700 AA WAGENINGEN, e-mail <j.b.m.thissen@ikcn.agro.nl>.

In 1998 an inventory will be completed on the sites which meet the Convention's criteria not only for birds, but for other nature values. This inventory will be published in 1999. Drawing up the list was not easy as many sites could easily be split in a few separate sites and still meeting the Ramsar criteria. With the above mentioned list all organisations involved, GO's and NGO's can agree.

6.2 Does there exist a list or directory of “important” wetlands for your country or region?

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.

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

In the Netherlands there is about 885,000 ha of wetland, qualifying for the bird criteria of the Ramsar Convention. An unknown additional area qualifies for the Ramsar convention because of other nature values than birds. This information will be included in the national inventory.

In the last decades there has been little net loss of wetlands, however the character of some wetlands has changed before some of them were designated as Ramsar sites.

E.g. many estuaries, coastal inlets and bays have been dammed off from the sea, changing them into stagnant lakes (Deltaworks in particular). Also eutrophication, drainage of surrounding agricultural areas, fragmentation by infrastructure and increased pressure of human use in general have caused changes in ecological character but not with designated sites. Through nature development projects like “ Gelderse Poort”, Blauwe Kamer”, “Duurse Waarden” and others, in the last decade, a slight increase of total wetland habitat area has been achieved.

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:

- meet the criteria for fish habitat (Resolution VI.2),
- meet the 1% criterion for waterbird populations using data provided by the International Waterfowl Census (Resolution VI.4),
- are subterranean karst or cave wetland systems (Resolution VI.5),
- are peatland ecosystems (Recommendation 6.1)
- are coral reefs and associated systems (Recommendation 6.7)
- 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

If yes, please describe these actions.

The Netherlands

In the current national inventory of internationally important wetlands those criteria are taken into account. However the importance for breeding and in particular migratory and wintering waterbirds, of our wetlands is so overriding, that other wetland nature values do only necessitate the designation of a few new sites not internationally important for birds. Furthermore our main remnants of raised bogs (point d) are already designated as Ramsar sites and there are no karst and cave wetlands, coral reefs or mangroves in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

The main mangroves and sea grass beds are in the already designated Ramsar sites “Het Lac” on Bonaire and “Het Spaans Lagoen” on Aruba. The coral reefs of “Klein Bonaire” are in a designated Ramsar site.

- 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.

The Netherlands

An action plan concerning the designation of new Ramsar sites has been established and will be soon implemented. It is expected that a further 28 sites will be designated or even more.

The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

On the Netherlands Antilles no new designations are planned.

On Aruba designation of the “Bubali Plas” is being investigated.

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

Wadden Sea and Bargerveen are ‘transfrontier’ designated wetlands.

- 6.7 Describe any plans, or actions being taken for further transfrontier sites to be listed.

The Netherlands is planning to designate two transfrontier sites in near future: “Westerschelde”, adjacent to Belgian site “Schorren van de Beneden-Schelde”, and “Gelderse Poort “ (where the river Rhine enters the Netherlands from Germany), adjacent to large German Ramsar site “Unterer Niederrhein”.

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).

Sites

Bilateral or multilateral co-operation has been established for the following sites: Waddensea, Bargerveen, Gelderse Poort and the Westerschelde.

The trilateral co-operation between Denmark and Germany concerning one of the most important wetlands The Wadden Sea has been led to a Wadden Sea Plan.

This Plan, presented during the last Trilateral Ministerial Conference in Stade (1997, Germany) includes several activities and projects for the coming three years, to reach the formulated goals for the Waddensea. Based on the Wadden Sea Plan a brochure, titled “The Wadden Sea, the way to the next millennium” has been edited.

There is a very informative website on the Wadden Sea, URL <http://www.waddensea.org/engels/index.html>.

In 1997 a hydrological study has been completed in the wetland site “Bargerveen”. A German-Netherlands commission has been established to implement the results of this study. The measures will be executed between 1998 and 2001.

In 1996 a co-operation agreement was signed between the Flemish region (Belgium) and the Netherlands concerning dredging the shipping lane in the Westerschelde. This agreement includes restoration and compensation measures of the estuary of the Westerschelde.

Catchments

The management of the international catchments of Rhine, Meuse and Scheldt is very important for the quality of wetlands in the Netherlands. A new “Ecological Total Concept” Rhine Convention will replace the existing Rhine Convention of 1963. The new Rhine Convention has been signed on a Ministerial Conference in 1998 and will enter into force in 2000. It will among others, pay attention to the development of new wetlands as catchment areas during high water level periods. In 1994 co-operation agreements have been signed by the Netherlands, the three Belgian regions and France for the rivers Meuse and Scheldt.

- 7.2 Do you have Ramsar sites that are “twinned” with others, either nationally or internationally?
Yes.

If yes, please give details.

The following Ramsar sites are twinned through the EUROSITE project:

“De Boschplaat” to “Spiekeroog Ostplate” (Germany)

“Dollard” (part of “Wadden Sea” site) to “Elisabeth-Außengroden” (Germany)

“Zwanenwater” to “Titchwell Marsh” (UK) and “Platier d’Oye” (France)

“Schiermonnikoog” (belongs partly to “Wadden Sea” site) to “Slowinski National Park” (Poland)

“De Weerribben” to “Ranworth Staite” (UK) and “Le Marais Audomarois” (France)

“Bargerveen” to “Clara Bog” (Ireland)

- 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:
- Convention on Biological Diversity
 - Framework Convention on Climate Change
 - Convention to Combat Desertification
 - Convention on Migratory Species
 - World Heritage Convention

Within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries Division for International Affairs of the Department for Nature Management, co-ordinates all the actions in the above mentioned fields in close co-operation with the divisions implementing national policies of the Department for Nature Management. Furthermore the coordination with other ministries is rather well in place through the Government Commission on Biodiversity and Environment (includes all ministries) meeting very regularly and having a strong saying in the final text of the formal instructions for Dutch Delegations attending meetings of these conventions.

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

If yes, please provide details.

The most important one is the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement for the development of which the Netherlands Government played a leading role. The Netherlands also acts as the Depository of the AEWA and manages the Interim Secretariat. The AEWA is the main policy document, together with the Ramsar Convention, on which the relative large international support programme in the field of wetlands and waterbird conservation is based and justified.

An overview of bilateral and multilateral activities on a project and/or programme basis is given in annex I and II. These projects have been financed by the Directorate General for International Co-operation and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries from various budgets.

Supported by the government the Netherlands' NGOs carry out a concerted action for nature in Europe. "The Netherlands for European Nature" has started in 1996. Also various ministries have Memoranda of Understanding with Central and Eastern European countries. Wetlands, natural rivers and water management problems are often an important element of cooperation and support of projects/programmes. Important countries in this respect are: Poland, Hungary, Romania, Ukraina and Russian Federation.

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

Yes.

If yes, provide details.

In the periode 1993-1998 the European Commission has donated from its LIFE-fund about 6 million ECU to restore three wetlands: "Friesland buitendijks" (part of Ramsar site "Wadden Sea"), the Ramsar site "Naardermeer" and "Nieuwkoopse Plassen" (no Ramsar site yet).

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

Yes.

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

The annual budgetary allocation is part of a larger management budget of the Ministry for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. Also the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management provides substantial budgets in relation to the budget available for water management and ecological restoration. Within both ministries it is difficult to extract the money/budget lines for wetlands. However in total several tenths of millions guilders are allocated for wetlands (purchase, management, monitoring, restoration and development of new wetlands).

- 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.

If yes, please give details.

There is not a particular budget earmarket for wetlands only. However integrated wise use of wetlands is important and many support is given. Information on the larger projects and programmes is included in annex I and II.

- 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

If yes, what is that process.

It exists for the funds allocated to the Programme International Nature Conservation, of which a small part Dfl. 7 million of the total budget for development co-operation is for projects in the field of strict nature conservation. With regards to all the other funds, our ministry plays an increasingly important advisory role e.g. via the International Experts Group for Forest and Biodiversity of the National Reference Center for Nature in Wageningen (part of the Department for Nature Management).

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.

If yes, please provide details.

The Netherlands' voluntary financial contribution to the Small Grants Fund is till now NLG 60,000,- a year including 1998.

The Netherlands will contribute NLG 100,000 to the Ramsar secretariat for the participation of developing countries in the 7th CoP, Costa Rica 1999 and has contributed \$ 50.000.- direct to the Government of Costa Rica to assist with the preparation of CoP7.

It should be noted that the Netherlands through its substantial support via the Programme International Nature Management (PIN) provide allmost \$ 5 million to wetlands conservation projects in, in particular West Africa and Eastern Europa. Promoting Ramsar accession and AEWA accession plays an important role in this support. This support is not nessecarely been given through the Ramsar Bureau and therefore relatively unknown. The main contractors are Wetlands International, BirdLife International, Governments in the countries and, to a lesser extend, IUCN. Furthermore the Netherlands provides, with a few other countries substantial core support to Wetlands International to extend and maintain the vital world databases on waterbird census data and to publish the data widely.

- 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.

No arrears.

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

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

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

International: Wetlands International (headquarters in the Netherlands)
Birdlife (European office is in the Netherlands)
IUCN (European office is in the Netherlands)
European Union for Coastal Conservation (headquarters in the Netherlands).

On the national and provincial level besides the eight NGOs of the officially appointed “National NGO Ramsar Committee” (see 4.1) there are another about 25 NGOs which have wetlands as part of their regular “business”, namely provincial nature management NGOs and Provincial Federations of local Nature and Environmental NGOs.

- 9.2 Is there a regular forum or mechanism through which these NGOs express their views on wetland conservation and Ramsar implementation:
- to each other? **Yes**
 - to the government? **Yes**

The views of the NGOs can be expressed by the officially appointed “National NGO Ramsar Committee” (see 4.1). The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries is observer to their meetings.

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

Yes, a representative of the “National NGO Ramsar Committee” is part of the official delegation.

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

If yes, please give details (Refer also to question 3.1).

The Netherlands’ branch of Birdlife International (*Vogelbescherming Nederland*) in co-operation with WWF publishes every year a status report of the wetlands in the Netherlands. The information is based on local reports from ‘wetland watchers’ all over the country and they receive much publicity.

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

Each of the listed wetlands in the Netherlands has a management plan. Many sites are managed by NGO nature management societies themselves anyway.

With exception of the Ramsar site “Oostvaardersplassen” managed by the National Forest Service, there are no formal site management advisory committees in the Netherlands.

- 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.

The NGO’s represented in the National NGO Ramsar Committee are most active in the themes mentioned under General Objectives 2, 5, and 6.

Final comments:

10.1 General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

no comments

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 Netherlands is a Permanent Observer to the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention. The background of this is the fact that the formal support organisation for the Ramsar Convention, which is Wetlands International, has its headquarters in the Netherlands. The Netherlands share this Permanent Observer position with Switzerland (host of IUCN).

With all formal Ramsar Convention partner NGO's, the Netherlands maintain strong and good relations and provides substantial support to these organisations reg. their activities in the field of wetlands and waterbirds.

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

no comments