



11th 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

Resolution XI.7

Tourism, recreation 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 ecosystem services including opportunities for sustainable tourism and recreation necessary for human well-being, and that these services can offer both material and non-material value to governments, the tourism industry, indigenous peoples 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 and recreation in and around wetlands for development, poverty alleviation, local empowerment, human health, wetland conservation and wise use, and for providing a meaningful experience for visitors;
3. AWARE that sustainable tourism and recreation can contribute to the achievement of public policy objectives and can bring economic opportunities for securing wetland conservation and wise use and the maintenance of key socio-economic wetland values and functions, both in Ramsar Sites and in other wetlands;
4. NOTING that sustainable tourism and recreation 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 and recreation strategies, policies and plans, these do not always adequately address the role of wetlands and the potential or actual impacts of tourism and recreation, and may not be linked with national wetland policies and strategies;
6. AWARE of the negative impacts of tourism on wetlands that can be both direct (*in situ*), such as unregulated infrastructure development, disturbance of wetland species, or

ecosystem degradation by tourism and recreation activities, and indirect (*ex situ*), such as through unsustainable land and water use, and CONCERNED that uncontrolled tourism and recreation can result in negative changes to the vital services provided to human societies by Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;

7. RECOGNIZING that well-managed protected areas can support wetland conservation, sustainable tourism, education and community strengthening in ways which balance the relationship between tourism and wetlands.
8. 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;
9. 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” (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;
10. 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 Ramsar Secretariat/Spanish Ministry of Environment’s *Herramientas para la gestión del Turismo sostenible en Humedales* (2002) presented at COP8, the World Heritage Convention’s *Managing tourism at World Heritage Sites: a practical manual for World Heritage site managers* (2002), and the Wetlands International brochure *Wetlands, Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Tourism* (2007);
11. 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);
12. ALSO AWARE of the existence of many successful wetland examples around the world of implementing recreational and tourism activities which are of social and economic benefit to indigenous peoples and local communities, and which also provide satisfying experiences to visitors,
13. CONVINCED of the relevance of sustainable tourism in poverty eradication strategies and policies and as a potential contributor to sustainable development by promoting jobs and livelihoods for local communities;

14. RECALLING that the Rio +20 Conference (Brazil 2012) emphasized that well designed and managed tourism can make a significant contribution to sustainable development, recognized that there is a need to support sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity building, encouraged “the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism”, and underlined “the importance of establishing, where necessary, appropriate guidelines and regulations in accordance with national priorities and legislation for promoting and supporting sustainable tourism”; and

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15. AFFIRMS 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;
16. 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 recreation and in supporting indigenous peoples and local communities and their livelihoods and increasing visitors’ awareness, and ENCOURAGES:
- i) improved integration and recognition of wetland values and wetland wise use approaches into tourism and recreation policies and planning, including national tourism strategies, in order to ensure effective implementation of sustainable tourism in wetlands and necessary safeguards for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands;
 - ii) closer collaboration between the tourism and wetland conservation and wise use sectors in order to maximize and sustain the long-term benefits derived from each other’s expertise;
 - iii) development of technical tools for managing recreational issues in wetlands, especially those devoted to the conservation of resources (such as recreational carrying capacity and impact prevention) and others dealing with visitor management (including visitor congestion and overcrowding, audience profile studies, interpretation programmes, codes of ethics and etiquette, and recreational facility design), and development of activity zoning systems to direct and manage tourism activities to appropriate localities within or in relation to wetlands;
 - iv) development of concepts and practices for planning sustainable tourism in relation to wetlands;
 - v) development of marketable and responsible tourism products in order to reach intended tourist customers, to identify service providers, and to choose the most appropriate means of communication;
 - vi) support for the active participation of indigenous peoples, 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;
- vii) taking fully into account the ethical implications of cultural and historical issues of indigenous peoples and local communities in planning for sustainable tourism and the optimum use of environmental resources;
 - viii) social inclusion and equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism *inter alia* for indigenous peoples and local communities as well as national conservation and tourism activities in support of wetland conservation, and the involvement of such communities in decision-making; and
 - ix) sharing of best practices in sustainable tourism within and around wetlands;
 - x) 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;
 - xi) 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;
 - xii) researching success stories and good practices in respect of policy, regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements, and development strategies; and
 - xiii) broad involvement of planners, developers and managers of sustainable tourism and recreation activities in approaches which treat Ramsar Sites as heritage destinations, with a focus on conservation and empowerment of local communities;
17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, and especially their Ramsar CEPA National Focal Points, to help raise awareness of wetland wise use and sustainable tourism in their Ramsar Sites, guided by the the CEPA Programme and paying special attention to this Programme as a key tool for easy understanding of wetland values and functions;
18. URGES Contracting Parties to ensure that sustainable tourism initiatives include criteria for compliance with basic global environmental, social and economic standards;
19. URGES Contracting Parties to collaborate closely with stakeholders at all levels involved in tourism, recreation 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, 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; v) academic experts in the development of recreational activities and thematic interpretation programmes, vi) recreation organizations, vii) wetland site managers; and viii) indigenous peoples and local communities – in order to address the challenges for achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands as listed in Annex 2 of this Resolution;

20. 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, recreation and wetland management;
21. 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;
22. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to use Ramsar Sites as a branding opportunity to promote sustainable tourism and recreation practices, with a view to increasing appreciation of wetlands by providing meaningful experiences for visitors, for example through birdwatching and cultural activities;
23. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to consider the possibility of strengthening legislative frameworks concerning the balance between attracting tourism and maintaining the ecological character of wetlands;
24. 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 recreation and therefore their need to be managed sustainably;
25. 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 and recreation issues;
26. REQUESTS Contracting Parties and others involved in sustainable tourism and recreation in wetlands to share experiences and best practices for such activities 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 recreation and wetlands upon which any further advice and guidance would be helpful;
27. ENCOURAGES national environmental authorities to develop scientific knowledge on the sustainable development and wise use of wetland ecosystems;
28. 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;
29. INVITES the UNWTO and other relevant organizations to consider, resources permitting, developing further advice, including key themes or messages, technical recreational management tools and/or guiding principles for tourism and recreation 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*;

30. NOTES the UNWTO definitions of “sustainable tourism” and “ecotourism” 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, as appropriate; and
31. 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, as appropriate, 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 and recreation 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 and recreation 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 and recreation plans and policies exist or are under development, wetlands and their tourism and recreation values 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 UNWTO principles of sustainable tourism and Ramsar wise use, as well as with management plans for wetland sites; and take into account the views of indigenous peoples and local communities as well as interested and affected parties;
- vii) sustainable tourism income provides financial resources for wetland conservation and management through the implementation of adequate economic instruments, 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 indigenous peoples and 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 and recreation 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 have:

- i) all activities and developments being consistent with sustainable tourism and wise use in relation to tourism and complying with the relevant government plans, processes and regulations;

- ii) indigenous peoples and local communities participating in tourism planning and decision-making, and that tourism benefits are equitably shared;
- iii) tourism and recreation activities in and around wetlands contributing to the creation of alternative sustainable livelihoods for the indigenous peoples and 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 providing adequate contributions to support maintenance of the wetland features and functions, including financial resources for wetland conservation and management by the implementation of economic instruments; and
- v) responsible marketing using the Ramsar logo and Ramsar mission being 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 such as guided tours, lodging, accommodation and transport) 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 by different means including interpretation programs and codes of ethics and etiquette, 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 meaningful tourism experience; this could include control of tour groups and individual visitors, monitoring of tourism impact and provision of interpretive information;
- iv) responsible marketing using the Ramsar logo and Ramsar mission is 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) indigenous peoples and 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 by developing appropriate and responsible tourist products;

- ii) tourism's revenue and investment where appropriate help provide management capacity to maintain or improve the ecological character of the wetland;
- iii) assessment, monitoring and management of tourism and recreation 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 used to support adaptive management responses;
- iv) assessments of wetland values related to recreation criteria 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, and are applied by being incorporated into tourism and land-use planning and decision making;
- v) appropriate recreation activities are identified and promoted especially to those dealing with thematic interpretation and are compatible with the wetland's characteristics and its management plan; and visitors are encouraged to follow visiting rules, if 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.