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“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”

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**Background and rationale to the Framework for processes of
detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland
ecological character**

See also COP10 Draft Resolutions DR 15 and DR 16

Background

1. Draft Resolution DR16 presents a “Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character”, as drawn up by the Ramsar Convention’s Scientific & Technical Review Panel in response to a request from the Parties at the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP8, 2002). The present Information Document provides a more detailed supporting rationale for the Framework. It reviews what guidance is already available (see Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 15, 3rd edition, for relevant full texts) and identifies gaps in various places in the processes where further guidance may be needed.
2. The core of the Framework is a series of flowcharts showing the various stages (and decision-making points) in the overall process. These are reproduced in DR 16 as summary guidance on how to address each of the steps and decision points, backed up by the more detailed guidance on various aspects already available. The DR also defines further work to be undertaken in future by the STRP on this issue.
3. In the present paper, in addition to a description of the background and references to existing guidance on each step, a section of additional text has been included on the various processes for reporting that relate to different parts of this scheme. This text, in Annex 2, provides an example of the form of accompanying summary guidance that would need preparing for the other elements of the processes depicted in the flowcharts.
4. The whole process of detecting, reporting and responding to change is obviously heavily dependent on having a description of wetland ecological character as a baseline or starting-point. This paper and DR 16 are therefore closely linked to draft Resolution DR 15 on “Describing the ecological character of wetlands, and data needs and formats for core inventory: harmonized scientific and technical guidance”, which provides guidance on

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compiling such descriptions and also defines further work to be undertaken by the STRP on this issue.

5. The Ecological Character Description Sheet proposed in DR 15 includes a column for recording any changes or likely changes in each aspect of ecological character, by reference in particular to “limits of change” defined, for example, in relation to management plan objectives. This links specifically with the section in the present paper concerning the issue of when a change is “too trivial” to report under Article 3.2 of the Convention, and again (in DR 16) it is proposed that the STRP develop further work on this.

1. Introduction – definition of the question

6. The advice and information in this paper is presented in response to the request from the Contracting Parties in Resolution VIII.8 (2002) on *Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention*, paragraph 17 of which:

“ALSO REQUESTS the STRP to prepare further consolidated guidance on the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character, including guidelines for determining when such a change is too trivial to require reporting, having regard to the reasons why a given site is important and to the conservation objectives which have been set for it, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties in the meantime to take a precautionary approach.

7. Article 3.2 of the Convention states that “each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 [i.e., the Ramsar Secretariat]”.
8. A synthesis and consolidation is given here of some relevant elements of existing guidance adopted on different previous occasions by the Parties, principally:
 - Resolution VIII.8 itself;
 - Resolution IX.1 Annex A - *A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character*;
 - Resolution XI.1 Annex E - the Ramsar *Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring (IF-WLAM)*;
 - Ramsar Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2006) on *Addressing change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands*;
 - Resolution IX.6: *Guidance for addressing Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the Criteria for designation*.
9. Ramsar’s *Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring* (Resolution XI.1 Annex E) provides a broad context, setting out the purposes of and interrelationships among different aspects and tools for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring, with summary information on each aspect of the relevant guidance adopted by the Convention, and general guidance on further steps to be taken to improve relevant processes.

10. Handbook 15 (3rd Edition, 2007) presents a compilation of existing guidance on a variety of aspects of the more specific question of ecological character change, concerning both Ramsar sites and wetlands in general.
11. The emphasis in this paper is to give new advice on the overall scheme or “architecture” of Ramsar’s regime on this issue, the ways in which different parts of it (detecting, reporting, responding) fit together, and the processes that should operate.
12. As well as this presentation of the overall scheme, some new thinking is included to complete the coherent elaboration of processes created by Article 3.2. This relates to:
 - the issue of determining when change is too trivial to require reporting;
 - the issue of “likelihood” of change;
 - the links to site objectives defined in management plans;
 - the role of a precautionary approach; and
 - some further considerations on decision-making concerning restoration and compensation.

2. Who is this document for?

13. As will be clear from the flowcharts in Annex 1, a range of actors has different parts to play in the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character of wetland sites. This advice is designed for all of them, so that not only can the details of an individual relevant component of the scheme be clear, but so can the wider context within which it sits.
14. There are key functions for:
 - the managers of individual Ramsar sites;
 - authorities responsible for the management of Ramsar sites, at local and national levels;
 - National Ramsar Administrative Authorities;
 - National STRP Focal Points;
 - National CEPA Focal Points;
 - National Ramsar/Wetland Committees;
 - competent NGOs and other “third parties” who can supplement information obtained by official bodies;
 - the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP);
 - the Ramsar Secretariat; and
 - the Conference of the Contracting Parties.
15. Section 19 below summarises some of the key functions of each main audience for this document, by reference to the flowcharts in Annex 1.

3. Contents

16. Information is presented here in the following sections:
 4. Defining ecological character
 5. Defining change in ecological character
 6. The role of site management plans
 7. Human-induced change and natural change
 8. Negative change and positive change
 9. Actual change and likely change
 10. “Arranging to be informed”
 11. Change that is “too trivial to require reporting”
 12. Taking a precautionary approach
 13. Reporting (“passing information without delay”)
 14. Article 8 and the role of the COP
 15. Responding to change
 16. The Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Missions
 17. Restoration
 18. Compensation
 19. Who is responsible?
- Annex 1 – Flowcharts
- Annex 2 – Further detail on reporting, related to the flowcharts

4. Defining ecological character

17. The current definition of “ecological character” is contained in paragraph 15 of Resolution IX.1 Annex A, the *Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character*. It makes reference to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment’s terms and concepts, under which “services” form an integral part of ecosystems, and reads as follows:

“Ecological character is the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits*/services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time.

* Within this context, ecosystem benefits are defined in accordance with the MA definition of ecosystem services as ‘the benefits that people receive from ecosystems’”.
18. The concept thus captures values associated with processes as well as attributes, and it is the correct basis for defining the target state for a site or its limits of acceptable change (see section 11 below).
19. The concept of “international importance” is not the same thing and should not be used as a site management target. Every wetland has ecological character, but only some wetlands have international importance. Ecological character is dictated by the ecology; while international importance is dictated by a human value-construct. Handbook 16 (*Managing Wetlands: Frameworks for managing Ramsar sites and other wetlands* - 3rd Edition, 2006) in paragraph 11(v) explains that the Ramsar site selection criteria reflect “certain benefits and

values of the wetland which might be lost as a result of change in the ecological character”, making clear that the two things are distinct.

20. The reason for which the objective for site management is maintenance of ecological character, and not maintenance of the site’s international importance, is explained in paragraphs 59-61 of the information document COP9 DOC. 15, on *Issues and scenarios concerning Ramsar sites or parts of sites which cease to meet or never met the Ramsar Criteria*. In essence, the ecological character will often far exceed the minimum thresholds established in the criteria for international importance, and the obligation is to maintain this level, not merely to preserve the minimum. In fact, in relation to sites designated under Criterion 6 because they support 1% or more of a biogeographic waterbird population, allowing a site’s bird numbers to reduce to the minimum would result in a population decline which could then lead to a reduced 1% threshold number for that population, so that a further decline would still allow 1% of such a reduced population to be supported, and the logical iterative end would be its extinction.
21. Recent attention to periodic updates of the Ramsar site Information Sheets (RIS) has rightly addressed the role of the RISs in revealing change. Their role in providing information about ecological character has also received attention. For example, Resolution VIII.8 para 9 reads: “RECOGNIZING ALSO that the information fields contained in the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS), as revised by Resolution VIII.13, used for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance should also form a statement of the ecological character of these wetlands”. However, this has also created the risk of a perception that monitoring change in international importance, as formally stated in the RIS, is the same as monitoring change in ecological character.
22. In truth, however, as is made clear in Handbook 16, a site can experience change in its ecological character without necessarily experiencing a change in its international importance. Moreover, as shown in Resolution IX.6 (paragraphs 6(vi) and 6(vii)), a site can experience change in international importance without necessarily experiencing change in ecological character. So while the RIS (as potentially amended in future) may act as a more complete description of the ecological character of a site (and hence a more useful baseline for monitoring), the separate aspect of why the site meets the criteria will need to be treated in a clearly-distinguished way.
23. The STRP is addressing several tasks given to it by the COP concerning the description of ecological character on a site-by-site basis (not the definition of the concept, but the description of how it is manifested in any given case).
24. Resolution VIII.8, paragraph 15, “REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to further review . . . gaps and disharmonies in defining and reporting the ecological character of wetlands through inventory, assessment, monitoring and management of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, giving priority to . . .
 - b) determining the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands;
 - c) the clear definition of the ecological character features in the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)....”

25. Resolution IX.2 in item 52 (ii) includes the task for STRP to “conduct a fundamental review of the structure of the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS)”; and priority issues to address in this include:
- preparation of guidance for the description of the ecological character of wetlands;
 - harmonization of the layout and information fields of the RIS with the core data fields of the *Framework for wetland inventory* and the description of ecological character.
26. Once the components of the description of ecological character have been elaborated and agreed as an output of these STRP tasks, they will obviously be a framework upon which reports concerning change in ecological character (see below) would be based.

5. Defining change in ecological character

27. The current definition of “change in ecological character” is contained in paragraph 19 of Resolution IX.1 Annex A, and reads as follows:
- “For the purposes of implementation of Article 3.2, change in ecological character is the human-induced adverse alteration of any ecosystem component, process, and/or ecosystem benefit/service.”
28. The importance of addressing change in ecological character is related to the fact that under the Convention there is an objective of maintaining this character. There are some curiosities in the logic of this however.
29. Article 3.1 of the Convention commits Parties to promote the conservation of Ramsar sites, and Article 3.2 requires action if the ecological character of a site changes or is likely to change. These were not linked, however, by saying that conservation means maintenance of the ecological character until the Strategic Plan did so in 1996 (originally in Operational Objective 5.1, and now Operational Objective 11.1 of the 2003-2008 Plan), and then paragraph 20 of Resolution VIII.8 reinforced this. Recommendation 4.8 in 1990 emphasised the fundamental importance of maintaining the ecological character of sites, but only as a preambular remark. Resolution VIII.14 adds another complexity in referring to “favourable conservation status” as the objective for sites.
30. Two separate clauses in the Convention provide for reporting change in site extent and change in character respectively (Articles 2.5 and 3.2). This potentially suggests that reducing the area is not a change in the character. That would be counterintuitive, and the definitions are hopefully more clear if one assumes that “area” is one of the “components” – but the oddity in the Convention text remains.
31. A further point to emphasise is the “processes” part of the definition – i.e., a change in processes, even when numbers and extent of features, etc., remains the same, constitutes a change in character. Information in Ramsar Information Sheets usually tends not to be sufficient to provide a statement of the baseline in this respect.

6. The role of site management plans

32. Resolution VIII.8, in mandating the present guidance, includes the element (paragraph 17) of “having regard to the reasons why a given site is important and to the conservation objectives which have been set for it”.
33. Paragraph 18 of the same Resolution “RECOGNIZES that the establishment of a management planning process, in line with the guidance on management planning adopted by this meeting of the COP [= Resolution VIII.14], on all Ramsar sites greatly facilitates the identification, reporting and resolution of changes in ecological character, and that inclusion in each management plan of an objective of maintenance of the ecological character of the site provides a basis for implementation of Article 3.1 of the Convention”. (Article 3.1 is the one which provides that “The Contracting Parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory”).
34. Changes at a site may take it towards or away from the maintenance of its ecological character, as discussed above; but at the same time they may take it towards or away from more specific and detailed objectives defined for it in a management plan.
35. These more detailed objectives will provide an appropriate basis for considering limits of acceptable change (see section 11 below).
36. As well as containing a statement of the specific objectives applying to a given site, a site management plan may set out the arrangements for monitoring, which should be the means for generating awareness of instances of change or likely change (see section 10 below).
37. Management plans and their implementation therefore have a key role to play in this overall scheme. Further guidance is provided in Resolution VIII.14 which contains the *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands*, and in Handbook 16 (3rd edition, 2006) *Managing wetlands: Frameworks for managing Wetlands of International Importance and other wetland sites*.

7. Human induced change and natural change

38. Article 3.2 refers only to reporting human-caused changes in ecological character. Resolution VIII.8, paragraph 5, notes that “Resolution VI.1 interpreted ‘change in the ecological character of a site’ as meaning adverse change, caused by human activities, and noted that this excludes the process of natural evolutionary change occurring in wetlands”.
39. As Resolution IX.1 Annex A, para 20, explains: “The inclusion of specific reference to Article 3.2 of the Convention text within the definition [of change in ecological character] is designed to clarify the maintenance obligation for the ecological character of listed Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) under Article 3.2, and to note that such change concerns only adverse change caused by the actions of people. This is in line with the context of Article 3.2 and Recommendation 4.8 (1990) establishing the Montreux Record, which was re-affirmed by COP8 Resolution VIII.8. For the purposes under the

Convention, this definition therefore excludes the processes of natural evolutionary change occurring in wetlands and also excludes positive human-induced change.”

40. There is, however, no guidance provided to Parties on how to distinguish human-caused changes from naturally-occurring changes. In practice this can be difficult, since, for example, an apparently natural change to a site may in practice be the consequence of a human-caused *ex situ* change, such as changes in the water management elsewhere in a river basin. Furthermore, changes observed as natural may be an indirect consequence of a human activity, such as ecosystem change resulting from global climate change driven by human-caused increases in greenhouse gas emissions.
41. It should also be noted that other actions adopted by the Convention, such as those concerning assessing the overall status and trends of wetlands and Ramsar sites, require information on all types of change in ecological character – positive and negative, natural and human-induced (as is recognized in COP8 DOC. 20 and by Resolution VIII.8).

8. Negative change and positive change

42. As mentioned in the preceding section, both Article 3.2 and the definition of “change in ecological character” now in Resolution IX.1 Annex A relate only to adverse change. Positive changes are therefore not anticipated to feature in Article 3.2 reports. Positive changes should be addressed, however, in several other reporting processes that are provided for under the Convention.
43. One of these is described in Resolution VIII.8, where paragraph 20, relating to resolving Article 3.2 issues on a site, “CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to ... [utilize] ... all appropriate mechanisms to address and resolve as soon as practicable the matters for which a site may have been the subject of a report pursuant to Article 3.2; and, once those matters have been resolved, to submit a further report, so that both positive influences at sites and changes in ecological character may be fully reflected”.
44. A second example concerns the information generated through management plan monitoring processes (see Section 6 above).
45. The process for removing a site from the Montreux Record is another way in which positive changes will be recorded (see Section 3, *Guidelines for operation of the Montreux Record* in the Annex to Resolution VI.1; and Section C of Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2006) on *Addressing change in ecological character*).
46. The Convention has also recognized that wetland restoration and/or rehabilitation programmes can lead to favourable human-induced changes in ecological character (see Annex to Resolution VI.1).

9. Actual change and likely change

47. The Convention text was farsighted in requiring formal communication not only about those site changes that have happened or are happening, but also about those deemed “likely” to happen (Article 3.2). This allows anticipatory/preventive action (usually the

wisest and most cost-effective kind!). This is also a basis for the Ramsar indicator of implementation effectiveness which addresses trends in threats to sites (indicator D).

48. The Ramsar *Wetland Risk Assessment Framework* (Resolution VII.10 and its Annex), including its guidance on “early warning indicators”, is especially relevant here.
49. No guidance has been given on what degree of “likelihood” or confidence is sufficient to require the triggering of the Article 3.2 process. Clearly it would defeat the aim of this provision if strict standards of evidence and substantiation were imposed. On the other hand, the system might be open to abuse (or at least ineffectiveness) if the merest suggestion or anxiety on the part of one person were enough to create the legal reporting obligation. The appropriate approach will lie somewhere in a middle ground of informed, authoritative or expert judgement. Further guidance on this may be desirable in future.
50. Planning and decision-making processes which may reveal a prospect or proposal of change should be included within the scope of monitoring regimes (see Section 10 below).

10. “Arranging to be informed”

51. It is implicit in Article 3.2 that the Ramsar Administrative Authority in each Party needs to establish a mechanism by which those responsible for each Ramsar site will be aware of the requirements of the Article, and will report to the Administrative Authority when a change or likely change in ecological character has been detected. In turn, for those locally responsible for a Ramsar site to detect and report such change, or likely change, a monitoring mechanism must be in place at the site, and the COP has recommended that this should form part of the management planning process for all Ramsar sites. In practice few reports are submitted by Administrative Authorities when changes or likely changes as defined by Article 3.2 occur, with most reports being provided instead by third parties. Concern about this has been expressed by the COP, for example in Resolution VIII.8.
52. A working definition of “monitoring” is given in Ramsar’s *Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Resolution VIII.6), as follows: “*Wetland Monitoring* [is] the collection of specific information for management purposes in response to hypotheses derived from assessment activities, and the use of these monitoring results for implementing management. The collection of time-series information that is not hypothesis-driven from wetland assessment is here termed *surveillance* rather than monitoring (refer to Resolution VI.1)”. (Both surveillance and monitoring are relevant to Article 3.2).
53. The following list of provisions relevant to wetland monitoring, which Parties have adopted or operated to date, is taken from a review compiled by BirdLife International on behalf of the Ramsar International Organization Partners which was presented to the Standing Committee in February 2007 (*Watching the Wetlands*; Document SC35-4). (Some of these are further addressed in subsequent sections of the present document).
54. Relevant Ramsar systems, provisions and requirements include:
 - i) the *Framework for designing a wetland monitoring programme* (Annex to Resolution VI.1);

- ii) the *Wetland risk assessment framework* (Annex to Resolution VII.10) including guidance on early warning indicators;
- iii) the *Guidelines for the rapid assessment of inland, coastal and marine wetland biodiversity* (Annex E(i) to Resolution IX.1);
- iv) monitoring undertaken at individual sites in the framework of management plans for the sites, according to Ramsar management planning guidance (Resolution VIII.14);
- v) the six-yearly updates of Ramsar Information Sheets (according to Resolution VI.13) – while not strictly designed as a monitoring mechanism, these will increasingly become an important method for systematically documenting changes, including changes in ecological character, at Ramsar sites;
- vi) a requirement for monitoring that is implied by the Convention text itself in Article 3.2 – “Article 3.2 reports” should in theory be transmitted when change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites is occurring or is threatened (this process is amplified and reinforced in Resolution VIII.8, which includes reference in para 12 to the fact that information from NGOs may be a basis for Article 3.2 reports by Parties);
- vii) the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the Ramsar List* (annexed to Resolution VII.11), which includes objective 4.1: “to use Ramsar sites as baseline and reference areas for national, supranational/regional, and international environmental monitoring to detect trends in the loss of biological diversity, climate change, and the processes of desertification”;
- viii) the Montreux Record and the Ramsar Advisory Missions, which track events in selected cases;
- ix) at a strategic level, the performance of the Ramsar site network as a whole – this can be described in relation to the objectives and targets in the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List and the Convention’s overall Strategic Plan, and Parties have also been asked to set national-level targets for these;
- x) Parties’ national reports to each COP, which often capture both system level and site-specific information on status and changes at sites (a role reinforced by Resolution VIII.8 paragraph 12), information which is reflected in summary in the regional implementation reports compiled by the Secretariat and in some cases also taken forward into COP Resolutions;
- xi) three of the indicators of effectiveness of implementation of the Convention adopted in Resolution IX.1 Annex D, which relate to aspects of the condition of wetland sites:
 - Indicator B: “Trends in the status of Ramsar site ecological character – qualitative assessment”;
 - Indicator D: “The frequency of threats affecting Ramsar sites – qualitative assessment”;
 - Indicator E: “Wetland sites with successfully implemented conservation or wise use management plans”

- xii) qualitative assessments of the kind piloted in 2004 in the MedWet region, as these would also be relevant (no specific proposals advertised at present, but this may feature in operating some parts of the indicators in (x) above);
 - xiii) additional information; under Resolution VIII.13 paragraphs 12-13, data which is additional to that supplied by Parties (including information on site condition and threats) can be “managed” by the Ramsar Sites Information Service as part of maintenance of the Ramsar Sites Database and linked to other sources.
55. In relation to Article 3.2, Contracting Parties will need to equip themselves with mechanisms to detect likely change as well as actual change (see section 9 above). This may require processes for monitoring that go beyond monitoring of sites as such, to include also monitoring of planning and decision-making processes which may reveal a prospect or proposal of change, such as registers of consent applications for land-use/water-management change, development proposals, etc.
 56. The issues above range beyond the requirements of Article 3.2 and Ramsar sites to include strategic trends and changes relating to wetlands more generally. (To the extent that they do this, they will therefore relate to “natural” and “positive” changes as well as human-induced negative ones – see Sections 7 and 8 above).
 57. Item (vii) above refers to the fact that there is an explicit objective in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11) for the Ramsar site network to be used for monitoring wetland status and trends. Objective 4.1 in the *Strategic Framework* determines “to use Ramsar sites as baseline and reference areas for national, supranational/regional, and international environmental monitoring to detect trends in the loss of biological diversity, climate change, and the processes of desertification.”
 58. It is unclear whether any Contracting Party is yet using its national network of Ramsar sites for such monitoring and reporting purposes, and no mechanisms are in place for such monitoring at supranational/regional or international scales. To do so implies that monitoring regimes at Ramsar sites established as part of the management planning process should be designed to yield such trend information, and that a mechanism is needed for reporting and compiling this information so as to report ‘supranationally’ on such trends.
 59. Although, as for Article 3.2 reporting, the emphasis in Objective 4.1 is upon losses (i.e., adverse change), it should be noted that not all such trends, for example as a consequence of climate change, will necessarily be adverse, as is recognized by the STRP’s report on climate change and wetlands (Resolution VIII.3 and COP8 DOC. 11). Likewise, Objective 4.1 implies that the only changes in the biological diversity of wetlands will be losses, and it may be unduly pessimistic to make this assumption.
 60. There is no guidance provided to Parties on how, and to whom, such information from monitoring Ramsar sites should be reported so as to respond to Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework*. It may be appropriate to request the STRP to review this matter and advise on how such a reporting mechanism might be established in a coherent manner,

linked to the collection of monitoring information as part of within-site management planning and to Article 3.2 reporting.

61. In the meantime, paragraph 20 of Resolution VIII.13 has requested the STRP to review sources of information on Ramsar sites (including Ramsar Information Sheets, site management plans, and data collected under other international instruments), to review the reporting and use of such information, and to make recommendations on opportunities for harmonisation and efficiency. This has been incorporated into the STRP task defined in paragraph 52 (i) of Resolution IX.2 on information needs, taken forward now in COP10 draft Resolution DR 14 on *A Framework for Ramsar data and information needs*.

11. Change that is “too trivial to require reporting”

62. Article 3.2 is unqualified as to the magnitude or significance of the changes to which it refers. As written, it implies that any change, no matter how trivial, should be reported. Clearly to do so would be neither practical nor helpful. Further guidance on this has therefore been seen as useful for assisting Parties in meeting their obligations under the Article, and that has been requested by Resolution VIII.8.
63. One part of this issue concerns absolute triviality, and how to define the cut-off threshold between “*de minimis*” changes which can be ignored and other changes which may be indicating something real that requires a response.
64. The other part concerns the ability to distinguish between a natural range of variation and some perturbation which becomes superimposed on this and signals an issue of concern. As paragraph 25 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* puts it: “Changes to ecological character outside the natural variations may signal that uses of the sites, or externally derived impacts on the sites, are unsustainable and may lead to the degradation of natural processes and thus the ultimate breakdown of the ecological, biological and hydrological functioning of the wetland.”
65. It should be emphasised that what is concerned here is a question based on the ecological character and the functionality of the wetland, so triviality or significance is not something that will be judged simply in terms of the extent of the wetland area affected by change.
66. Both of the aspects described above approximate to a consideration of what is elsewhere sometimes referred to as “limits of acceptable change” or “alert limits”. A strong linkage is suggested here with site management plans. The management plan should be the place where limits of acceptable change are defined, by reference to management objectives. In the most simplistic sense, anything that falls within the tolerance “bandwidth” for these objectives, if they are properly defined, should be “trivial” in the sense of not requiring an Article 3.2 report.
67. Resolution VIII.14, *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands*, includes text on “operational limits”, as follows:
- “130. The purpose of operational limits is to define a range of values for each factor which will be considered acceptable and tolerable levels.

131. The most significant factors provide a focus for surveillance or monitoring. ... Acceptable levels should be defined for any factors known to have a significant impact on the features. For example, it is often necessary to set a level of tolerance for an invasive alien species, which could be anything from total exclusion to accepting the presence of a species providing the population remains below a given limit. Other examples could include biological limits, such as a limit on the extent of scrub cover in wet grassland, and limits on human activities such as hunting or fishing.
 132. Operational limits require an upper or a lower limit, or sometimes both. In reality, though, both upper and lower limits are seldom applied to the same factor. Upper limits are usually applied to undesirable factors - they define the maximum tolerance - and lower limits are applied to positive factors.
 133. In most instances it will not be possible to set precise, scientifically defined limits. This should not be considered a major issue, however. Operational limits are an early warning system, acting as a trigger for action, reached long before there is any significant threat to the long-term viability of the feature. If scientific information is not available, then professional experience comes into play.
 134. Key questions concerning operational limits for factors are:
 - i) to what extent can a negative factor be allowed to influence a feature before there is any need for concern; and
 - ii) to what extent is it necessary to ensure that positive factors are maintained.”
68. A section on “specified limits” is also given, from which the following are extracts:
- “149. Specified limits represent thresholds for action and should trigger an appropriate response. They define the degree to which the value of a performance indicator is permitted to fluctuate without creating any cause for concern.
151. ... (iii) when a change has taken place and the reason is unknown, ... establish a research project to identify the cause.
 152. Limits for ecological character features should be developed in recognition of the natural dynamics and cyclic change in populations and communities. In reality, there are very few features for which the natural fluctuations are fully understood. For a population, the lower limit might be the threshold beyond which a population will cease to be viable. The upper limit could be the point at which a population threatens another important population, or where a population becomes so large that it compromises the habitat that supports it.
 153. Even if a viability threshold is known, it would be very unlikely that a manager would set a limit close to a point of possible extinction. A sufficient safety margin must always be allowed to account for the possibility of unexpected changes or unforeseen impacts. In many ways, limits can be regarded as limits of confidence. When the values of all performance indicators fall within the limits, it can be

confidently considered that the feature is at favourable conservation status; when the limits are exceeded, that confidence disappears.

154. Limits for ecological character features may be closely related to suitable use and carrying capacity limits. Thus, limits of human activities/interventions should also be clearly established and monitored.”
69. The Commonwealth (federal) Government of Australia has been developing guidance on issues concerning the ecological character of its Ramsar sites (*Draft National Framework and Guidance for describing the ecological character of Australia's Ramsar wetlands*, 2007). While not necessarily applicable to other Contracting Parties or to other situations elsewhere in the world, this does provide a recent example of thinking on the question of limits of acceptable change.
70. The definition of limits of acceptable change adopted in the Australian work is: “the variation that is considered acceptable in a particular component or process of the ecological character of the wetland without indicating change in ecological character which may lead to a reduction or loss of the criteria for which the site was Ramsar listed”. (It can be seen immediately that there are some potential problems with this, in light of the discussion in Section 4 above concerning the relationship between ecological character and international importance).
71. Wetland managers in the Australian approach would be expected to “describe the natural variability and limits of acceptable change for each of the critical components, processes and benefits/services of their wetland; quantify the typical range of variability for the critical components, processes and services and the limits of acceptable change beyond which the ecosystem component, process or service would be expected to move outside the limits specified and result in a change in condition of the wetland; and where possible, describe the impact that exceeding the limits of acceptable change may have on these and other components, processes or benefits/services.”
72. The draft guidance further provides that:
- “The limits of acceptable change may equal the natural variability or may be set at some other value. Justification for the limits should be provided.
- For some wetlands there may be a trend of change in the natural variation of the system over time, so it is important to review the limits of ecological change over time to ensure they still reflect the natural variability of the system. However, care should be taken to ensure that such changes are really the natural variability or trend of the system and not a human induced change in the system.
- Where possible, the limits of acceptable change should be based on quantitative information from relevant monitoring programs, scientific papers, technical reports, or other publications and documented information on the wetland. Wetland experts, indigenous leaders and oral histories may also provide information that can be useful in setting limits of acceptable change. In some cases the datasets may not be ideal, however, there may be enough information to set interim limits of acceptable change and identify that further data is required.

For some components, processes, or some wetlands, there may be very little information available. Where available information is not comprehensive enough to set definite limits or interim limits of acceptable change, this lack of information should be described as a knowledge gap. Where possible, identify the information required to set the limits if that information is not available.”

73. Examples of the type of “alert threshold” specifications under consideration include:
- any net reduction in the number of waterbird species recorded;
 - fewer than a threshold lower-limit number of birds recorded for two consecutive years (set by reference to the normal range of numbers occurring), based on consideration of previous 24 months’ data;
 - any net reduction in waterbird numbers over 10 years;
 - sustained changes in community composition/abundances of common groups;
 - reduction in population recruitment rates;
 - more than 20% change, sustained for more than two years, in the number of species of any of the classes of macroinvertebrates present;
 - significant loss of area (advice required on what constitutes “significant”);
 - significant loss of area of community (advice required on what constitutes “significant”);
 - any net change in the timing, duration, and frequency of freshwater inputs;
 - site specific trigger values (once sufficient data has been collected) based on 80th percentile of median water turbidity values;
 - any significant change in median solute concentrations from baseline;
 - any significant change in median salinity values from baseline.

12. Taking a precautionary approach

74. Paragraph 17 of Resolution VIII.8, quoted earlier, encouraged Contracting Parties “to take a precautionary approach” “in the meantime”, i.e., while the STRP was preparing the present advice. There is however a good case to be made for taking forward some of the ethos of “precaution” from this interim situation so that it features as an enduring element of the overall scheme.
75. Standards and international thinking on the concept of precautionary approaches are now in common currency. As one example, the concept is written into the text of the Convention on Biological Diversity (preamble paragraph 9). As another, IUCN in 2007 produced *Guidelines for applying the precautionary principle to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management*.
76. The concept would be applicable to much of what is involved in implementing the Ramsar Convention. The development of further guidance on this, in a general sense, may be desirable in future.
77. In the present context, however, of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character, the most relevant manifestation of precautionary thinking will relate to the provision that is already in place for reporting “likely” change as well as actual change (section 9 above). In this sense it could be argued that the primary text of the

Ramsar Convention has always embodied an aspect of the precautionary approach, long before it became the widespread principle it is now seen to be elsewhere.

78. When an identified candidate Ramsar site is facing actual or likely change in ecological character, in many cases it will be prudent, for the purposes of impact assessment and decision-making (see Section 15 below), to treat it as though it has already been designated. This is the approach followed by some Contracting Parties on a voluntary basis, and it is commended as good precautionary practice for all, where appropriate.
79. If, instead, a significantly weaker standard of treatment were applied to candidate or “pending” sites, they would be at increased risk of damage or loss before ever being able to benefit from the formal protection they deserve. In some cases the very fact of identifying a site as a candidate increases its risk, if for example developers are spurred by such identification to bring forward proposals in the “window” of time perceived before stronger protection is applied. This is a very acute example of a need for “precaution”.
80. It will be important to determine in a given case the reasons why any particular site that may merit designation as a Ramsar site has not yet been designated. Examples of the possibilities include:
 - there is not yet sufficient information to assess clearly that the site qualifies;
 - there is sufficient information but scientific evaluations of this information are still underway;
 - scientific evaluation confirms that the site qualifies, but there is insufficient capacity/resources to prepare an RIS and/or undertake any internal procedures needed to progress designation;
 - a national “strategy and priorities for the further designation of Ramsar sites” (Resolution VIII.10, para 27) has been completed, but the site concerned has been assigned a low priority in it;
 - as a matter of national policy on Ramsar designations, national legal protection measures need first to be applied to the site, and this has not yet occurred;
 - as a matter of national policy on Ramsar designations, national legal protection measures need first to be applied to the site, and the area concerned (or part/s of it) cannot readily be addressed by the mechanisms available;
 - local consultations about the designation are still underway;
 - conflicting proposals for the future use of the site are under consideration.
81. Although several of these may apply in a given case simultaneously, in an approximate way they describe a rough sequence of situations that approach progressively closer to full and final designated status; and so the degree of precaution that is desirable might be seen to escalate accordingly. The final situation listed here should in fact not be a reason for delaying designation (although it sometimes is), since it describes a situation where all the machinery of the Convention’s requirements and guidance on treatment of listed sites should be brought to bear in a full and formal sense to secure an appropriate outcome.
82. By extension, it follows that it would also be prudent good practice (though with a less strict imperative, according to the concept of hierarchy being suggested here) to apply in a precautionary way some of the “checks and balances” designed for Ramsar sites to relevant ecological change situations arising in respect of other wetland areas. Although

not a legal obligation, this would be an important contribution and tool for implementing the “wise use” provisions of the Convention.

83. Article 2.5 of the Convention is also relevant in requiring that a test must be met (the existence of “urgent national interests”) before a Contracting Party is able to move to delete or restrict the boundaries of a listed Ramsar site. At present no such test is required where the Party may be planning to allow a change in ecological character without an intention to delete or restrict the boundaries of the site. The magnitude of change in ecological character could however be the same in each of these cases; so this is an anomaly which could usefully be rectified by developing appropriate guidance at some stage in future.
84. Finally, Section VI of Ramsar Handbook 16 on *Managing Wetlands: Frameworks for managing Ramsar sites and other wetlands* (3rd edition, 2006) concerns “The precautionary approach as applied to environmental management”, and contains the following:
 - “53. When considering the carrying capacity of a site for any human use, activity or exploitation (i.e., its sustainability), the best available evidence should indicate that the activity will not be a threat to the features of the ecological character of the site.
 54. Contracting Parties are, when implementing their wetland management planning process, invited to take into consideration the precautionary approach, as established in Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which affirms that

‘In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.’”

13. Reporting (“passing information without delay”)

85. As noted earlier, the latter part of Article 3.2 reads: “Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 [= the Secretariat]”.
86. When paragraph 6 of Resolution VIII.8 recorded that the Conference of Parties was “CONCERNED that, according to available information including the National Reports to COP8, many Contracting Parties do not have in place the mechanisms to comply with Article 3.2, or that these are not being implemented;” the failure of most Parties to report as they should under Article 3.2 was one key aspect of this. This remains a serious deficiency, all the more so since it is a strict and unqualified requirement contained in the Convention itself.
87. One action to assist with this was agreed at COP8 in paragraph 14 of the same Resolution, which “DIRECTS the Ramsar Bureau [= Secretariat], in cooperation with Wetlands

International, to prepare and circulate to all Contracting Parties a simple format for this reporting”. Some initial proposals were drawn up in 2006, as a separate pro-forma document. An alternative approach has now been advanced, however, in draft Resolution DR 15 on “Describing the ecological character of wetlands, and data needs and formats for core inventory”, to use the Ramsar Ecological Character Description Sheet put forward in DR 15 as the basis for change reports. A simple column has been included in the Description Sheet headed “Change/likely change?”. A copy of the sheet for a given site, with relevant details entered into this column, can therefore act as the simple alert mechanism required to trigger the processes for implementing Article 3.2.

88. Article 3.2 report information provides an important contribution to the National Reports provided by Parties for each COP, as emphasized by paragraph 12 of Resolution VIII.8. Paragraph 14 of the Resolution reaffirms that in accordance with Resolution 5.4 this information will be maintained as part of the Ramsar Sites Database. Analyses can be derived from the Database for regular reporting to Parties on the status and trends of wetlands, and paragraph 13 makes the link to the monitoring analysis provision in Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (see Section 10 above). The role of this kind of information in relation to certain of the Convention’s indicators of effectiveness has also been mentioned above.
89. These are, however, all periodic and systematic collation processes. The primary force of Article 3.2, on the other hand, is that it envisages a “real time” or “as it happens” communication system, so that responses to specific issues can be prompt and effective. The system is designed primarily as an action tool, rather as merely than a research tool. The phrase “without delay” is critical to this, and yet it is extremely poorly observed by most Parties, or in many cases even ignored. **This must change in future, if the credibility and utility of the Convention as a whole is not to be undermined.**
90. The system in the meantime relies heavily by default on the assistance that can be provided by NGOs and civil society in passing information in cases of ecological change affecting sites. Much can be done in a constructive way by Contracting Party governments that engage in partnership arrangements with NGOs on these matters. Helpful though this is, however, it is not an adequate substitute for government authorities playing their full part in honouring the obligations they have accepted under the Convention and passing information in an authoritative and statutory way.
91. It is finally worth noting that Resolution VIII.8 para 15. “RECOGNIZES that reporting under Article 3.2 of the Convention does not substitute for the requirement as adopted by Resolution VI.13 for Contracting Parties to provide a fully updated Ramsar Information Sheet for each of their designated Ramsar sites at intervals of not more than six years, and URGES Contracting Parties to renew their efforts to provide such updated Ramsar Information Sheets in a timely manner.”
92. In the flow-charts presented in Annex 1, many of the steps illustrated carry a reporting obligation, or a reporting implication. Further interpretative detail concerning these reporting aspects is set out in Annex 2.

14. Article 8 and the role of the COP

93. Article 8.2 of the Convention gives a non-exhaustive list of functions of the body now known as the Secretariat, which include:
- “(d) to forward notification of any alterations to the List, or changes in character of wetlands included therein, to all Contracting Parties and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next Conference”; and
 - “(e) to make known to the Contracting Party concerned, the recommendations of the Conferences in respect of such alterations to the List or of changes in the character of wetlands included therein.”
94. If the COP is to make recommendations on alterations to the List or changes in the character of sites, it might seem logical that it should do so in advance of such things happening. Some Parties however have expressed reluctance to be put in an implied position of waiting for the once-in-three-years opportunity for the COP to express a view before they can act, when in any case such a view would appear only to have the force of a recommendation rather than a determination.
95. It is also possible to envisage that COP recommendations could be made on actions to be taken consequent on an alteration/change (such as compensation) – while perhaps not as useful, such an interpretation cannot be ruled out, and the Article does not clearly indicate whether one or the other (or both) of these approaches is/are intended.
96. Resolution IX.6 refers to these provisions of Article 8, but does not reduce their ambiguity. In paragraph 17 of its Annex, it provides as follows:
- “If a deletion or boundary restriction is still contemplated after all such other considerations and options have been weighed, the procedures for such an action should follow the terms of Article 8.2 (b), (d) and (e): i.e., for the Secretariat to forward notification of such an alteration to the List to all Contracting Parties; to arrange for the matter to be discussed at the next Conference of the Contracting Parties; and to make known to the Contracting Party concerned the recommendations of the Conference in respect of such alterations.”
97. In paragraph 30 of its Annex, it further provides:
- “The following procedure should be followed when a Party wishes to confirm restriction or delisting a Ramsar site:
 - i) The Party should submit its intent, covering the aspects of the issue as outlined in Step 8 above, to the Ramsar Secretariat, which will make arrangements to advise all Contracting Parties, in line with Article 8.2 (d);
 - ii) All such cases and their outcomes will be reported for discussion at the next COP, in line with Article 8.2 (d), which may wish to make recommendations to the Party concerned, in line with Article 8.2 (e);
 - iii) The Secretariat will transmit any such recommendations made by the COP to the Contracting Party concerned (Article 8 (e)).”

98. Resolution IX.6 and its Annex, as with previous discussions on Article 8, concerns itself in this context mainly with situations where there is a possibility of deletion or restriction of the boundaries of a Ramsar site under Article 2.5. To date, less attention has been given to the fact that Article 8 also expressly covers situations where change in ecological character of a site is at stake without deletion or restriction necessarily being in prospect.
99. Nonetheless, parts of what Article 8 envisages in this respect do feature routinely in the Conference of Parties, where information (e.g., from National Reports) about ecological character change at sites is presented, and Resolutions (or often a single “portmanteau” Resolution) are adopted making recommendations in response. There remains, however, much room to make these processes more complete and effective.

15. Responding to change

100. Although the Ramsar Convention contains a strict obligation for Contracting Parties to arrange to be informed about change or likely change in ecological character affecting Listed sites, and to pass information on such changes without delay to the Secretariat, there is no equivalent obligation concerning what to do about the change itself (apart of course from the general requirement in Article 3.1 to formulate and implement planning so as to promote the conservation of sites in the List). This may seem to be a slight anomaly.
101. There are however a number of suggestions and exhortations contained in COP decisions that offer help. Two particular sets of response processes, concerning mechanisms created by the Convention itself (the Montreux Record and the Ramsar Advisory Missions) and concerning actions for restoration and compensation, are dealt with separately in Sections 16, 17 and 18 respectively below. Others are dealt with in the present Section.
102. COP Recommendation 4.8 on *Change in ecological character of Ramsar sites* emphasizes “the fundamental importance of maintaining the ecological character of listed sites”, and “REQUESTS that Contracting Parties, in whose territory are located sites which have incurred or are being threatened by change in ecological character, take swift and effective action to prevent or remedy such changes”. This Recommendation also established the Montreux Record (discussed further in Section 16 below).
103. Resolution VIII.8, in paragraph 19, “FURTHER RECOGNIZES that several response options and mechanisms are available to the Contracting Party concerned to address and resolve identified negative changes, or likely changes, in the ecological character of sites on the List, including *inter alia*:
- a) when resources permit, using an established management planning process, including undertaking an environmental impact assessment, to guide implementation of appropriate management action;
 - b) seeking the advice of the STRP, and its National Focal Points, on appropriate issues to take into account in addressing the matter, through the mechanism of requesting the Bureau [= Secretariat] to circulate the Article 3.2 pro-forma completed by the Contracting Party concerned to the STRP for comment;
 - c) for developing countries ... requesting resources to implement management action through the emergency assistance category of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund or seeking such resources from other relevant sources; and

- d) listing, if appropriate, on the Montreux Record and requesting a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) in order to bring international expertise to bear in providing advice on appropriate actions”.
104. Paragraph 20 of the same Resolution “CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to maintain or restore the ecological character of their Ramsar sites, including utilizing all appropriate mechanisms to address and resolve as soon as practicable the matters for which a site may have been the subject of a report pursuant to Article 3.2”. (The issue of restoration is picked up in Section 17 below).
105. Actions resulting in a change in ecological character may on occasion arise as a deliberate official choice by Contracting Party authorities, where tradeoffs are seen to be necessary between different competing public interests in the same area, e.g., legally mandated conservation on the one hand and legally mandated development on the other.
106. In such cases, where Ramsar sites are concerned, Article 2.5 (as discussed above) requires that a test of “urgent national interests” be met, in relation to the exceptional need for the action that will produce (or threatens potentially to produce) the change in character; assuming that a change in Ramsar status of the site or a change in its boundaries would follow.
107. A number of cases have produced elaborations of thinking on the “urgent national interest” test (see, for example, the report of Ramsar Advisory Mission No. 46 in 2001 concerning the Mühlenberger Loch Ramsar site in Germany – www.ramsar.org/ram/ram_rpt_46e.htm and the guidance adopted in Resolution VIII.20).
108. If an area was designated incorrectly and never met the criteria; if it had an approximate boundary that later becomes refined; if its interest declines below the criteria thresholds for unintended or unpreventable reasons and it cannot be recovered; or if the thresholds themselves are amended and the site is no longer “above the bar”, then reduction or de-listing might be a logical step. None of these scenarios, however, were foreseen by the Convention text, and so technically this falls outside what is allowed.
109. Cases of this kind have arisen more frequently in recent years. COP9 information paper DOC.15 (2005) refers to examples involving sites in Australia, Azerbaijan, Denmark (Greenland), Iran, Pakistan, Spain, Togo, the United Kingdom and Uruguay, and Resolutions have been adopted in 1993, 2002 and 2005 to give some guidance (Resolutions 5.3 Annex 1 on a *Review procedure for listed sites which may not qualify under any of the Criteria established by Recommendation 4.2*, VIII.21 on *Defining Ramsar site boundaries more accurately in Ramsar Information Sheets*, and IX.6 on *Guidance for addressing Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the Criteria for designation*). The challenge is to distinguish cases that are genuinely of this kind from those which should be dealt with according to Article 2.5 instead.
110. Paragraph 4 of Resolution IX.6, referred to above, recalls that Resolution VIII.22 recognized that there are situations, other than the “urgent national interest” provision of Article 2.5 of the Convention, where Ramsar site boundaries may warrant further definition, or where sites or parts of sites no longer meet the criteria for designation. Most of the situations cited do not technically involve a change in ecological character of the

site. One of them does, however, namely the situation where “part or all of a Ramsar site unavoidably loses the values, functions and attributes for which it was included”.

111. Paragraph 9 of the Resolution reaffirms that “it is an overarching principle that a wetland should remain designated as a Ramsar site, and that the whole of its original extent should remain designated, whenever possible and appropriate”.
112. The Annex to the Resolution (paragraph 12) points out that “Resolution VIII.22 concerns particular situations in which ecological character loss of a designated Ramsar site is or was ‘unavoidable’. It follows that if such a situation is or was avoidable, the appropriate steps to take are to avoid such loss”. If loss of ecological character is unavoidable, then restoration or compensation should be considered. The Annex includes further points on this, which are referred to in Section 17 below.
113. In the Resolution IX.6 Annex, paragraphs 1-2 introduce the guidance it gives as covering “principles and procedures for situations not foreseen in the treaty text concerning the loss or deterioration of the ecological character of wetlands on the List of Wetlands of International Importance ... under which the terms of Article 2.5 of the Convention text concerning ‘urgent national interests’ for situations of loss of the ecological character of a listed Ramsar site have not been invoked by the Contracting Party concerned, or where such ‘urgent national interest’ cannot be justified. Procedures and responsibilities of Parties in relation to Article 2.5 are covered by the guidance adopted by COP8 as the Annex to Resolution VIII.20.”
114. Paragraph 3 continues: “In relation to boundary restrictions of listed Ramsar sites, this guidance concerns those situations where reductions in the area of the site are being contemplated owing to the loss or deterioration of the ecological character of the site, where the proposed changes would affect the fundamental objectives, and the application of the Criteria for designation, for which the site was listed.”
115. Ten scenarios were identified in a review prepared by the Ramsar Secretariat (COP9 DOC. 15). Those concerning change in ecological character are as follows (with slight amendments made in taking them forward into the text of Resolution IX.6):
 - “All or part of a Ramsar site loses the components, processes, and services of its ecological character as a wetland for which it was listed, for reasons other than changes covered by Article 2.5”;
 - “Part or all of a listed Ramsar site is proposed for deletion in order to permit possible future developments or other land use change in that area which cannot be justified as ‘urgent national interest’” (it is emphasized in paragraph 13 of the Annex to Resolution IX.6 that this is not an acceptable action).
116. The Resolution IX.6 Annex then sets out a series of steps to apply in the event that “last resort” deletion or restriction is contemplated, which include:

Step 5: As part of the assessment in Step 4 [= assessment of the present ecological character of the site], establish whether the change in ecological character that has led to the site, or part of the site, ceasing to qualify is truly irreversible. If the change appears to have a chance of reversibility, define the conditions under which

the change may reverse or be reversed, and the management actions (including restoration) needed to secure this, as well as the likely timescales needed to permit the recovery of the character of the site.

Such reversibility could arise through, *inter alia*, recovery from damage caused by a natural disaster, the natural inter-annual variability of the size of waterbird or other populations, and/or management interventions including restoration or rehabilitation of the affected part(s) of the site.

Step 6: If there is potential for reversibility, monitor the key ecological features of the site for the time period necessary as identified under Step 5, and then re-assess the status of the site in relation to its qualification under the Criteria.

Step 7: Report on the recovery of the site, including through a further Article 3.2 report to the Secretariat, requesting removal of the site from the Montreux Record if appropriate, and prepare and submit an updated Ramsar Information Sheet which clearly identifies the changes which have occurred.

Step 8: If the loss of part or all of the listed site is irreversible, and the attempts at recovery or restoration have failed in terms of its qualification for the Ramsar List, or if there is clear evidence that the site was listed in error in the first place, prepare a report on the restriction of the site's boundary or its removal from the List, as appropriate. This report should include, *inter alia*, a description of the loss of ecological character and the reasons for it, a description of any assessments made and their results, the steps taken to seek the recovery of the site, and proposals for the provision of compensation (including in line with Resolutions 5.3, VII.24 and VIII.20), accompanied by relevant maps. If the intention is for a boundary restriction, this should include an updated Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS).

16. The Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Missions

117. One of the institutional responses available under the Convention in respect to ecological character changes is the Montreux Record, a list of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur, established by COP Recommendation 4.8 in 1990 and maintained by the Secretariat in consultation with each Contracting Party concerned. The original Recommendation 4.8 provisions regarding the Record have been further amplified by elements of Resolutions 5.4, VI.1, and VII.8.
118. In Resolution 5.4 the Parties established guidelines for the operation of the Record and determined that its purpose should be, *inter alia*, to identify priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention. In Resolution VI.1, they adopted a revised procedure for its operation.
119. Paragraph 21 of Resolution VIII.8 reaffirmed that "the Montreux Record is the principal tool of the Convention for highlighting those sites where an adverse change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur and which are therefore in need of priority conservation action, and ACKNOWLEDGES that the voluntary inclusion of a

particular site on the Montreux Record is a useful tool available to Contracting Parties in circumstances where:

- a) demonstrating national commitment to resolve the adverse changes would assist in their resolution;
- b) highlighting particularly serious cases would be beneficial at national and/or international level;
- c) positive national and international conservation attention would benefit the site; and/or
- d) inclusion on the Record would provide guidance in the allocation of resources available under financial mechanisms.”

120. Paragraph 22 “ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, when submitting a report in fulfillment of Article 3.2, to consider whether the site would benefit from listing on the Montreux Record, and to request such listing as appropriate”, and Paragraph 23 “REQUESTS Contracting Parties with sites on the Montreux Record to regularly provide the Ramsar Bureau with an update on their progress in taking action to address the issues for which these Ramsar sites were listed on the Record, including reporting fully on these matters in their National Reports to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.”
121. The Montreux Record might also be considered as a mechanism for generating good case study information on lessons learned in successfully tackling threats to Ramsar sites.
122. Further information on the Montreux Record can be found in Ramsar Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2006) on *Addressing change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands*.
123. The Montreux Record questionnaire that is submitted by a Party when requesting inclusion of a site in the Record has been developed separately from the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) that forms the basis for the Ramsar Sites Database, and the questionnaire has not been wholly compatible with the RIS and database structure. The Parties have therefore identified that there is a need to review the questionnaire and increase harmonisation of the information fields so as to facilitate future maintenance of the Montreux Record as part of the Ramsar Sites Database. Accordingly the STRP was given task 56 in Resolution IX.2 to “Prepare advice on redesigning the Montreux Record questionnaire, *inter alia* to ensure consistency with the Article 3.2. reporting format.” Draft Resolution DR 10 on “Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention” now takes this forward as a task for the STRP’s future work programme to “Prepare advice on redesigning the Montreux Record questionnaire to ensure consistency with the recommendations in DR 15 on ‘Describing wetland ecological character, and data needs and formats for core inventory: harmonized scientific and technical guidance’ and DR 16 on ‘Detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character: scientific and technical guidance’, and to take account of other perceived priority requirements.
124. The Montreux Record is a source of information, but it is also a catalyst for action. One of the actions to which it may be viewed as a precursor is the use of a Ramsar Advisory Mission. The original decision to create the Missions procedure was made by the Standing Committee in 1988 and later endorsed by the COP in 1990 in Recommendation 4.7. The system was originally named the “Monitoring Procedure”, then later (through paragraph 14 of Resolution VI.14 in 1996) the “Management Guidance Procedure”, and finally (through paragraph 39 of Resolution VII.12 in 1999) the “Ramsar Advisory Missions”.

125. The Missions (or RAMs) are a mechanism for bringing international expert advice and assistance to bear on ecological character change issues. The expertise contributed is sometimes the decisive added value required to find a solution. On other occasions the independent authoritative “brokerage” provided through a RAM can break political deadlock and may be decisive in creating consensus.
126. Further information on the Ramsar Advisory Missions can be found in Ramsar Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2006) on *Addressing change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands*.
127. It will be clear from foregoing sections of this paper that if Article 3.2 of the Convention were operating fully as intended, there might be little need for the Montreux Record, since a record of “Article 3.2 reports” could largely fulfil the purposes for which the Montreux Record was designed. The information and action triggers thus provided could then potentially include Ramsar Advisory Missions or other actions as appropriate to the given case. Given, however, that Article 3.2 for the present continues to be implemented in only a very incomplete way, this potentially streamlined situation unfortunately remains a prospect only for the somewhat distant future.

17. Restoration

128. This section and the one that follows on compensation continue the discussion of potential responses to change or likely change in ecological character by focusing on situations where avoidance or prevention of change is not possible or is unlikely to succeed.
129. As emphasized, for example, in Recommendation 4.1, Resolution VII.17 paragraph 10, and Resolution IX.6 Annex paragraph 12, no matter how feasible restoration may be in a given case, when potential loss of natural wetlands is in prospect, the first priority is to avoid such loss.
130. The COP has also stressed the point (again in Resolution VII.17 paragraph 10, and Resolution VIII.16 paragraph 10) that restoration or creation of wetlands cannot replace the loss or degradation of natural wetlands. This is true in relation to the ecological values of such wetlands, but in many cases it is equally true, or even more so, in relation to those cultural values that are site-specific in nature.
131. There is thus a logical sequence in which steps should be considered. To begin with, when change in ecological character at a site is deemed likely, the response obligation at that point is to maintain the character under Article 3.1 of the Convention (following the reasoning referred to in Section 5 above whereby “conservation” is taken to mean “maintenance of ecological character”).
132. If change is occurring or has occurred, the “maintain” obligation should be interpreted as continuing in effect, which would mean an obligation to restore the interests in question, *in situ*.

133. The *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* forming an Annex to Resolution VIII.16 comment on the term “restoration” as follows, in paragraph 3: “Although Operational Objective 4 of the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 refers to both ‘restoration’ and ‘rehabilitation’, the difference between these two terms is not clear. The Ramsar Convention has not attempted to provide precise definitions of these terms. While it might be said that “restoration” implies a return to pre-disturbance conditions and that “rehabilitation” implies an improvement of wetland functions without necessarily returning to pre-disturbance conditions, these words are often used interchangeably both within Ramsar documentation and within the conservation literature. These *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* use the term ‘restoration’ in its broadest sense, which includes both projects that promote a return to original conditions and projects that improve wetland functions without necessarily promoting a return to pre-disturbance conditions.”
134. A move to a next step in the sequence would depend on a judgement that efforts to “maintain”, “restore” or “rehabilitate” were not succeeding and/or had no prospect of succeeding. This is often not a straightforward judgement to make, either in ecosystem management terms or in legal terms. Informed assessments and a precautionary approach (see Section 12 above) will both be necessary.
135. If the judgement described in the preceding paragraph is made, in effect it constitutes also a decision that the situation has moved beyond the scope of the Article 3.1 requirement (hence the legal dimension mentioned above), and at this point the question of compensation becomes relevant.

18. Compensation

136. Clearly, if change proceeds to the extent of a decision to restrict the boundary of the designated area, or to de-list the Ramsar site altogether (provided that the strict “urgent national interests” test in Article 2.5 for allowing either of these actions has been met), then under Article 4.2 compensatory habitat provision is required.
137. Article 4.2 provides as follows: “Where a Contracting Party in its urgent national interest, deletes or restricts the boundaries of a wetland included in the List, it should as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources, and in particular it should create additional nature reserves for waterfowl and for the protection, either in the same area or elsewhere, of an adequate portion of the original habitat”.
138. Resolution VIII.20 on *General guidance for interpreting “urgent national interests” under Article 2.5 of the Convention and considering compensation under Article 4.2* includes the following (paragraph 4 of its Annex): “When invoking its right under Article 2.5 of the Convention in cases of urgent national interests, a Contracting Party should as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources. When considering such compensation, a Contracting Party may take into account, *inter alia*, the following:
- 4.1 the maintenance of the overall value of the Contracting Party’s wetland area included in the Ramsar List at the national and global level;
 - 4.2 the availability of compensatory replacement;
 - 4.3 the relevance of the compensatory measure to the ecological character, habitat, or value of the affected Ramsar site(s);

- 4.4 scientific and other uncertainties;
 - 4.5 the timing of the compensatory measure relative to the proposed action; and
 - 4.6 the adverse effect the compensatory measure itself may cause.”
139. The Annex to Resolution IX.6 on *Guidance for addressing Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the Criteria for designation* (in its paragraph 15) interprets item 4.1 above to mean that “at least equivalent provision of compensation should be made”.
140. It should be noted that the trigger for compensation under Article 4.2 is not the ecological character change itself, but instead the administrative decision that the designation should be changed, on the basis that the ecological change concerned is deemed to be irreversible.
141. This is logical, since until such a conclusion is reached, the first response to character change should be to endeavour to reverse it. (This is discussed above in relation to the cited guidance in Resolutions concerning restoration. The principle also appears in texts concerning compensation – for example, paragraph 5 of Resolution VII.24 notes that “effective wetland protection involves the conservation of wetlands as a first choice within a three-step mitigation sequence, including avoidance, minimization, and compensation, the latter only as a last resort”).
142. If, however, irreversible negative changes have occurred and yet no decision is taken to amend or de-list the designated area, the Convention text does not require compensation, and this could be regarded as an anomaly on which further advice should be prepared.
143. In such cases, Resolution VII.24 on *Compensation for lost wetland habitats and other functions* becomes the primary source of an expectation that compensation should be provided. (This Resolution is not to be read as complementary to Article 4.2 – in fact, it applies to Ramsar sites just as much as it does to other wetlands). In its substantive paragraphs, the Resolution records that the Conference of Parties:
- “10. URGES the Contracting Parties to take all practicable measures for compensating any loss of wetland functions, attributes and values, both in quality and surface area, caused by human activities;
 11. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to integrate rules for compensation of wetland loss into their national policies on land and water planning; and
 12. ALSO CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to incorporate a preference for compensating for wetland loss with wetlands of a similar type and in the same local water catchment.”
144. The Annex to Resolution IX.6 on *Guidance for addressing Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the Criteria for designation* extends the reference in Resolution VII.24 paragraph 10, quoted above, to cover legislation – its paragraph 16 reads: “Parties should consider, if such policies and legislation are not already in place, establishing policies and legislative mechanisms for addressing third-party damage to the ecological character of listed Ramsar sites, including the issue of compensation”.
145. Two further scenarios may arise in which compensation is necessary. The first (though not strictly within the context of the present guidance concerning change in ecological character) is defined by Resolution 5.3 on a *Procedure for initial designation of sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, Annex 1 of which is a *Review procedure for listed sites which*

may not qualify under any of the Criteria established by Recommendation 4.2, and which, in paragraph 4 of this Annex, provides as follows: “When, following consultation between the Convention Bureau and the Contracting Party concerned, it is agreed that a site failed at the time of designation to qualify under any of the criteria, and that there is no possibility of extension, enhancement, or restoration of its functions or values, it shall instruct the Convention Bureau to remove the site from the List and shall apply the provisions for compensation, as provided in Article 4.2 of the Convention.”

146. The second further scenario relates to certain exceptional cases of “likely” ecological character change affecting a Ramsar site. Normally, as discussed above, the sequence of actions would see compensation being a final resort when other possibilities are exhausted, and normally this point would arrive when the change had already occurred. However, in some cases where avoidance, prevention and remediation of change can with certainty be predicted (for example, an “urgent national interest” case has run its full course of decision-making, and scientific assessments predict with confidence the impossibility of maintaining the site’s character *in situ*), then even if the change has not yet occurred, it may be prudent to commence compensatory measures in advance of the change, so that, for example, affected biodiversity interests have some opportunity to translocate.
147. The COP has tasked the STRP with further work on compensation and mitigation. Item 128 in Resolution IX.2 (taken forward from Resolution VIII.16) requests the Panel to “Prepare guidance on compensation for wetland losses, in response to Resolution VII.24”; and item 166 suggests that it could “Develop guidance on wetland mitigation issues”. As part of this it is envisaged that a review will be undertaken of experience in implementing policies on “no net loss of wetlands” in the USA and Canada. Draft Resolution DR 10 on “Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention” now takes this forward as a task for the STRP’s future work programme to “Develop guidance on mitigation of and compensation for losses of wetland area and wetland values, in the context of DR 16 on Detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character, and including lessons learned from available information on implementation of ‘no net loss’ policies, the ‘urgent national interest’ test, and other aspects relating to situations in which Article 2.5 and 4.2 and/or Resolution VII.24 are relevant”. In future, therefore, there should be additional material available to assist with these issues.

19. Who is responsible?

148. Types of audience for this document were mentioned in Section 2 above. The list below highlights some of the key functions of each main group. This relates also to the pictorial summary given in the flowcharts in Annex 1 below.

Responsible group	Key functions
Individual Ramsar site managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - compile Ramsar site ecological character description sheet - define site management objectives - draft site management plan, including detailed objectives and limits of acceptable change - implement management plan - carry out actions to maintain the ecological character of

	<p>the site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monitor ecological character, against management objectives and limits of acceptable change - detect change, or likely change, in ecological character - pass information on negative changes or likely changes that are outside defined limits of acceptability, without delay to national Ramsar Administrative Authority - consult others (e.g., local stakeholders, NGOs) to gain more complete picture of any changes/likely changes - implement agreed restoration or other corrective actions - feed other relevant information in to national compilation of data for national reports to COPs and (details to be defined) reports on Ramsar effectiveness indicators
Authorities responsible for the management of Ramsar sites, at local and national levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mandate, train and resource site managers to fulfil the functions listed above - monitor effectiveness of performance of this system, and feed lessons learned back into their own operations and to national policy level
National Ramsar Administrative Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - create enabling policies, legislation, institutions, governance and funding for all relevant within-country actions in this scheme - ensure that Ecological Character Description Sheets are compiled, oversee quality control and forward completed Sheets to Ramsar Secretariat - define strategic parameters for setting site objectives and limits of acceptable change, in light of, e.g., national biodiversity targets - institute consistent national system for monitoring of ecological character of Ramsar sites - formally forward reports of change or likely change under Article 3.2 without delay to Ramsar Secretariat - as appropriate, make formal requests for addition/removal of sites to/from the Montreux Record - as appropriate, facilitate/host Ramsar Advisory Missions - determine/approve relevant corrective/remedial actions to maintain/restore site ecological character, or measures to compensate for lost values, as appropriate - account overall for conservation (maintenance of ecological character) of national network of Ramsar sites - collate relevant information for national reports to COPs and (details to be defined) reports on Ramsar effectiveness indicators - take stock of strategic lessons learned, and apply experience as appropriate in decision-making in Ramsar regional meetings, Standing Committee and COP
National STRP Focal Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide advice to all national players referred to in this table in the course of both system reviews and individual cases, in particular concerning awareness and interpretation

	<p>of relevant Ramsar guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feed experiences and lessons learned into relevant deliberations of the STRP
National CEPA Focal Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promote in-country awareness and interpretation of relevant Ramsar guidance in the national context
National Ramsar/Wetland Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain overview of operation of these systems in practice, reviewing emerging issues and brokering contacts between sources of expertise for problem-solving at national level - review global Ramsar guidance, assist with promoting in-country awareness and interpretation in the national context - review experiences/lessons learned, and assist with input to national reports to COPs and (details to be defined) reports on Ramsar effectiveness indicators
Competent NGOs and other “third parties” who can supplement information obtained by official bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as far as is permitted within prevailing national circumstances, arrange to maintain vigilance for detecting changes or likely changes in ecological character of sites - provide “early warning” notification to site managers and relevant authorities of changes/likely changes - support data-collection and response measures where appropriate, in conjunction with statutory authorities - assist in raising public awareness of and support for Ramsar site conservation objectives - make consultative input to the other activities referred to in this table, as appropriate
The STRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review any implications emerging from syntheses of data, case studies, reports to COP and other information and experiences for refinements of/additions to technical guidance - maintain overview of synthesized information on site changes, and incorporate as appropriate into status & trends reviews and other relevant assessments - review results from Ramsar effectiveness indicators and develop scientific & technical recommendations as appropriate - review uptake and impact of existing guidance - advise on site remedial measures where appropriate, including input as required to Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Mission cases
The Ramsar Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitate dissemination of and access to guidance, including identification of any opportunities for resourcing its translation into additional languages - receive and collate reports of change or likely change under Article 3.2, and manage global-level communications and coordination of global-level response options, including use of Convention mechanisms such as Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Missions - receive and make available relevant results from Ramsar

	<p>effectiveness indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - report on these matters to COPs in accordance with Article 8
<p>The Conference of Parties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - receive and deliberate on reports provided under Article 8 - make recommendations in respect of alterations in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, changes in the character of listed wetlands and other aspects of the conservation of specific wetlands (Articles 6.2d and 8e) - approve guidance aimed at further improving implementation practices

Annex 1

Flow-charts summarising the overall scheme for detecting, responding to and reporting on change in ecological character

Note: These charts appear also in COP10 draft Resolution DR16

Contents:

Overview of the four flow-charts describing procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character – (for designated Ramsar sites)

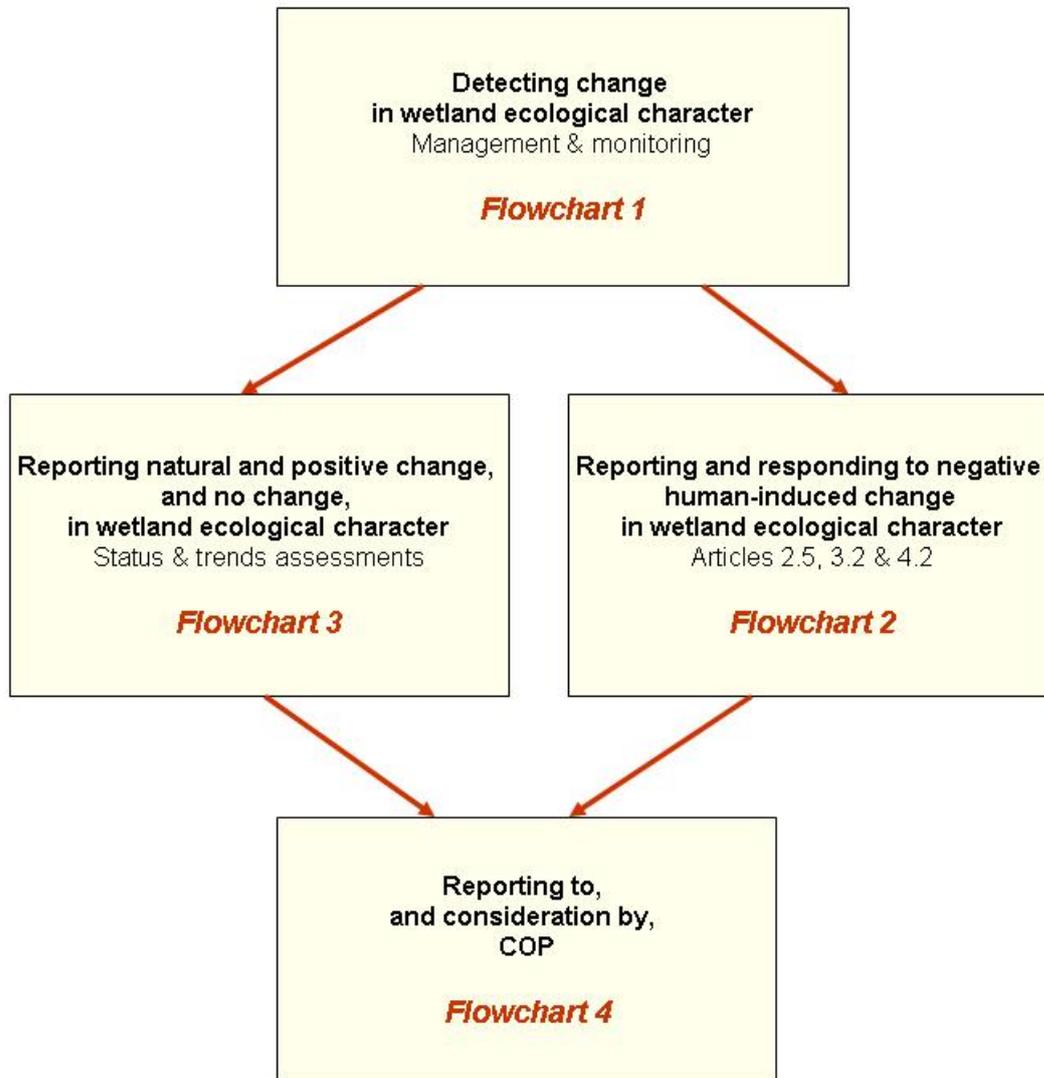
Flowchart 1: Detecting change in wetland ecological character - procedures for designated Ramsar sites

Flowchart 2: Reporting & responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character – procedures for designated Ramsar sites

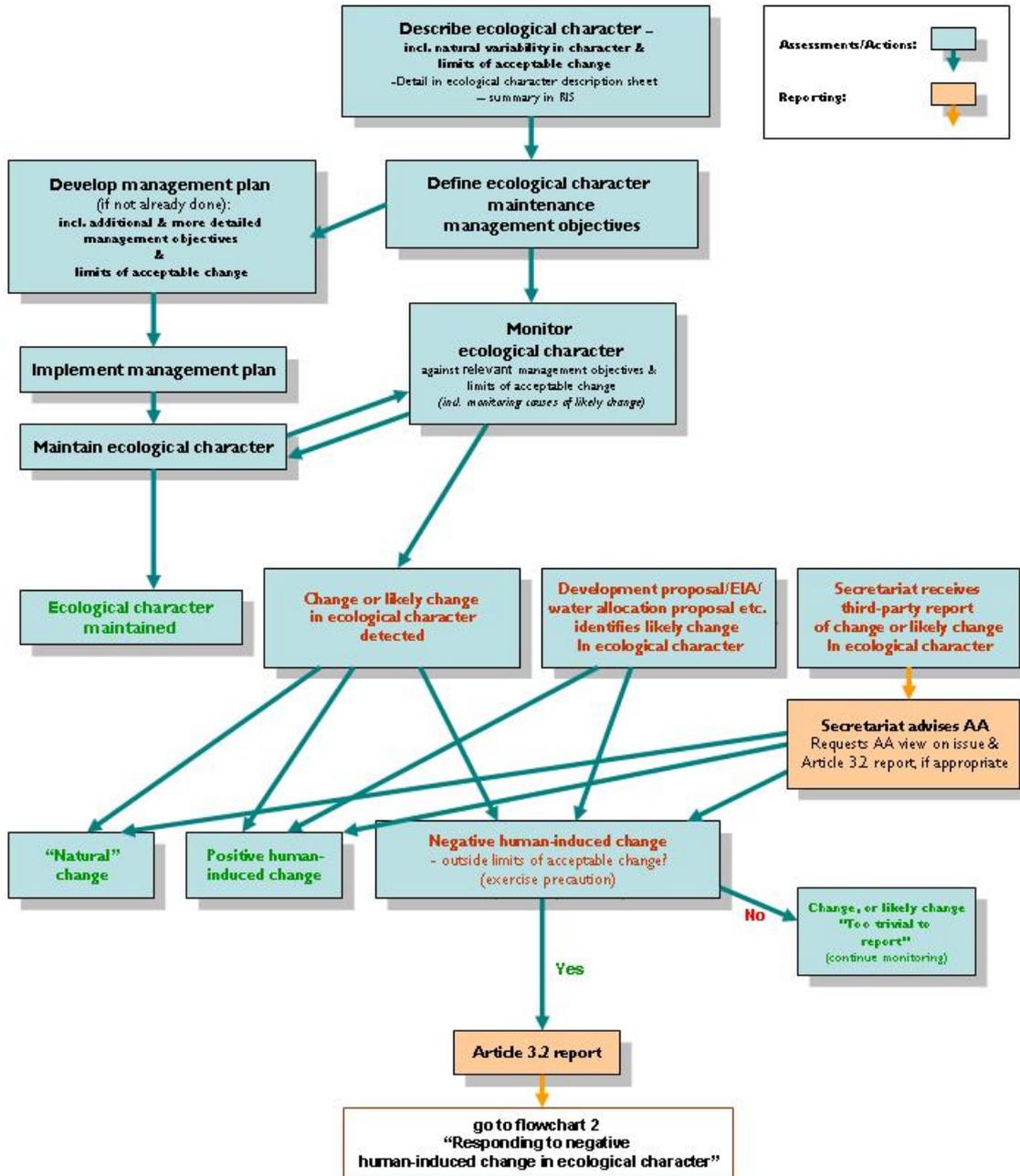
Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character - procedures for designated Ramsar sites

Flowchart 4: Reporting to, and consideration by the Conference of Contracting Parties of change in wetland ecological character

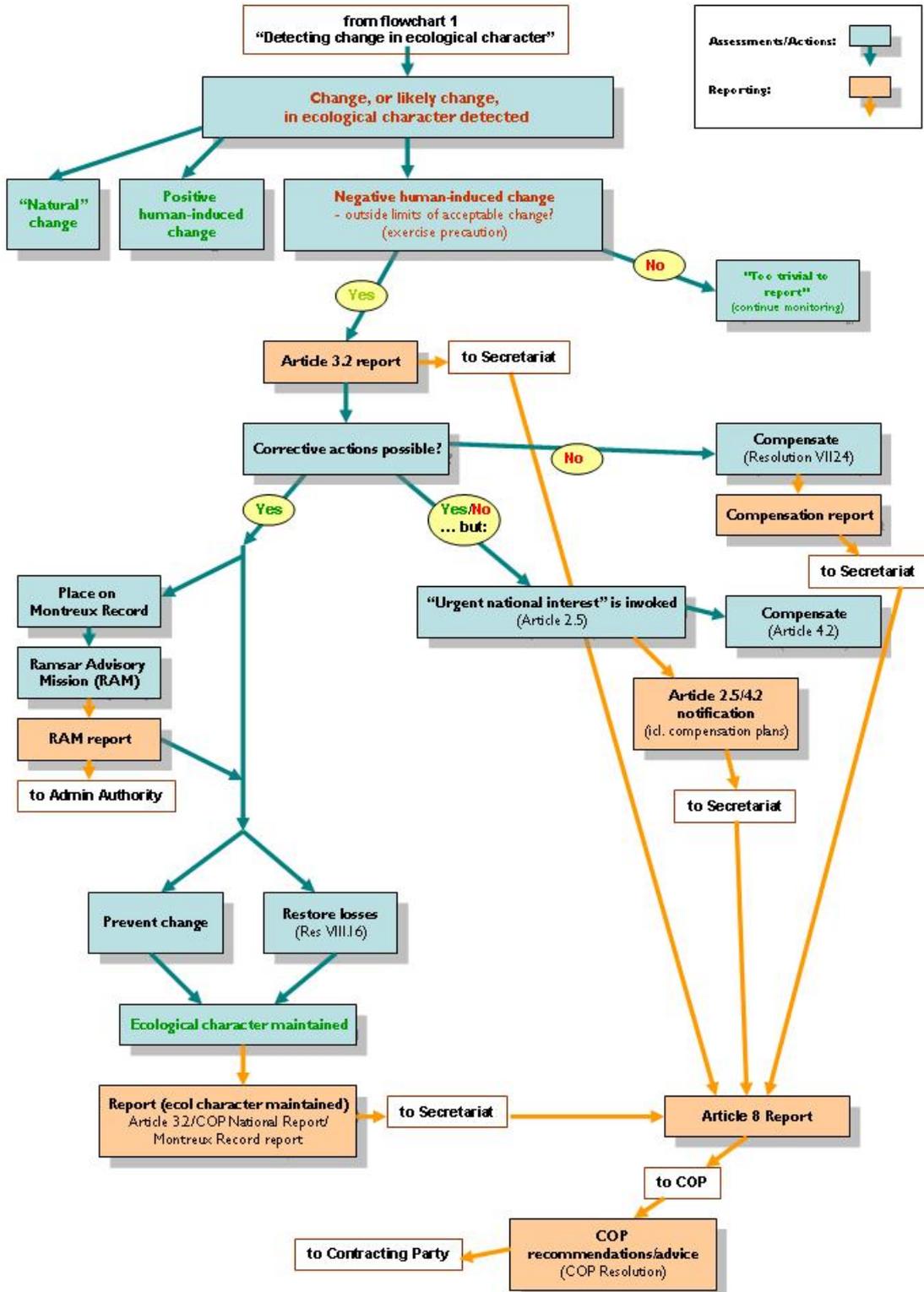
Procedures for detecting, reporting & responding to change in wetland ecological character
- for designated Ramsar sites



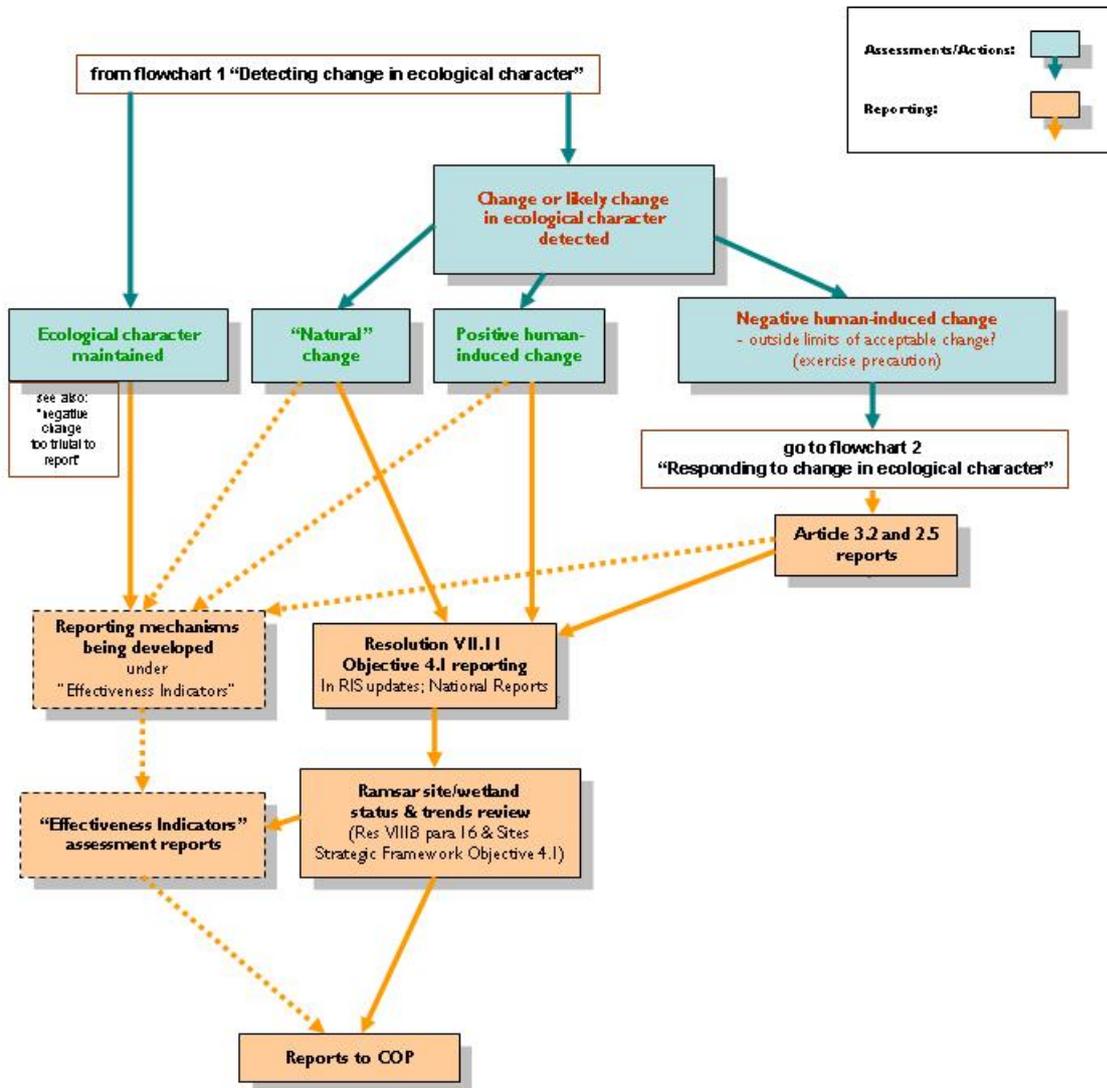
Flowchart 1: Detecting change in wetland ecological character: Procedures for designated Ramsar sites



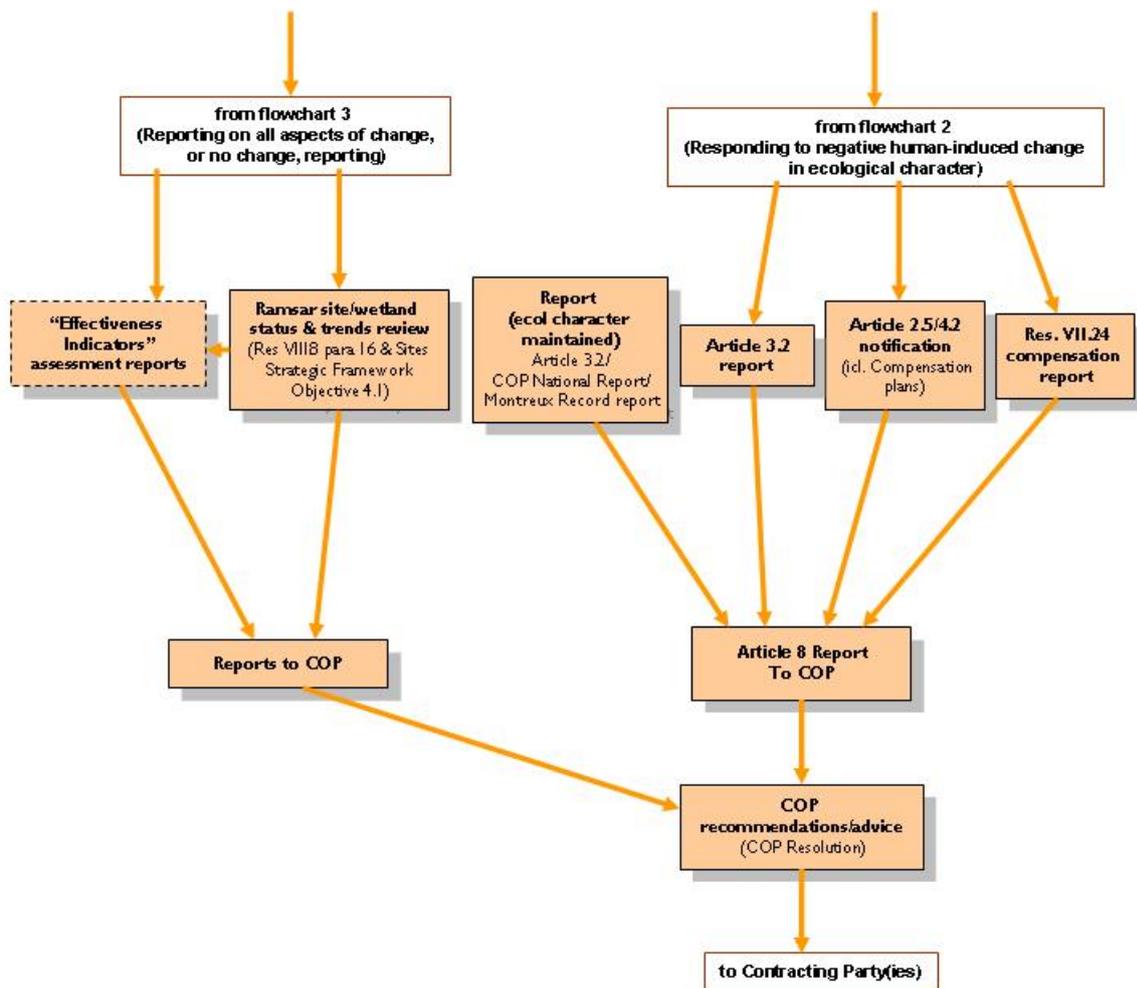
**Flowchart 2: Reporting & responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



**Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character:
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



**Flowchart 4: Reporting to, and consideration by, COP of change in ecological character
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



Annex 2

Guide to steps involving reporting - to accompany the flow-charts in Annex 1 describing procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character for Ramsar sites)

“Reporting” is not simply a step that occurs at one stage in the ecological character change processes, but rather it is an accountability and communications discipline which pervades the entire system. Some of this results from strict specific requirements adopted by the Parties, while some is additionally necessary for coherent operation of the process overall.

Some general comments on reporting are made in the main text of this document (Section 13). The additional suggestions below give more detail on the relevant steps in the overall scheme, by reference to the flowcharts in Annex 1.

Detecting change in wetland ecological character (*Flowchart 1*)

Reports on the **results of monitoring** are a tool for supporting **management** of individual sites. At their most basic they should be capable of enabling a decision either to continue with existing management action or to adjust such action.

Synthesis reports on the **results of monitoring** will provide input to triennial **National Reports** from Contracting Parties to each COP. In the current National Report Format, relevant questions that such reports will help to answer are 1.1.3, 1.1.4, 1.5.1, 2.3.1 and 2.4.3.

Synthesis reports on the **results of monitoring** will provide input to updates of the **Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS)**.

Synthesis reports on the **results of monitoring**, either via National Reports (see above) or separately, will provide input to those Ramsar **indicators of implementation effectiveness** that relate to Ramsar sites (indicators B, D, E).

Reporting and responding to negative human-induced change in ecological character (*Flowchart 2*)

Once an instance of **human-induced negative change outside the limits of acceptable change** defined for the site has been detected, an **Article 3.2 report** must be submitted by the Contracting Party Administrative Authority without delay to the Ramsar Secretariat, as required by Article 3.2 of the Convention.

Cases of such change may sometimes in the first instance be brought to the attention of the Secretariat by **reports from third parties**. Where appropriate, the Secretariat will communicate with the Administrative Authority of the Contracting Party concerned with a view to an **Article 3.2 report** being formally submitted.

Proposals for **compensation under Resolution VII.24** (i.e., cases where there is NO proposal to delete or restrict the site under Article 2.5) will normally need to be communicated to a variety of types of consultees before becoming finalized. In most cases it would be advisable for the STRP to be included in this. In some cases the Secretariat may also need to be included, including for example cases where the Party wishes to request a Ramsar Advisory Mission to help in planning the compensation.

Proposals for **compensation under Article 4.2** (i.e., where Article 2.5 “urgent national interest” is being invoked to delete or restrict the site) will normally need to be communicated to a variety of types of consultees before becoming finalized. In most cases it would be advisable for the STRP to be included in this so that it may advise, perhaps especially on the requirement in Article 4.2 concerning provision of an “adequate portion of the original habitat”. The Secretariat should also be included, since the proposals will constitute a follow-up to the report submitted. The Secretariat is also an important recipient in cases where the Party wishes to request a Ramsar Advisory Mission to help in planning the compensation.

When a Party **invokes Article 2.5**, it is required under the terms of that Article to submit a report to the Secretariat “at the earliest possible time” on the **site deletion or boundary restriction** changes being made. Logically, however, for consistency with Article 8 among other reasons, this report should be submitted at an earlier stage. (In effect, the Convention text has always contained a logical inconsistency in this respect). Resolution IX.6 (Annex, paragraph 30) describes a procedure which Parties have agreed should be followed in order to achieve logical consistency in cases where deletion or restriction is being considered for reasons other than those provided for by Article 2.5. Under that procedure, the report is to be submitted when the Party “wishes to confirm” its “intent” to delete or restrict the site. It would be logical to take the same approach in Article 2.5 cases as well. This logic is further supported by Resolution VIII.20 which states (paragraph 7) that “A Contracting Party, when notifying such changes to the [Secretariat], may request advice including from the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and/or Standing Committee before any irreversible action is taken”. It would further be logical for such reports to detail the specific grounds on which “urgent national interests” are being asserted in the given case. Resolution VIII.20 (paragraph 3) suggests some considerations which may form part of this reasoning, but fails, perhaps due to an oversight, to require that the actual considerations in a given case be reported.

In the Annex to Resolution VI.1, a questionnaire-style pro forma is provided for completion when either the **addition or the removal of a site to or from the Montreux Record** is being proposed. The questionnaires are initiated by the Secretariat, but their completion may be an iterative consultation between the Secretariat, the Party/ies involved, and the STRP. Resolution VI.1 also provides (Annex, paragraph 3.2.6): “Within the framework of their triennial National Reports, Contracting Parties shall provide a report to the Convention Bureau on the conservation status of any sites included in the Montreux Record. If necessary, further information will be provided to the Bureau on request.” Resolution VIII.8 further (paragraph 23) “REQUESTS Contracting Parties with sites on the Montreux Record to regularly provide the Ramsar Bureau with an update on their progress in taking action to address the issues for which these Ramsar sites were listed on the Record, including reporting fully on these matters in their National Reports to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.”

Reports of each **Ramsar Advisory Mission** are compiled by the Mission team, discussed with the Contracting Party/ies concerned, and published on the Ramsar Web site. They are a rich source of problem-solving case experience for the Convention.

Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character *(Flowchart 3)*

Reports on **“natural change”** should contribute to any exercises that review the status and trends of wetlands in a country or more widely. (Paragraph 16 of Resolution VIII.8, and Objective 4.1 in the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List call for such reviews).

Reports on **positive human-induced change** (the emphasis here is on instances that are in addition to those that arise from resolving an Article 3.2 problem) should contribute to any exercises that review the status and trends of wetlands in a country or more widely. (Paragraph 16 of Resolution VIII.8, and Objective 4.1 in the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List call for such reviews).

Consideration by the Conference of Parties of ecological character change issues *(Flowchart 4)*

Reports to the Secretariat on the outcomes of actions taken in the context of the **Montreux Record** are required by Resolution VIII.8 (paragraph 20). It would be expected that summary information derived from this would also be included in the Party's National Reports. Similarly, such information should also form a contribution to any exercises that review the status and trends of wetlands in a country or more widely. (Paragraph 16 of Resolution VIII.8, and Objective 4.1 in the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List call for such reviews).

In the context of **Article 8** and more generally, **synthesis reports on all matters reported under this scheme** are submitted by the Secretariat for consideration by each meeting of the COP.

Synthesised information on all matters reported under this scheme should also form a **Secretariat contribution** (together with input from the STRP) to any exercises that review **the status and trends of wetlands at an international scale**. (Paragraph 16 of Resolution VIII.8, and Objective 4.1 in the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List call for such reviews).

Synthesised information on all matters reported under this scheme should also form a **Secretariat contribution** (together with input from the STRP) to relevant Ramsar **indicators of effectiveness** (indicators B, D, E) in so far as they are operated at an international scale; in addition to inputs mentioned above.

Reviews of the **status and trends of Ramsar sites** will constitute one form of report input to relevant Ramsar **indicators of effectiveness** (indicators B, D, E).

Outputs from the operation of Ramsar **indicators of effectiveness** will be reported to each meeting of the COP.