

Dr V L Filonenko
Chairman, Goskompriroda of the Ukrainian SSR
252001 Kiev, Kreschatik 4, USSR

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Dear Dr. Filonenko

The "Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat", Ramsar 1971 (the "Ramsar Convention") is a global intergovernmental treaty on the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the principal instrument for cooperation between governments on wetland conservation. The principal obligations accepted by governments which become Contracting Parties to the Convention are:

to designate at least one wetland within their territory for the List of wetlands of international importance (Article 2.1);

to make "wise use" of all wetlands, whether or not they are included in the List (Article 3.1);
and

to consult with one another about implementing obligations under the Convention (Article 5)

At present 60 countries have joined the Convention and have designated over 500 wetlands, covering more than 30 million hectares, for the List (see attached summary). The USSR became a Contracting Party in 1976, when it designated 12 wetlands covering 3 million hectares for the list. Among these, three are in Ukraine:

- Danube Delta and Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays
- Bay of Sivash, Sea of Azov
- Kerkinit Bay

The USSR has regularly attended meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, the most recent of which was held in June/July 1990 in Montreux, Switzerland, where the Soviet delegates were Dr. A.A. Vinokurov and Dr. S.G. Priklonski of the All-Union Institute for Nature Conservation. I enclose for your information a copy of the Soviet report to this Conference.

The decisions which confirm the accession of the USSR to the Ramsar Convention, and the designation of the Chernomorski Zapovednik are as follows:

- Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR No. 1046, dated 26 December 1975;
- Decree of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, No. 106, dated 26 February 1976;
- Decision of the Kherson Regional Executive Committee No. 149-9/5, dated 5 March 1976.

In order to strengthen contacts and information exchange between the Ramsar Bureau (or secretariat) after the Montreux Conference, I visited the USSR in November 1990. My visit

was organized by Goskompriroda Moscow and the All-Union Institute for Nature Conservation. The visit included a stay of several days in Ukraine, where I was most warmly received by representatives of the University of Odessa (Dr. Korzyukov) and the University of Kiev (Dr. Serebryakov). I had an opportunity to visit several Ukrainian wetlands, in particular the Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays reserve, where Director Majewski gave me an excellent opportunity to see the whole of the wetland, its achievements and its problems. I also contacted the Institute for Biology of the Southern Seas (Dr. Svetlana Svetasheva). Unfortunately, there was no opportunity on this occasion to visit Kiev. I am therefore writing to you to raise a number of questions, and to make some recommendations.

1. Information on Ramsar:

Although USSR was one of the earliest Contracting Parties to the Convention and has designated so many important wetlands for the Ramsar List, I found that Ramsar's aims and objectives are not very known in Ukraine. I therefore recommend that much greater publicity be given to the Convention and will be pleased to provide material. I have discussed this matter with Goskompriroda of the USSR who are willing to produce summaries in Russian of Convention literature, in particular the brochure and newsletters. I also discussed this question with Academician Syroyechkovsky of the USSR Academy of Sciences who supported the idea of establishing an All-Union Ramsar committee and Ramsar committees for each republic.

2. Separation of Danube and Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays into two Ramsar sites:

When USSR joined the Ramsar Convention in 1976, the Danube and Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays reserves were listed as a single Ramsar site, for administrative reasons. I understand that they have now been separated administratively. Since they are several hundred kilometres apart and are biologically quite different, I strongly recommend that they be considered as two separate Ramsar sites.

3. Conservation of Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays:

The reserve undoubtedly merits the status of wetland of international importance, by its size and varied wetland types, by its large waterfowl populations and by its high biological priority (its importance as a fishery nursery should be emphasized). The scientists attached to the reserve are carrying out excellent research work, there is an effective network of wardens, and the museum is an important educational centre, especially for children. Nevertheless, the reserve has some problems, which the staff have already notified to the authorities and for which they have suggested remedies (see attached note). I support their suggestions and strongly recommend that they be carried out. The problems are as follows:

- Irrigation scheme: water with a high salt content runs off from irrigated drainage areas into the reserve, while saline water is extracted from underground and channeled into the reserve. This causes highly detrimental changes in the water quality, particularly in Tendrov Bay, but also in Yagorlitz Bay. The entire irrigation and drainage scheme is uneconomic in the long term, particularly as regards rice-growing. Discharge of water into the reserve should be stopped and the whole scheme reviewed and revised. It would be appropriate to develop a plan for integrated management of the whole region, covering both the reserve and the neighbouring agricultural area, and taking account of the Ramsar "wise use" principle.

- Military area: the presence of a military area in the centre of a nature reserve is not compatible with the status of wetland of international importance. Military activities cause major disturbance; there is a severe risk of oil and other pollution from vessels used as targets; there is heavy overgrazing by sheep in the military area. I understand that the military authorities have been sensitive to the requirements of nature conservation, but nevertheless suggest that the military activities should cease and that the military polygon be included under the authority of the Zapovednik as soon as possible.

- Extension of the reserve: At present, Yagorlitz Bay only has the status of no-hunting zone (zakaznik). Furthermore several areas on the northern shores of Yagorlitz Bay, especially the salt lakes at the northwest corner are not included in the reserve. I suggest they be given full zapovednik status as soon as possible. A more detailed report on the Tendrov/Yagorlitz Bays Ramsar site is being prepared under the Ramsar Monitoring procedure, and will be sent to you in the near future.

4. Listing of new Ramsar sites in the Ukraine:

At the Montreux Conference in June 1990, the Soviet delegation provided information on proposals to designate sixteen new Ramsar sites, covering 8 million hectares, in the Soviet Union. This announcement was warmly welcomed by participants and recognized in a Conference recommendation which stated:

"The Conference of the Contracting Parties warmly welcomes the statement by the delegation of the USSR about plans to establish a new law for protection of Ramsar sites and to designate 16 new Ramsar sites covering 8 million hectares, and urges the Government of the USSR to complete these measures as soon as possible". (Montreux REC. C.4.9. (Rev)).

One of the sites specifically mentioned was in Ukraine, Molotchnyi Liman ("Milk Bay") in the Sea of Azov. I hope that arrangements for Ramsar designation of this important wetland can be made as soon as possible.

In addition to Molotchnyi Liman there are undoubtedly other potential Ramsar sites in Ukraine, some of them at present quite unprotected. I had the opportunity to pay brief visits to both the Dniestr estuary and Tilligul Liman. I would strongly suggest that nature conservation measures be taken at these two sites, and that consideration be given to Ramsar listing. In addition, the IWRB/ICBP volume prepared for the Montreux conference (see attached copy) identifies a series of potential Ramsar sites in Ukraine. I hope that, for these sites too, conservation measures can be taken and Ramsar listing considered.

5. Conservation of Kerkinit Bay Ramsar site:

I had no opportunity to visit Kerkinit during the present visit (though I was able to go there in 1976). However, I had discussions with a representative of the Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas about the area. I understand that there are some problems of industrial pollution, and that it might be appropriate to apply the Ramsar Monitoring procedure here. In addition, I understand there are proposals to develop exchange of scientists and ecotourism. The Ramsar Bureau would be happy to help and advise as far as it can.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the Ukrainian hosts and colleagues for their very warm welcome and for arranging such an intensive and interesting programme. I hope that contacts between the Ramsar Bureau and the Ukrainian authorities and other interested bodies may develop greatly in the future.

I have discussed my visit to Ukraine with officials of Goskompriroda USSR, the administrative authority officially responsible for application of the Ramsar Convention. They welcomed my suggestion that I should write directly to you. I am sending them a copy of this letter. I am also sending a copy to the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, to which the Chernomorski Zapovienik is attached.

Please forgive me for writing in English; I will forward a Russian translation as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Smart, Director of Conservation