

Development of guidance for Ramsar site selection, data and information needs, and options for RIS revision

1. COP10 requested the STRP to undertake a number of tasks related to the Convention's guidance on selection and designation of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) and its needs for data and information at the point of designation. These tasks include:
 - a) a review of the consistency, logic and clarity of the targets and guidelines that support Ramsar's site selection criteria,
 - b) seeking the views of users of this guidance;
 - c) a review of options for revising the format of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) in order to ensure linkages and synergies with other Ramsar instruments to collect and report data and information on listed sites; and
 - d) further consideration of data and information needs related to the description of ecological character at the point of designation (and assessment of potential change thereafter).
2. In view of the significant linkages in the nature of these tasks, they are being undertaken together in an integrated manner in order to harmonize the relevant technical guidances and to avoid, as far as possible, the risk of needing any further future changes.
3. STRP are working to the principle of trying to simplify the guidance associated with the site selection Criteria, 'repackaging' the various existing agreed guidances which have developed separately over time and accordingly have a degree of unnecessary overlap. A further principle being adopted is to ensure that guidances and proposals reflect the very variable extent of data and information on sites available in different countries. The scientific 'ideal' may simply be impracticable in some developing countries owing to resource and other constraints. STRP are accordingly exploring hierarchical approaches to some aspects of guidance that recognize that some countries are less 'data-rich' than others.
4. A central need, repeatedly expressed by Contracting Parties and others, is to have an unambiguous description of ecological character at the point of designation which can act as a baseline description. STRP work has shown that a significant amount of the data and information used with the Convention's Ecological Character Description Sheet (as defined in Resolution X.15) can be delivered by the Ramsar Information Sheet. Ensuring that the RIS delivers the necessary information on ecological character has the advantages of:
 - a) reducing reporting burdens by seeking to collect data once that has utility for several different processes;
 - b) ensuring that data collected at the point of designation much better defines ecological character against which future changes of site status can be assessed; and
 - c) determining the potential use of data collected at the point of designation (and updates thereof) for other MEA reporting processes, still to be explored in detail.

5. Specifically, the STRP has proposed that:

- a) The existing guidance on the completion of the RIS within the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the development of the Ramsar list* is merged and consolidated to produce a single supporting document that will provide the necessary information on all aspects of the process of Ramsar site identification and designation;
- b) This new document will largely comprise existing adopted guidance, but re-ordered, better structured and with duplication removed so as to be more easily understood by Contracting Parties and other users. It will also bring together a range of other guidance agreed by Ramsar into this single document and will more coherently integrate links with the Ecological Character Description Sheet adopted in Resolution X.15;
- c) Emphasis will be given to simplifying the guidance and providing worked examples and illustrative case-studies which may further help those compiling (or revising) Ramsar Information Sheets;
- d) It is aimed to provide a more consistent structuring for the guidance associated with each Criterion. This will probably follow the following model:

Criterion X

What this criterion is seeking to achieve?

How to interpret this criterion – what does it mean?

What data and information is needed to apply this criterion?

Potential ambiguities/pitfalls in applying this criterion

Where to go for further help or information

- e) There will be the need for additional guidance associated with some Criteria where the current explanations are limited or ambiguous.