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## **Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention concerning change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites**

Note: This paper relates to draft resolution COP8 – DR 8. It has been prepared by the Ramsar Bureau and members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel's Expert Working Group on Ecological Character.

### **Summary of issue**

Article 3.2 of the Convention provides a precise and strict requirement for the notification of change in the ecological character of a Ramsar site: "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 [of Wetlands of International Importance] 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" [the Ramsar Bureau.

Implicit in the terms of Article 3.2 is 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 Article 3.2 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.

### **Background**

1. This paper provides: a) a brief review of the importance and purposes of assessing the status and trends in the health of wetlands; b) information on the currently available extent of such assessments; and c) a review of the extent of implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention, which requires reporting without delay change, or likely change, in the ecological character of sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance. This requirement also relates to the mechanism of the Montreux Record established by the COP.
2. In the 2000-2002 triennium, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) established an Expert Working Group on the Ecological Character of Wetlands. The Working Group

undertook a review of the existing mechanisms and guidance under the Convention for the inventory, assessment, monitoring, and management of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, and it recognised the relevance of these tools for the application of Article 3.2.

3. The STRP concluded that much guidance has already been adopted by the COP concerning assessing and reporting the status of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, and that additional relevant guidance has been prepared by the STRP for consideration by COP8. This includes the *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands* (Ramsar COP8 – DR 14), with guidance on the assessment and monitoring of ecological character features and the factors that affect them, the *Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Ramsar COP8 – DR 6), and the *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* (Ramsar COP8 – DR 16).
4. However, the STRP review also identified a number of gaps and disharmonies amongst the guidance to Contracting Parties arising from different elements of this guidance being prepared at different times, and recommended that COP8 consider a draft resolution on this matter (COP8 – DR 7). It also urged that an Information Paper be prepared concerning elements and priorities for a potential framework for integrated wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring (COP8 DOC. 16) to further assist Parties in these matters.
5. The 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee in 2001 also discussed matters concerning: a) the purpose and importance of assessing the status and trends of wetlands; b) the use of Ramsar's guidance by Parties in identifying change in ecological character of Ramsar sites; c) reporting this in line with Article 3.2 of the Convention; and d) implementing appropriate management responses to such change.
6. Subsequently a discussion paper on these matters was considered by the Standing Committee's Subgroup on COP8 in May 2002, which requested that a revised text be made available to COP8 as the present Information Paper.

### **The purposes of assessing and reporting the status of Ramsar sites and other wetlands**

7. The delivery of the conservation and wise use of wetlands in line with the commitments embodied in the Ramsar Convention entails: a) establishing the location and ecological characteristics of wetlands (baseline inventory); b) assessing the status, trends and threats to wetlands (assessment); c) monitoring the status of wetlands and trends, including the identification of existing threats and appearance of new threats (monitoring); and d) taking management actions (both *in situ* and *ex situ*), including the redress of any such changes causing or likely to cause damaging change in ecological character (management). Further discussion of steps towards establishing an integrated framework under the Convention for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring, and the tools and guidance currently available through the Convention, is contained in Ramsar COP8 DOC. 16.
8. At the site scale, the Convention's guidance on management planning, including the *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands* (COP8 – DR 14), stresses that establishing the ecological character of a site in terms of its features and ecological processes, and the factors that are positively or adversely affecting this character or are likely to do so, is essential to the implementation of an effective management process, so as to maintain the wetland in a favourable conservation status. This requires assessing and

stating the ecological character of the site, stating the conservation objectives designed to maintain the ecological character in implementation of Article 3.1 of the Convention, and establishing a monitoring regime to detect *inter alia* changes in this character, both positive and negative, natural and human-influenced, in order to take appropriate management intervention, as necessary.

9. At national and international scales, an understanding of the status and trends in the health of wetlands has been recognised through the Convention as an essential basis for the establishment of national and international policies, strategies, and priorities for actions to assure the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
10. Monitoring the conservation status of Ramsar sites should also provide an important 'health check' of the success of the Ramsar Convention as an international treaty and its mechanisms for achieving wetland conservation and wise use.

### **Adequacy of available information to assess wetland status and trends**

11. Current knowledge of national and international (regional and global) distribution of the wetland resource is widely acknowledged to be generally poor. There is even less information available on wetland status and trends.
12. Concerning baseline wetland inventory, the *Global Review of Wetland Resources and Priorities for Wetland Inventory* (GRoWI) undertaken for the Convention in 1999 found that adequate or comprehensive national wetland inventory existed for only 7% of countries, that no wetland inventory information was available for 25% of countries, and that very few inventories provided any information on the status and trends of the wetlands surveyed. However, this situation may be improving somewhat: a provisional analysis of National Reports to COP8 reveals that 27 Contracting Parties (23% of those Parties submitting a Report) indicate that they have a comprehensive national wetland inventory.
13. The 2001 *Pilot Assessment of Global Ecosystems: reports on Freshwater Ecosystems and Coastal Ecosystems*, prepared by the World Resources Institute (WRI) in support of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, summarised available information sources on inland wetlands. It likewise recognised that although status and trends information exists on certain features of wetland ecosystems and biodiversity from a variety of surveys in different parts of the world and at different spatial scales, this information is inadequate to establish confidently the global wetland status and trends in biodiversity loss. Furthermore, much of such information exists as a snapshot in time and is not recent, so current status is even more difficult to establish. A further report, prepared in 2002 by WRI for the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar on the *Status and trends of inland water biodiversity* provides a more detailed review, particularly for wetland-dependent species, and confirms this view.
14. Nevertheless, some programmes do exist that monitor and regularly report status and trends of some features of wetland biodiversity. For example, Wetlands International's International Waterbird Census compiles and statistically analyses status and trends of waterbird biogeographical populations in several parts of the world, and comparable programmes cover some other regions. Their *Waterbird Population Estimates* review, produced regularly in support of the Ramsar Convention and the application of Criterion 6 for the identification and designation of Ramsar sites, provides a global assessment of best available knowledge of all biogeographic populations of many waterbird families.

15. Other ecosystem assessment initiatives, notably the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (see Ramsar COP8 DOC. 8), are currently underway and are likely to help to improve understanding of the state of knowledge of wetland status and trends.
16. A novel assessment of the status of Ramsar sites is currently being prepared by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which analyses the information provided by Ramsar Contracting Parties in the Information Sheets on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) as summarised by Wetlands International in the *Ramsar Sites Directory*. Preliminary results reveal that the quality of management planning of Ramsar sites has improved since designation in several regions, but that the reported level of threats to sites remains undiminished. It is recognised, however, that much of this information is dated (see below for comments on the limited extent of updating of RISs). Furthermore, this study has only been able to assess the status of management practices and reported threats to Ramsar sites. It has confirmed that it is not possible, owing chiefly to the original purpose and information fields of the RIS, to analyse reliably the ecological character status and trends of Ramsar sites from the information in RISs provided by Contracting Parties.

### **The Convention's mechanisms for assessing and reporting status, trends and changes in ecological character of wetlands**

#### **Assessment of overall status and trends in wetlands**

17. There is no mechanism or procedure established under the Convention for assessing the status and trends of all wetlands. Nevertheless, a number of decisions taken by the COP have recognised the value and need for such information, in order to implement Article 3.1 of the Convention on the conservation and wise use, as far as possible, of wetlands in their territory.
18. The need and priority for comprehensive wetland inventory was recognised in Resolution VII.20, as a basis for *inter alia* policy development, as well as identification and designation of Ramsar sites. Likewise, the Convention's guidance on management planning (Resolution 5.7 and Ramsar COP8 – DR 14), which includes approaches to defining ecological character of wetlands and monitoring, recognises that this is equally applicable to both designated Ramsar sites and other wetlands.
19. However, Convention's focus of attention has been on assessing and reporting the status and change in ecological character of Ramsar sites in relation to Articles 3.1 and 3.2 of the Convention. Nevertheless, given the general lack of adequate, available information on where wetlands are (inventory) and what is happening to them (monitoring and assessment) in terms of their overall capacity to deliver their goods and services as a basis for achieving the intent of Article 3.1, it may be increasingly appropriate to consider developing further guidance on these matters to assist Contracting Parties.
20. In addition, assessment of change in ecological character under the Convention has focused on detecting only adverse, human-induced change (see further explanation below). Therefore it is not possible to use analyses based on these Convention reporting mechanisms to assess overall changes in status of Ramsar sites, since the mechanisms do not allow for assessment of positive changes, including those as a consequence of

management interventions. Thus any such analysis is likely to paint an unduly pessimistic picture of wetland status and trends.

21. As part of the work of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) (see Ramsar COP8 DOC. 8), a multi-scalar methodology and guidelines for undertaking sub-global ecosystem assessments has been developed and is being tested in a range of demonstration assessments at different spatial scales and under different conditions. This may offer a useful methodology for overall wetland assessment for application by Contracting Parties.

### **Describing ecological character**

22. A working definition of “ecological character” was developed by Resolution VI.1 and a revised definition adopted by Resolution VII.10:

*“Ecological character is the sum of the biological, physical, and chemical components of the wetland ecosystem, and their interactions, which maintain the wetland and its products, functions, and attributes.”*

*“Change in ecological character is the impairment or imbalance in any biological, physical, or chemical components of the wetland ecosystem, or in their interactions, which maintain the wetland and its products, functions and attributes.”*

23. The RIS prepared by Contracting Parties for the designation of a Ramsar site provides a general description of the ecological character of the site, including ecological character features and ecological processes. However, it is recognised that the structure of the RIS was not designed to provide a precise description of ecological character as the basis for assessment and monitoring.
24. Additional, more detailed guidance on describing the ecological character of a wetland is provided in Ramsar’s management planning guidance (Resolution 5.7, with new guidance to be considered by COP8 – Ramsar COP8 – DR 14)
25. The Ramsar *Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Ramsar COP8 – DR 6) recommends a set of ‘core data fields’ which can also form the basis for recording the ecological character of a wetland.
26. COP8 will consider proposals for further work by the STRP to provide more harmonised and comprehensive guidance on the description of ecological character for inventory, assessment and monitoring purposes, and the form of ecological character statements in the RIS. This is designed to further develop the integrated approach to wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring outlined in Ramsar COP8 DOC. 16.

### **Detecting change in ecological character**

27. To detect change in ecological character requires first establishing a clear status of that character and then establishing a monitoring regime to identify changes, or likely changes, in the character. Guidance on monitoring of Ramsar sites has been adopted by the Convention in Resolution VI.1 and as components of its guidance on management planning (Resolution 5.7 and COP8 – DR 14). Further guidance on predicting and assessing change in ecological character as part of the management planning process is provided by the Convention’s *Wetland Risk Assessment Framework* (Resolution VII.10).

28. For management planning purposes, monitoring of the objectives established in the management plan will include monitoring of change in ecological character. This needs to detect both beneficial and adverse changes in ecological character and also to understand what causes them, whether human-induced or natural, so that appropriate decisions about future management of the wetland can be made.
29. However, the definition of “change in ecological character” focuses upon adverse change only.
30. Resolution VI.1 clarifies that this was established based on interpretation of the context of Article 3.2 of the Convention, which requires reporting of change in ecological character “as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference”, and Recommendation 4.8 which established the Montreux Record. However, in Article 3.2 itself it is only implicit rather than explicit that all such changes will be adverse to the ecological character of a wetland, given that, for example, human interference could be taken also to include management interventions that act positively to remove an adverse pressure.
31. Thus it is important to draw a clear distinction between two purposes of assessing and detecting change in ecological character on Ramsar sites:
  - i) for management planning purposes, where monitoring should be designed to identify both beneficial and adverse changes, including both natural and human-induced changes; and
  - ii) for the more specific purpose of reporting change or likely change in ecological character under Article 3.2, which concerns assessing and detecting only those changes that are of an adverse, human-induced nature.

### **Ramsar sites as a monitoring network**

32. Explicit in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11) is the objective that the Ramsar site network is to be used for monitoring wetland status and trends. Its Objective 4.1 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.”
33. 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 ‘supra-nationally’ on such trends.
34. 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 recognised by the STRP’s report on

climate change and wetlands (Ramsar COP8 – DR 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.

35. 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.

### **Reporting change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites under Article 3.2 of the Convention**

36. Article 3.2 of the Convention provides a precise and strict requirement for the notification of change in the ecological character of a Ramsar site: “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 [of Wetlands of International Importance] 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” [the Ramsar Bureau]”.
37. Implicit in the terms of Article 3.2 is 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 Article 3.2 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.
38. Although definitions of “ecological character” and “change in ecological character” have been adopted, there is no guidance for establishing when a detected change would be important enough to require reporting it to the Ramsar Bureau, since the terms of Article 3.2 imply that any change, no matter how trivial, should be reported. Further guidance on this matter would assist Parties in meeting their Article 3.2 obligations.
39. Article 3.2 refers to reporting only human-caused changes in ecological character. There is, however, no guidance provided to Parties on how to distinguish such 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-caused change. An example would be ecosystem change that may be occurring as a consequence of global climate change perceived to be driven by human-caused increases in greenhouse gas emissions.
40. Such issues are implicitly recognised in Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* since this refers specifically to monitoring climate change-induced change on Ramsar sites.

### **The Montreux Record as a mechanism for addressing adverse change in ecological character**

41. The Montreux Record of “Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur” was established by COP4 in 1990. Recommendation 4.8 instructed the Ramsar Bureau to maintain a record of such sites, and Resolutions 5.4 and VI.1 adopted procedures for the operation of this “Montreux Record”.
42. In Resolution 5.4 the Contracting Parties determined that the purpose of the Montreux Record “is to identify priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention”, and this Resolution and the Annex to Resolution VI.1 also indicated that the Record should be maintained as part of the Ramsar Sites Database.
43. The intent of Recommendation 4.8 and Resolution 5.4 was thus that the Montreux Record would serve as a primary mechanism for Contracting Parties to fulfil their commitments under Article 3.2 of the Convention.
44. However, the use of the Montreux Record has been interpreted by Contracting Parties in general as a mechanism for use in exceptional cases to draw attention to the need for action or support for those sites which are facing **serious adverse change** in ecological character. Some Parties have also interpreted the Montreux Record as a “black list” and have been hesitant to inscribe sites on it. Therefore, not all Ramsar sites facing change in ecological character are listed on the Montreux Record, and hence Article 3.2 is not being fully applied in this respect.
45. 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) which forms the basis for the Ramsar Sites Database, and is not wholly compatible with the RIS and database structure. There is, however, potential 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.

### **Implementation of the Convention’s mechanisms for assessing and reporting ecological character**

46. Implementation by Contracting Parties of these mechanisms for assessing and reporting ecological character and change in this character has generally been inadequate to meet the provisions and expectations of the mechanisms described above.
47. Through Resolution VI.13 Contracting Parties committed to providing a fully updated RIS for each of their Ramsar sites at a maximum of six-year intervals. However, in practice very few such updates have been received by the Bureau – of the 854 Ramsar sites designated more than six years ago, 403 RISs (47%) have not yet been updated. It is not possible, therefore, to review the time series information potential provided in RISs to establish status and trends.



48. As indicated above, it is unclear whether Ramsar sites are being used by Contracting Parties as a national network for monitoring trends in the loss of biodiversity, climate change and desertification, as envisaged by Objective 4.1 of the Strategic Framework (Resolution VII.11), and there is no supra-national mechanism established for such reporting.
49. It is also evident that few, if any, Contracting Parties are currently fulfilling their obligations under Article 3.2, since the Bureau receives very few such reports of change or likely change in ecological character directly from Administrative Authorities. That such changes or likely changes are occurring in many Ramsar sites is borne out by the information received by the Bureau on such matters from third parties (often local communities or local NGOs). There is therefore a need to provide further assistance and clarification to Contracting Parties concerning establishing mechanisms for identifying change and likely change in ecological character, and then reporting and resolving it.
50. Concerning the application of the Montreux Record, it is clear that since its inception eleven years ago it has not yet fulfilled its original intended role as a primary mechanism for Article 3.2 reporting, and also that its use by Contracting Parties for this purpose is progressively diminishing. Currently there are only 59 Ramsar sites (out of the current total of 1180 Ramsar sites as of July 2002) listed on the Montreux Record. Since it was established, a total of 76 sites have been listed by Contracting Parties, of which 17 have subsequently been removed from the Record, and a further two removed and then included again. Of the sites currently remaining on the Record, a large proportion have been listed at least eight years ago: 32 were listed in 1990 (the year of COP4) and a further 14 in 1993 (the year of COP5). However, since 1996 only six sites have been listed on the Record.
51. It is improbable that this progressive decrease in the number of sites being listed each year on the Montreux Record is a reflection of a global decrease in the pressures on, and threats to, Ramsar sites. Indeed, the WWF study outlined above has provisionally confirmed that the reported levels of threat to Ramsar sites remain undiminished.
52. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Montreux Record continues to provide a valuable tool under the Convention. Parties use the Record as a mechanism when they identify that a Ramsar site is facing particularly intractable problems of change in ecological character – problems which would especially benefit from international conservation attention, for example through a Ramsar Advisory Mission. The efforts by Parties to implement the advice of an Advisory Mission are in many cases substantial.
53. Essential for the detection of change or likely change in ecological character is the presence of an active monitoring regime at each Ramsar site, and the Convention's guidance is that this should form part of the site management planning process. However, at COP7 the Parties reported that management plans were in place and being implemented at only 44% of designated Ramsar sites. This situation does not appear to be improving, since provisional analysis of Parties' National Reports to COP8 indicates that only 35% of Ramsar sites now designated have a management plan in place and being fully implemented. Therefore, there remains a substantial number of Ramsar sites for which there is no established mechanism being applied for detecting, reporting and responding to change.

## Conclusions and recommendations

54. A number of conclusions and recommendations may be drawn from this analysis:
- i) There is a need to stress and clarify the purpose and importance of assessing the ecological character of wetlands and reporting about it. An improved assessment of the status of and trends in wetland ecosystems should form the basis for future decision-making and prioritisation. In the case of Ramsar sites, this requires that the objective of maintaining the ecological character of the site be clearly incorporated in the management plan, as a means to comply with Article 3.1.
  - ii) It is not currently possible to report on national and international status of and trends in wetlands ecosystems based on information available to the Convention, either for Ramsar sites (in line with Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework*) or wetlands in general.
  - iii) Clarification is needed of the purposes of monitoring and reporting change in ecological character, including which types of change should be assessed for each purpose, notably that:
    - a) for site management planning purposes, where monitoring should be designed to identify both beneficial and adverse changes and both natural and human-induced changes; and
    - b) for the more specific purpose of reporting change or likely change in ecological character under Article 3.2, which concerns assessing and detecting only those changes that are of an adverse, human-induced nature.
  - iv) Despite the establishment through the Articles of the Convention and Resolutions of the COP of a number of commitments and mechanisms for determining and reporting on ecological character and change in ecological character, these mechanisms are poorly applied by Contracting Parties, and there is a need to reaffirm the importance of Article 3.2 reporting and the establishment of within-site and within-country mechanisms to assess, report and, as necessary, respond to such changes.
  - v) Despite the existence of these various mechanisms and guidance, there is a need to provide further clarification and guidance to Contracting Parties on these matters, notably in:
    - a) providing coherent guidance on the overall mechanism;
    - b) monitoring and reporting change in ecological character for management planning, implementation of Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework* for the Ramsar List, and Article 3.2 reporting purposes;
    - c) establishing whether a detected change is of sufficient significance to the status of the site to warrant its reporting; and
    - d) providing a streamlined Article 3.2 reporting mechanism.

- vi) The original intent of the Montreux Record, that Article 3.2 reports should be held as part of the Ramsar Sites Database, should be reaffirmed, and analyses should be made of the status and trends information held in the Database for regular reporting to Contracting Parties.
- vii) The importance of regular full updating of Ramsar Information Sheets (at intervals no longer than six years) should be reaffirmed, as complementary to the ‘without delay’ topical reporting under Article 3.2 of specific changes or likely changes to ecological character.
- viii) The Montreux Record should be reaffirmed as an important and valuable mechanism of the Convention for Parties to identify and seek assistance, if necessary, in addressing threats to ecological character, particularly in cases 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.
- ix) The Montreux Record might also be considered as a mechanism for generating good case study information on lessons learned in successfully tackling threats to ecological character, linked to elements of the proposed San José Record of Ramsar sites demonstrating good management practice (COP8 – DR 15).
- x) A clear distinction should be drawn between reporting under Article 3.2 of all cases of adverse, human-induced change in ecological character (subject to clarification of guidance on changes too trivial to report) and the use of the Montreux Record for reporting and addressing threats to ecological character through the identification of “priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention”.
- xi) The response options available to Contracting Parties to address threats to ecological character should be clarified, to include *inter alia*:
  - a) when resources permit, using an established management planning process, including undertaking an environmental impact assessment, to guide implementation of management action;
  - b) seeking the advice of the Convention’s Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) on appropriate measures to take into account in addressing the matter, through the mechanism of circulation to the STRP for comment of a questionnaire completed by the Contracting Party;

- c) for developing countries and countries with economies in transition, requesting resources to implement management action through the emergency assistance category of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund or seeking such resources from other relevant project-based programmes; and
- d) requesting a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) in order to bring international expertise to bear in providing advice on appropriate management actions.