



11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the  
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

*“Wetlands: home and destination”*

Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012

Agenda item **XVIII**

Ramsar COP11 DR7, **Rev.1**

Draft Resolution **XI.7, Rev.1**

**Tourism and wetlands**

1. RECOGNIZING that wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems; that many wetlands worldwide, both coastal and inland, natural and artificial, offer significant opportunities for tourism and recreation; and that such tourism and recreation are of economic value to governments, the tourism industry, and local communities;
2. AWARE of the additional sustainable tourism opportunities and attractions provided through the internationally acknowledged importance of Ramsar Sites (Wetlands of International Importance), and RECOGNIZING the value of sustainable tourism in and around wetlands for development, poverty alleviation, **local empowerment**, human health, wetland conservation and wise use;
3. AWARE that sustainable tourism can **contribute to the achievement of public policy objectives and can** bring ~~strong political attention and~~ economic opportunities to securing wetland **conservation and** wise use and the maintenance of key socio-economic wetland values, both in Ramsar Sites and in other wetlands;
4. NOTING that ~~well-managed~~ sustainable tourism can both benefit wetlands and contribute to **the conservation of** global biodiversity and sustainable development goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), climate change adaptation and mitigation, the Aichi targets established in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015;
- 5.- CONCERNED that, whilst many countries have established national tourism strategies, policies and plans, these do not always adequately address the role of wetlands in tourism and their potential or actual impacts **of tourism**, and may not be linked with national wetland policies and strategies;
6. AWARE ~~of the~~**that** negative impacts of tourism on wetlands **that** can be both direct (*in situ*), such as ~~through~~ unregulated infrastructure development and disturbance of wetland biodiversity by tourism activities, and indirect (*ex situ*), such as ~~through upstream~~

unsustainable land and water use, and CONCERNED that ~~unsustainable or~~ uncontrolled tourism can result in ~~human-induced~~ negative changes to the vital services provided to human societies by Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;

6bis. RECOGNIZING that protected areas can support wetland protection, ecotourism, education and community strengthening in ways which balance the relationship between tourism and wetlands.

7. RECOGNIZING that whilst sustainable wetland tourism can be a positive alternative to other land uses, tourism does not always bring socio-economic and cultural benefits to local communities and other stakeholders, and that in some cases it may lead to the exacerbation of existing problems and the creation of new inequalities in access to resources and distribution of benefits;
8. AWARE of the role of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in addressing issues of tourism and wetlands, RECOGNIZING that the UNWTO conceptual definitions for “sustainable tourism” and “ecotourism” (annex 1 of this Resolution) are consistent with application of the Ramsar wise use principle, and WELCOMING the report and analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and sustainable tourism” launched at this meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
9. INFORMED of existing sustainable tourism and biodiversity guidelines that are useful for addressing tourism in and around Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, including among others the UNWTO publication *Tourism congestion management at natural and cultural sites* (2005), the CBD *Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development* (2004), the IUCN-WCPA *Sustainable tourism in protected areas: guidelines for planning and management* (2002), the World Heritage Convention’s *Managing tourism at World Heritage Sites: a practical manual for World Heritage site managers* (2002), the CBD *Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development* (2004), and the UNWTO publication *Tourism congestion management at natural and cultural sites* (2005) and the World Heritage Convention’s *Managing tourism at World Heritage Sites: a practical manual for World Heritage site managers* (2002);
10. ALSO AWARE of the attention paid to tourism in multilateral environmental agreements, including through the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme, the CBD’s Biodiversity and Tourism Network, the Convention on Migratory Species’ publication *Wildlife watching and tourism: A study on the benefits and risks of a fast growing tourism activity and its impacts on species* (2006), and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) *Guideline No. 7: Guidelines on the development of ecotourism at wetlands* (2002);
11. CONVINCED of the relevance of sustainable tourism in poverty eradication strategies and policies and as a potential contributor to [a Green Economy][sustainable development] by promoting jobs and livelihoods for local communities; and

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12. AFFIRMS~~RECALLING~~ that the key messages on “Planning, decision-making, finance and economics” in the *Changwon Declaration on human well-being and wetlands*, which was

adopted by the Conference of the Parties as Resolution X.3 (2008), are relevant to issues of planning and decision making for tourism and wetlands;

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13. RECOGNIZES that concerted efforts are needed to increase awareness and facilitate dialogue amongst all stakeholders about the role of wetlands in providing key services for maintaining ecological balance and sustainable tourism and in supporting local communities and their livelihoods, and ENCOURAGES:
- i) improved integration and recognition of wetland values and wetland wise use approaches into tourism policies and planning, including national tourism strategies, in order to ensure effective implementation of sustainable tourism and necessary safeguards for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands;
  - ii) closer collaboration between the tourism sector and the wetland conservation and wise use sector in order to maximize and sustain the long-term benefits derived from each other's expertise;
  - iii) support for the active participation of local communities, municipalities and public-private partnerships in tourism decision making, development planning, tourism service provision and management as well as the provision of financial resources for capacity-building;  
iii bis) development of concepts and practices for planning of sustainable tourism in relation to wetlands;
  - iv) taking fully into account the cultural and historical issues of local people in the planning for sustainable tourism, and the optimum use of environmental resources;
  - v) social inclusion and equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism inter alia for local communities in support of wetland conservation, and involvement of such communities in decision-making; and
  - vi) sharing of best practices in sustainable tourism within and around wetlands;
  - vii) promotion of quality tourist products and services that encourage responsible behavior by the actors involved and help to promote awareness and understanding of the significance of Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;
  - viii) generation of relevant information, such as visitor statistics, and identification and sharing of methodologies and techniques for measuring and monitoring capacity for and impact of tourism in relation to Ramsar Sites;
  - ix) researching success stories and good practices in respect of policy, regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements and development strategies;

x) broad involvement of planners, developers and managers of sustainable tourism activities in approaches which treat Ramsar Sites as heritage destinations, with a focus on conservation and empowerment of local communities.

14. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, and especially their Ramsar CEPA National Focal Points, to help raise awareness of wetland wise use and sustainable tourism in their-friendly Ramsar Sites, guided by the ~~through their~~ CEPA Programme ~~implementation~~;

14bis. URGES Contracting Parties to ensure that sustainable tourism initiatives include criteria for compliance with basic global environmental, social and economic standards;

15. URGES Contracting Parties to collaborate closely with stakeholders at all levels involved in tourism and wetland management – such as *inter alia*: i) national/regional policy-makers and planners in the tourism, water and land-use planning sectors; ii) other national/regional wetland policy implementation agencies, protected area management authorities, ~~and~~ environment ministries and departments, and municipalities; iii) national and local tourism authorities, the private sector, tourism investors and developers; iv) national and local tourism operators; ~~and~~ v) wetland site managers; and vi) local communities and indigenous peoples – in order to address the challenges for achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands as listed in Annex 2 of this Resolution;

16. ALSO URGES Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders to make good use of the Ramsar guidance on the conservation and wise use of wetlands (as compiled in the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks, 4<sup>th</sup> edition) and other available tourism, biodiversity and protected areas guidelines, many of which are relevant to addressing aspects of tourism and wetland management;

17. FURTHER URGES Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders, when considering restoring degraded wetlands, to recognize the opportunities such restoration provides for enhancing tourism experiences in a sustainable manner;

17bis. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to develop and implement activity zoning systems to direct and manage tourism activities to appropriate localities within or in relation to wetlands;

18. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to use Ramsar Sites as a branding opportunity to promote sustainable tourism practices;

18bis. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to consider the possibility of strengthening legislative frameworks concerning the balance between attracting tourism and maintaining the ecological character of wetlands;

19. URGES the Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat, the Ramsar Regional Centres and networks and INVITES the UNWTO and others to draw the attention of the tourism sector, both governmental and private, nationally and locally, to the importance of wetlands for tourism and therefore their need to be managed sustainably;

20. ENCOURAGES the secretariats and the scientific subsidiary bodies of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, as well as their national focal points, to continue to work collaboratively and to share knowledge on sustainable tourism issues;
21. REQUESTS Contracting Parties and others involved in sustainable tourism in wetlands to share experiences and best practices for such tourism in and around Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, including experiences relating to wetland centres and flyway initiatives, and INVITES the Parties, supported as appropriate by the IOPs and others, to inform the Ramsar Secretariat of any issues concerning sustainable tourism and wetlands upon which any further advice and guidance would be helpful;  
21bis. ENCOURAGES national environmental authorities to develop scientific knowledge on the sustainable development and wise use of wetland ecosystems;  
21ter. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to make use of the Integrated Framework and guidelines for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses, [annexed to Resolution XI.9] in all aspects of commercial tourism development, particularly those involved with the construction of infrastructures and facilities to accommodate visits to Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, and REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat to consult with relevant organizations, including UNWTO, on ways and means to assist Contracting Parties in this matter and to report on progress to the Conference of the Parties;
22. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and INVITES the UNWTO and other relevant organizations to consider, resources permitting, developing further advice, including key messages and/or guiding principles for tourism in and around wetlands, drawing upon, among other sources, the analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and sustainable tourism”; and
23. ENDORSES NOTES the UNWTO definitions of “sustainable tourism” and “eco-tourism”; and the Convention on Biological Diversity definition of “sustainable use”, annexed to this Resolution, for application in addressing tourism issues for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;
24. EXPRESSES APPRECIATION to the UNWTO and the International Organization Partners for working with the STRP and the Ramsar Secretariat in the preparation of this Resolution, the World Wetlands Day materials for 2012, and the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and sustainable tourism”, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to make good use of these materials and disseminate them widely to tourism and wetlands stakeholders.

## Annex 1

### Tourism-related definitions and concepts

#### A. Conceptual definition of “sustainable tourism” (UNWTO, 2004)

**“Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations**, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the **environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects** of tourism development, and a **suitable balance must be established** between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- 1) **Make optimal use of environmental resources** that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining ~~essential~~ ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;
- 2) **Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities**, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance; and
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, **providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders** that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the **informed participation of all relevant stakeholders**, as well as **strong political leadership** to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a **continuous process** and it requires **constant monitoring of impacts**, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a **high level of tourist satisfaction** and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”

## **B. Definition of “ecotourism” (UNWTO, 2001)**

“Ecotourism” is used to mean forms of tourism which have the following characteristics:

- 1) All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- 2) It contains educational and interpretation features.
- 3) It is generally, but not exclusively organized by specialized tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small, locally-owned businesses.
- 4) It minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
- 5) It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by:



- generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,
- providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities,
- increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

**C. Definition of “sustainable use” (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992)**

“Sustainable use” means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

## Annex 2

### Issues for stakeholders to address in achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands

**A. National/regional policy-makers and planners in the tourism and land-use planning sectors** should seek to ensure that:

- i) tourism activities and developments do not compromise national commitments to ensuring the wise use of all wetlands under the Ramsar Convention;
- ii) policies and decision-making processes, including processes for approval and authorization of tourism developments, recognize that healthy wetlands can sustain tourism over the long term and so generate continued benefits and livelihoods, both locally and more widely;
- iii) where national or regional tourism plans and policies exist or are under development, wetlands and their tourism value are well integrated into such plans and policies;
- iv) there is increased awareness about the mutually beneficial objectives for wetlands and tourism resulting from the key role wetlands play as part of “natural capital”, which when maintained makes regions attractive for sustainable tourism and development; and from the importance of effective wetland conservation and management to the success of the tourism business in and around wetlands;
- v) incentives for tourism development are not perverse incentives in terms of wetland conservation and wise use;
- vi) tourism developments and activities that are authorized in and around wetlands are consistent with the principles of sustainable tourism and Ramsar wise use, as well as with management plans for wetland sites; and take into account the views of local communities as well as interested and affected parties;

- vii) sustainable tourism income provides ~~adequate~~ financial resources for wetland conservation and management, so in turn supporting maintenance of the wetland features and functions of importance for tourism; and
- viii) the wide range of economic benefits from wetlands for local communities are recognized and integrated in tourism planning in order to enhance and not reduce them.

**B. Other national/regional wetland policy implementation agencies, protected area management authorities, and environment ministries and departments** should seek to ensure that:

- i) tourism issues are integrated into wetland policy and planning, including training opportunities for wetland managers; and
- ii) there is full integration of wetlands into tourism policy and planning by engaging with the tourism sector.

**C. National and local tourism authorities, the private sector, tourism investors and developers** should seek to ensure that:

- i) all activities and developments are consistent with sustainable tourism and wise use in relation to tourism and comply with the relevant government plans, processes and regulations;
- ii) local communities participate in ~~the~~ tourism planning and decision-making, and that tourism benefits are equitably shared with local communities;
- iii) tourism activities in and around wetlands contribute to the creation of alternative sustainable livelihoods for the local communities, including through investment in training and capacity building to enable them to participate in the business and employment opportunities provided by tourism;
- iv) tourism developments provide adequate contributions to support maintenance of the wetland features and functions, including financial resources for wetland conservation and management; and
- v) The Ramsar logo and Ramsar mission are promoted to tourists who visit Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites).

**D. National and local tourism authorities and local tourism operators offering services to tourists (including guides associations, travel agencies, local communities where they provide tourism services, lodging, accommodation and transport providers)** should seek to ensure that:

- i) sufficient resources are invested into local livelihoods to provide a positive incentive for wetland resource custodianship, as well as into the management and conservation of the wetland, in order to maintain its attraction for tourists;



- ii) tourists' behavior is positively influenced and controlled so as to protect the wetland resource they are visiting;
- iii) there is close collaboration with the wetland site managers, in order to optimize the benefits derived from each other's expertise in ensuring that wetlands are well managed to support a long-term tourism experience; this could include control of tour groups and tourists, monitoring of tourism impact, provision of interpretive information of the features and importance of the wetland to visiting tourists; ~~and~~
- iv) the Ramsar logo and Ramsar mission are promoted to tourists who visit Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites); ~~and-~~
- v) the services offered by operators are appropriate in relation to carrying capacity and the quality of the visitor experience;

**E. Wetland site managers (including NGOs, private and government agencies) should seek to ensure that:**

- i) local community participation in wetland management is created and strengthened (making use, as appropriate, of Ramsar guidelines on *Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands*, Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 4<sup>th</sup> edition) and local communities are assisted in taking advantage of the opportunities presented by sustainable tourism;
- ii) tourism's revenue and investment help provide management capacity to maintain the ecological character of the wetland;
- iii) assessment, monitoring and management of tourism impacts are integrated into wetland management planning, including limits of acceptable change of the wetland ecological character; and importantly that this information is communicated to those responsible for tourism policy and planning; ~~and is used to support adaptive management responses;~~
- iv) assessments of wetland values are prepared and made available to national/regional policy-makers and planners in the tourism and land-use planning sectors and other relevant government agencies, so that they can be incorporated into tourism and land-use planning and decision making;
- v) tourism activities carried out by tourism operators in the wetland are compatible with the wetland's characteristics and its management plan, including by working with tour operators, and where necessary through appropriate enforcement of regulations; and
- vi) in any Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) visited by tourists, the Ramsar logo is prominently displayed and the Ramsar mission promoted.