



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

“Wetlands: home and destination”

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Agenda item XV

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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, human health, wetland conservation and wise use;
3. AWARE that sustainable tourism can bring strong political attention and economic opportunities to securing wetland 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 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, and may not be linked with national wetland policies and strategies;
6. AWARE that negative impacts of tourism on wetlands 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;

7. RECOGNIZING that whilst sustainable wetland tourism can be a positive alternative to other land uses, tourism does not always bring socio-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 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);
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; and
12. 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 amongst all stakeholders about the role of wetlands in providing key services for 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 in order to ensure effective implementation of sustainable tourism;

- 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 in tourism decision making, development planning, and management as well as the provision of financial resources for capacity-building;
 - iv) taking fully into account the cultural and historical issues of local people in the planning for sustainable tourism;
 - v) equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism for local communities; and
 - vi) sharing of best practices in sustainable tourism within and around wetlands;
14. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, and especially their Ramsar CEPA National Focal Points, to help raise awareness of wetland wise use and tourism-friendly Ramsar Sites through their CEPA Programme implementation;
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 and land-use planning sectors; ii) other national/regional wetland policy implementation agencies, protected area management authorities and environment ministries and departments; iii) national and local tourism authorities, the private sector, tourism investors and developers; iv) national and local tourism operators; and v) wetland site managers – 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, 4th 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, when considering restoring degraded wetlands, to recognize the opportunities such restoration provides for enhancing tourism experiences in a sustainable manner;
18. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to use Ramsar Sites as a branding opportunity to promote sustainable tourism practices;
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 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, and INVITES the Parties to inform the Ramsar Secretariat of any issues concerning tourism and wetlands upon which further advice and guidance would be helpful;
22. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and INVITES the UNWTO and other relevant organizations to consider 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 the UNWTO definitions of “sustainable tourism” and “eco-tourism”, 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.

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 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;
- 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 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).

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, 4th 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;
- 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.