



"People and Wetlands: The Vital Link"
**7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971),
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Guidelines for International Cooperation under the Ramsar Convention

Implementing Article 5 of the Convention

adopted by Resolution VII.19 (1999) of the Ramsar Convention

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§1. Introduction

1. Article 5 of the Convention states that *“the Contracting Parties shall consult each other about implementing obligations arising from the Convention especially in the case of wetlands extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where the water system is shared by Contracting Parties. They shall at the same time endeavour to coordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.”*
2. At the 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties, the Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) was approved. Action 7.3.4 of the Plan directs that the Standing Committee and the Ramsar Bureau should *“develop, for consideration at a Technical Session of the 7th COP (1999), guidelines for Contracting Parties, particularly as regards obligations concerning national funding agencies which provide assistance that may affect wetlands in developing countries.”*

§1.1 Interpreting Article 5 of the Convention

3. In these guidelines the following assumptions have been made with respect to interpreting the text of Article 5.
 - a) ***“The Contracting Parties shall consult each other about implementing obligations arising from the Convention . . .”*** It has been assumed that this text refers to all obligations arising from the Convention text, including, but not restricted to, Article 2.6 (conservation, management and wise use of migratory waterfowl), Article 3.1 (planning and implementation of wise use), Article 4.3 (encouraging research and the exchange of data and publications), and Article 4.5 (promoting training, management and wardening).
 - b) ***“. . . especially in the case of wetlands extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where the water system is shared by Contracting Parties.”*** It has been assumed that this text refers to wetlands which cross international borders, whether Wetlands of International Importance or not - this is consistent with Article 3.1 - and river basins which cross international borders, irrespective of whether or not they contain Wetlands of International Importance.

- c) ***“They shall at the same time endeavour to coordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.”*** It has been assumed that this text refers to cooperation between Contracting Parties in areas such as shared wetland-dependent species, bilateral and multilateral assistance, trade in wetland-derived plant and animal products, and foreign investment practices.

§1.2 Guidance given by past Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

4. In the six previous meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, there have been a number of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted which provide advice on aspects of international cooperation under the Convention. These are:

Resolutions

- Implementation of Article 5 of the Convention (Resolution 4.4);
- Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Resolution VI.9);
- Cooperation with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its implementing agencies: the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP (Resolution VI.10)

Recommendations

- Assistance for developing countries (Recommendation 1.2);
- Responsibility of development agencies towards wetlands (Recommendation 3.4);
- Tasks of the Ramsar Bureau in respect of development agencies (Recommendation 3.5);
- Cooperation with international organizations (Recommendation 4.11)
- Cooperation between Contracting Parties for the management of migratory species (Recommendation 4.12);
- Responsibility of multilateral development banks towards wetlands (Recommendation 4.13);
- Relationship between the Ramsar Convention, the GEF and the CBD (Recommendation 5.4);
- Inclusion of conservation and wise use of wetlands in multilateral and bilateral development cooperation programmes (Recommendation 5.5)
- Conservation and wise use of wetlands in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation programmes (Recommendation 6.16).

§1.3 Strategic Plan of the Convention - General Objective 7

5. The Strategic Plan adopted at the 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties includes General Objective 7 related to international cooperation. This General Objective has four Operational Objectives, which have been used to help identify the themes to be addressed in the Guidelines given in Section 2.

- Operational Objective 7.1: Managing shared wetlands and catchments (called river basins here).
- Operational Objective 7.2: Cooperation with international and/or regional environmental conventions and agencies.
- Operational Objective 7.3: Encouraging the development assistance community and multinational companies to apply the Wise Use Guidelines
- Operational Objective 7.4: Funding the implementation of the Convention, notably in developing countries and those in economic transition.

§2. Guidelines for International Cooperation

6. Contracting Parties are urged to consider and adopt as appropriate the following Guidelines as the basis for their implementation of Article 5 of the Convention.

§2.1 Managing shared wetlands and river basins

7. The Ramsar Convention has always recognized that a fundamental obligation of Contracting Parties pursuant to Article 5 was cooperation in the management of so-called shared wetlands. The concept of shared wetlands, now regularly referred to as international wetlands, is a relatively simple one, meaning those wetlands which cross international boundaries. In the past, priority has been given to encouraging the Contracting Parties with shared wetlands included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance to cooperate in their management. Article 3.1 of the Convention indicates very clearly that that cooperation should extend to all shared wetlands, whether Ramsar-listed or not.
8. As the Convention has recognized and responded to the need to manage wetlands as part of river basins, so has the interpretation of international cooperation been expanded to include those situations where a wetland in one Contracting Party is within the water catchment of another Contracting Party and where the actions of the Contracting Parties within the catchment area may result in changes to the ecological character of the wetland. If the wetland in such a scenario is Ramsar-listed, the Contracting Parties might not be able to live up to their obligations under the Convention, through circumstances beyond their control. The inability of an upstream Party to deal with a problem impacting downstream should also be considered. A similar situation can arise with coastal wetlands, where the actions or inactions of one Contracting Party may adversely impact on the wetlands of another. Land-based marine pollution is a case in point.
9. In this area of shared river basins Contracting Parties should, where appropriate, seek to harmonize their implementation of Article 5 of the Ramsar Convention with obligations arising from any watercourse agreements to which they may also be signatories. At the international and regional scale there are over 200 such agreements which already provide a legal basis for cooperation. At regional level, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki, 17 March 1992) sets out important principles and rules which provide a comprehensive basis for the development of new agreements.
10. As indicated above, another aspect of managing shared wetlands and river basins is that of alien or invasive species. For wetlands which cross international boundaries there is a clear responsibility on the part of all jurisdictions involved to do everything possible to restrict

the spread of such invasive species, where they would have negative impacts. The same applies for shared river basins where preventing the water-borne introduction of an invasive species from one Contracting Party into an adjoining state should also be considered a responsibility under the Convention's guidelines for international cooperation.

§2.1.1 *Transboundary (international) wetlands*

11. Under these Guidelines for International Cooperation, Contracting Parties are urged to identify all their shared wetland systems (including those in the coastal zone) and cooperate in the management of these with the adjoining jurisdiction(s). This cooperation may extend to formal joint management arrangements or collaboration in the development and implementation of a management plan for the site. While not a comprehensive global assessment, the report prepared by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) "Shared wetlands and river basins of the world" provides a preliminary basis for the identification of shared wetlands. This report indicates that of 955 Ramsar sites considered in the analysis, 92 (9.6%) sites may be subject to impacts from adjoining jurisdictions and could therefore benefit from cooperative management approaches between countries.

§2.1.2 *Transboundary (international) river basins*

12. In the same way that Contracting Parties are urged to identify and then cooperate in the management of shared, or international, wetlands, so there is an expectation that similar cooperation will be pursued for shared or international river basins and coastal systems. The establishment of multi-state management commissions is an important concept for those countries which share river basins to consider and pursue energetically. Experience has shown these to be an effective mechanism to promote international cooperation over water resource management, which includes the wetlands forming part of these river basins. As indicated in §2.1.1 above, the WCMC report "Shared wetlands and river basins of the world" provides a preliminary basis for the identification of international river basins to assist Contracting Parties with undertaking this element of the Guidelines. This report indicates that of the 955 Ramsar sites considered, 267 (28%) are located within international river basins.
13. For shared coastal wetlands Contracting Parties are urged to develop frameworks of cooperation within existing Regional Seas Programs and embodying Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) concepts. Regional Seas Programs provide a legal framework for cooperation, including a convention and appropriate protocols. Contracting Parties are also encouraged to manage major coastal wetlands systems (such as barrier reefs and expanses of mangrove/reef/seagrass systems) within the context of LMEs. A model for this management approach is Australia's Great Barrier Reef. While not a transboundary site (nor Ramsar-listed), it is an excellent illustration of wise use in action which should be considered by those Contracting Parties responsible for managing multi-state shared coastal wetlands. Appropriately, this model takes into consideration the management of the river systems discharging into the zone of influence for the reef system and seeks to ensure that potential negative impacts from these sources are controlled. For shared coastal wetland systems this an important consideration.
14. The establishment of river basin management commissions or equivalent cooperative mechanisms for coastal wetland systems may sometimes require expert and impartial

assistance as well as significant resources. The expertise can come from some established bodies, and the Ramsar Convention should promote the involvement of these in situations where it seems necessary or warranted. Contracting Parties may make use of existing organizations, created for other purposes or associated with other international or regional conventions, instead of creating new autonomous arrangements. The donor community also needs to recognize the establishment and operations of river basin management and coastal management commissions as a priority under their programmes for sustainable development.

Section A

Guidelines related to managing shared wetlands and river basins

- A1. Contracting Parties are encouraged to identify all of their shared wetland systems and cooperate in their management with the adjoining jurisdiction(s), through actions such as formal joint management arrangements or collaboration in the development and implementation of bi- or multilateral management plans for such sites.
- A2. Likewise, there is an expectation that similar cooperation will be pursued for shared or international river basins and coastal systems through the establishment of bi- or multilateral management commissions.
- A3. Contracting Parties are urged to work closely with Regional Seas Programmes and other appropriate international and regional conventions, to promote the wise use management principles of the Ramsar Convention, and to support the establishment of equitable and sustainable management regimes for shared river basins and coastal systems.

§2.2 Managing shared wetland-dependent species

- 15. International cooperation in the management of so-called shared species has been a priority under the Ramsar Convention since its inception. In fact, the motivation for countries to develop and put into place a convention like Ramsar was largely provided by a desire to promote international cooperation for migratory waterbird conservation. Today, the Convention continues to promote this aspect of its charter very strongly, and as the level of knowledge regarding migratory species grows, so too does the imperative for the Convention to take a more strategic approach to the management of shared species. It is important to recognize that it is not always the very large wetland sites that are critical for the conservation of migratory species; many small wetlands are also vital elements of migration routes and they are important, collectively, for biodiversity conservation. It also should be understood that not all shared species are migratory. There are non-migratory species which have a limited range and are found in transboundary wetlands or within adjoining countries. For these, cooperation in the management of their wetland sites, as encouraged through section §2.1 above, is critical.
- 16. In recognition of the close relationship between them, there is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Under this, the challenge for the Ramsar Convention is to work to see protected

and managed appropriately the critical habitats for the endangered migratory species which CMS endeavours to conserve through multilateral agreements among the range states. The revised Ramsar Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance (Resolution VII.11) with their newly formulated Objectives are now clearly focused on this as one fundamental element of the vision for the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

17. With this increase in the understanding of species distribution and biology has come a recognition that the shared species are more than just the waterbirds with their very noticeable migrations. In coastal wetland environments there are many species which migrate, such as marine turtles and certain fish stocks. The Convention, in partnership with CMS, must now turn its attention to these as well as its traditional clients, the waterbirds.
18. The very forces that motivated the establishment of the Ramsar Convention and CMS also played a role in the development of the 1986 North American Waterfowl Management Plan. This Plan represents a signed agreement between the governments of Canada, the United States, and Mexico (as of 1994). Through the Plan, together they seek to recover and safeguard waterfowl populations by protecting and restoring the wetland habitats upon which they depend throughout North America. As with Ramsar, international cooperation has been a priority of the Plan since its inception, and the conservation partnerships it has established to achieve it, called joint ventures, are a unique hallmark of the Plan. By encouraging these three countries to take both a landscape-level and partnership approach to conservation, the Plan not only offers long-term benefits to a wide range of wetland-dependent species but also serves as a model for international cooperation to be applied in other parts of the world. The conservation of migratory waterbirds in the Asia-Pacific is being promoted under the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000, through the establishment of networks of migratory shorebirds, cranes and Anatidae (see Recommendation 6.4). Also the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) has been successful in promoting conservation of shorebirds in the Americas through local partnerships developed at sites.

§2.2.1 *Migratory waterbirds*

19. For migratory waterbirds the Ramsar Convention has a responsibility as a part of international cooperation to see the important wetland habitats which form flyways recognized and managed appropriately in perpetuity. The Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance is the tool which the Convention has available to work toward this goal. Contracting Parties should have as a priority the identification and designation of all sites which satisfy the waterbird criteria for identifying wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List. With the development and implementation of management plans for these sites the Convention will make a significant contribution to the global efforts to conserve these species. The concept of site networks (see section §2.4.3) is one that the Convention should promote more strongly, in order to link the managers of these sites to allow for information sharing and to promote the setting of strategic conservation objectives rather than simply addressing these on a site-by-site basis.

§2.2.2 *Other migratory species*

20. As stated in the introduction to this section on shared wetland-dependent species, it is now recognized that the Ramsar Convention should be taking a more active role in the

protection and management of wetland habitats for a wider range of species than simply the waterbirds. Under CMS, actions are under way to develop multilateral agreements for the conservation of species such as marine turtles. The contribution of the Ramsar Convention to this can again be through the designation of critical habitats as Wetlands of International Importance and the encouragement of site networks. As with migratory waterbirds (see §2.2.1) above, the fish criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance provide one avenue for concerted action by the Contracting Parties to ensure that these critical areas on the migration routes are designated and managed appropriately.

Section B

Guidelines related to shared wetland-dependent species

- B1. Contracting Parties should give priority to the identification and designation of all sites which satisfy the waterbird criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance, followed by the development and implementation of management plans for these sites. In the context of these guidelines this should apply especially for flyway and shared sites. Equally, for other wetland-dependent species shared between Contracting Parties (such as fish), the designation and management of their important wetland habitats is a responsibility in terms of international cooperation.

- B2. The concept of site networks for shared species is one that the Convention should promote more strongly, aiming to link the managers of these sites to allow for information sharing and technical and financial assistance when so required. The setting of strategic conservation objectives for networks as a whole, and for the species' populations they support, is crucial. Contracting Parties should consider nomination of sites to relevant international networks (East Asia-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network, North East Asian Crane Site Network, East Asian Anatidae Site Network, and Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network).

- B3. The Convention will also seek advice from the Convention on Migratory Species about wetland-dependent species and support its efforts to encourage the development of multilateral agreements for the conservation of these species.

- B4. Contracting Parties are urged to examine and adopt as appropriate regional models, such as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000, in establishing multilateral agreements for the conservation of wetland-dependent species. Ideally, these agreements should include the partnership approaches promoted by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 1996-2000 which bring together all levels of government administration, non-government organizations and the business sector.

§2.3 Ramsar working in partnership with international/regional environment Conventions and agencies

21. The Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002 adopted in 1996 provides direction under Operational Objective 7.2 on international cooperation related to international/ regional environment conventions and agencies. Essentially this sets priorities for the Convention in the development of cooperation and synergy with these conventions and agencies in order to promote shared objectives and goals. The Ramsar Convention also has a unique partnership with a number of international non-government organizations (BirdLife International, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, The World Wide Fund for Nature - WWF, and Wetlands International) and is seeking to allow for expansion in this area through Resolution VII.3. Cooperation with these International Partners of the Convention will continue to accelerate implementation of the Convention at all levels from international to local.

§2.3.1 Other global environment-related Conventions

22. Operational Objective 7.2 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002 and Resolution VII.4 refer to the development of cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the World Heritage Convention, the Man and Biosphere Programme, CMS (see §2.2 above), CITES (see §2.6.2 below), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Convention on Wetlands has a Memorandum of Cooperation with CBD and a Joint Work Plan in which the Ramsar Convention has the role of lead partner in CBD wetland conservation issues. As indicated above, an MoU is also in place with CMS and under these Guidelines (see §2.2 above) this arrangement will be strengthened through joint actions also. Memoranda of Cooperation with the Convention to Combat Desertification and of Understanding with the World Heritage Convention were signed in December 1998 and May 1999 respectively. The Ramsar Convention will continue to develop similar arrangements with the other international conventions and, through these, to elaborate joint work plans. Section §2.6.2 of these Guidelines provides the basis for immediate cooperation with CITES.
23. At the national level Contracting Parties need to ensure that the implementation of these conventions is harmonized and integrated wherever possible. Apart from domestic actions, each imposes obligations in terms of international cooperation and, in meeting these expectations, Contracting Parties should aim to coordinate their responses. This applies, to a greater or lesser degree, to all of the actions proposed herein and so taking an integrated approach should be more cost-effective.

§2.3.2 Regional environment-related Conventions, agreements, organizations

24. As with the international environment conventions, the Ramsar Convention needs to develop partnerships with the relevant regional conventions, agreements and organizations. Action 7.2.8 of the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan identifies several such regional conventions, agreements and organizations with which partnership actions should be a priority. Among these are the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and the Amazonian Cooperation Treaty. Partnership with such regional initiatives will foster more cohesive responses to environmental challenges including wetland conservation and wise use. One example of a regionally-based arrangement that contributes greatly to fostering cooperation for wetland conservation and wise use is the Mediterranean Wetland Initiative

(MedWet) involving the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea (Resolution VII.22). This is a model which should be promoted by the Convention.

§2.3.3 *International programmes and organizations*

25. There are a large number of international programmes and organizations with which the Ramsar Convention should be working more closely. Some are operating under the aegis of the United Nations and its bodies and agencies (Commission on Sustainable Development, UNDP, UNEP, World Health Organization, etc.) and the development of a formal Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Convention and the relevant programmes of the United Nations will be pursued. Section §2.5 looks in detail at the relationship Ramsar should have with the donor community. Apart from these there are organizations and programmes such as the International Network of Basin Organizations and the Global Rivers Environmental Education Network which can offer their expertise to the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention and with which a closer working partnership would clearly be advantageous. As indicated above, the continuation of cooperative actions with the Convention's International Organization Partners (Resolution VII.3) is also of critical importance, and efforts should be escalated at all levels to develop partnership approaches with these organizations. The Ramsar Convention will continue to develop partnerships with other appropriate international and regional conventions, agreements and programmes (as it has done with CBD, CMS, CCD and WHC) and through these to develop and implement joint programmes of work.

Section C

Guidelines related to partnership with international/regional environment Conventions and agencies

- C1. At the national level, Contracting Parties should ensure that the implementation of environment conventions is harmonized wherever possible. This will allow each to take a more integrated approach to meeting its international and regional cooperation obligations.
- C2. The development of a formal Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Convention and the United Nations will be pursued, and the Convention Bureau and Ramsar national Administrative Authorities are urged to pursue partnerships with the Convention's International Organization Partners and other relevant bodies such as the International Network of Basin Organizations and the Global Rivers Environmental Education Network.

§2.4 Sharing of expertise and information

§2.4.1 *Knowledge sharing*

26. In all countries there exists knowledge and expertise in wetlands management. Sometimes this resides with the indigenous people who may have relied upon the wetland ecosystems for generations, and who have applied wise use practices to sustain them for centuries. There is also that unwritten understanding which people living in association with a wetland have acquired from being a part of the same ecosystem over time, an understanding which has built an empathy and a respect for the values of the wetland. Then there is the cutting edge of new understanding born of research and the development of new technologies. This can be practical, hands-on research, more sophisticated equipment or low-cost technologies, or it can be about promoting better management practices through the application of new science in the many fields which wetland managers must now embrace.
27. A key to the Ramsar Convention achieving its global mission is to find ways to increase the sharing of this knowledge resource. Through the *Convention's Outreach Programme* (Resolution VII.9), Focal Points for Wetland Communication, Education and Public Awareness should be appointed, and similarly, a National Focal Point in each Contracting Party for the business of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel should be designated (Resolution VII.2). These Focal Points are expected to form global networks of expertise and review their national resources in these two fields (traditional and local knowledge and current/cooperative research findings) with a view to promoting knowledge sharing. It is also important that these focal points, Ramsar Administrative Authorities, and the Ramsar Bureau take every opportunity to collaborate with those involved in implementing other conventions to foster the accelerated sharing of knowledge. The concept of national or regional data collection centres is one which is gaining increasing support in some parts of the world.

§2.4.2 *Training*

28. Training people to implement all aspects of the Convention, and to manage wetland sites, remains a high priority. Globally, there are a range of institutions providing training in these various fields. The challenge for the Convention is to deliver the right sort of training to the people that need and desire it. The Ramsar Bureau has begun to assemble information on this through its Directory of Wetland Management Training Opportunities now available through its World Wide Web site. However, this does not provide the resources needed to get wetland practitioners into training programmes, or to see training programmes delivered on-site in those Contracting Parties where it is urgently needed. Another gap is that very few countries have conducted analyses to determine their priority training needs at the national, sub-national and local levels. Without such reviews of training needs, there is a risk that the training provided or offered will lack relevance.
29. Recognizing the need for sharing and delivering training to people to implement all aspects of the Convention in the Asia-Pacific region and the lack of existing international mechanisms, a model of the training initiative based on the Wetlands for the Future Initiative in the Neotropics should be developed in the Asia-Pacific. Such an initiative would benefit from the establishment of a regional wetland training coordination centre in the Asia-Pacific.
30. A priority under the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* is to mobilise resources for training. Site twinnings and networks (see §2.4.3 below) may provide one avenue for mobilising training resources. Another is through direct

approaches to the bilateral and multilateral donor community (see §Section 2.5). The Ramsar Small Grants Fund has training as a priority, and with the generous support of the Government of the USA the Ramsar Bureau manages the Wetlands for the Future Initiative, which focuses on training and capacity-building programmes in the Neotropical region.

§2.4.3 *Site twinning or networks*

31. Under the Ramsar Convention the concept of twinning between Ramsar sites in different Contracting Parties is encouraged as a way to promote dialogue and information sharing. The National Reports submitted for Ramsar COP7 indicate that at that time there were fewer than 25 site twinings in place involving Contracting Parties. Equally, the concept of site networks linking the wetlands used by migratory species has been encouraged under the Convention.
32. As suggested by the number of twinning arrangements in place at present, the full potential of this concept as a tool to promote international cooperation under the Convention has not been fully explored as yet, and it is a priority to do so through these Guidelines. Such arrangements should be pursued by Contracting Parties as a priority with the act of twinning or networking intended to carry with it the intent for sharing information, expertise and resources between the sites involved. These mechanisms can provide the framework for personnel exchanges for the purposes of training as much as opportunities for knowledge sharing about species and site management.
33. Twinning and site networks can also provide a way for development assistance to be provided in a directed way, especially in north-south arrangements between sites.

Section D

Guidelines related to the sharing of expertise and information

- D1. Through the Focal Points for Wetland Communication, Education and Public Awareness and for the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), the Convention will increase its efforts to share knowledge (traditional, indigenous, and more recently derived technologies and methods) among Contracting Parties. A priority for these Focal Points should be to establish expert networks at the national level to allow for the rapid gathering and dissemination of this information.
- D2. Training of the personnel responsible for implementing the Convention and all aspects of wetland management remains a very high priority for the Convention and should be promoted through information sharing (see above), mobilising resources from the development assistance community, programmes such as the Ramsar Small Grants Fund and Wetlands for the Future in the Neotropics, and through site twinning and networking. Other Contracting Parties are urged to follow the examples of existing and successful training programme efforts for wetland practitioners.
- D3. A necessary precursor to undertaking training activities is to assess the training needs at the national, sub-national and local levels to ensure relevance.

D4. Contracting Parties are urged to give priority to site twinning and networking as a way to promote information sharing among site managers, to provide training opportunities, and where appropriate to direct development assistance.

§2.5 International assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands

34. The Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention have long recognized the importance of mobilizing international assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and that this forms a central element of international cooperation under Article 5. The first Conference of the Contracting Parties, in Recommendation 1.2, called on developing countries to “*pay more attention to conservation measures in any request for and programming of assistance, and upon developed countries and international organizations to pay due attention to these requests in their development aid policies*”. The subsequent Conferences of the Contracting Parties have approved a total of nine additional Resolutions and Recommendations (see §Section 1.2) calling for enhanced funding for wetland conservation and improved management and control of development assistance funding.
35. The Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan 1997-2002, under Operational Objectives 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4, provides further directions for intensifying international cooperation activities and mobilizing financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.

§2.5.1 Enhancing environmental funding for wetlands

36. The support for wetland conservation and wise use from several of the bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies has been steadily increasing over the past five years. This comes as a result of a growing recognition of the functions, values and benefits provided by wetland ecosystems and their importance for food and water security, poverty alleviation, and the conservation of biological diversity. However, it is of concern that the budgets and geographic and thematic coverage of some development assistance agencies have been significantly reduced during this same period.
37. Given the recognized importance of wetlands from environmental, economic and social perspectives, a priority under the Guidelines for International Cooperation is for Contracting Parties, and their bilateral development assistance agencies, to increase allocations for wetland conservation and wise use through existing environmental and other funds. At the same time, these agencies are encouraged to investigate and consider supporting the establishment in developing countries of innovative mechanisms for long-term fund generation for wetland conservation activities such as trust funds, user-pays contribution schemes, and the like.
38. In terms of multilateral assistance, Ramsar Resolution VI.10 noted the relevance of the GEF focal areas to wetlands and called for extension and deepening of cooperation with the GEF. Subsequently, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), through Decision IV/4 of its Fourth Conference of the Contracting Parties in 1998, urged Contracting Parties to seek the support of the GEF for the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems. Eligible Contracting Parties should

examine this CBD Decision in detail and prepare suitable proposals for consideration by the GEF.

39. Contracting Parties, and development assistance agencies, are also encouraged to make long-term financial commitments to support the operations of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF). The evaluation of the SGF (Resolution VII.5) has shown its value and effectiveness but revealed that many suitable projects each year cannot be supported due to a lack of financial resources for disbursement.
40. In line with Action 7.3.3 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002, Contracting Parties should also ensure that for their bilateral donor agencies there is appropriate monitoring of expenditures occurring in order to allow them to indicate to Conferences of the Contracting Parties what level and type of assistance has been provided to developing countries and countries in transition in meeting their Ramsar obligations, and its effectiveness. Ideally, this would be provided through the introduction, where it does not exist at present, of a reporting category for wetland conservation issues into the project monitoring databases of the development assistance agencies.

§2.5.2 *Ensuring adequate consideration of wetlands in sectoral strategies and development programmes*

41. Apart from the issue of mobilizing finances, previous Ramsar Conferences of the Contracting Parties have also considered the responsibilities of the development assistance agencies in terms of considering wetland-related projects in their sectoral as well as broader strategies and policies. Recommendation 3.4 urged the development assistance agencies “*to formulate and adopt coherent policies directed at sustainable utilization, wise management and conservation of wetlands; and to create special programmes to ensure the integration of these policies into all of their activities*”.
42. Although it is apparent that significant progress has been made in implementing certain elements of Recommendation 3.4, such as the use of Environmental Impact Assessments, other aspects remain to be implemented fully. A continuing priority is to ensure that wetland issues are appropriately considered within sectoral strategies and the general programmes of the development assistance agencies. Activities in the agriculture, fisheries, water resources, forestry, transportation and power generation sectors can potentially impact on wetlands, and it is vital that the strategies and policies directing the allocation of these financial resources are consistent with the Ramsar principle of wise use and these Guidelines for International Cooperation.
43. In particular, Contracting Parties with development assistance agencies should ensure that the actions called for under Recommendations 3.4 and 5.5 are undertaken, namely, “*to take appropriate steps for an assessment of their policies at regular intervals*” (Recommendation 3.4) and “*to review their development cooperation policies, in the light of the obligations and opportunities presented by Ramsar, [and] to support country-driven projects with a view to assisting developing countries to fulfill their Ramsar obligations*” (Recommendation 5.5). In this regard, reviews should be undertaken by these Contracting Parties to determine the extent to which the wetland conservation and wise use principles promoted by the Ramsar Convention are adequately considered in the policies related to the agriculture, fisheries, water resources, forestry,

transport and power generation sectors, and to seek the necessary introductions or amendments to these policies.

44. In such reviews of the sectoral strategies and policies of their development assistance agencies, Contracting Parties should also seek to encourage the priority consideration of projects which apply the wise use principles of the Convention through environmentally sound development activities in wetlands, such as sustainable forestry or fishery, wetland restoration, ecotourism, non-structural flood control, etc.

§2.5.3 *Supporting integration of wetland issues into national planning frameworks*

45. Article 3 of the Convention calls on all Contracting Parties to formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of wetlands. Through the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* and related decisions of Conferences of the Contracting Parties, the development of a national wetland policy or strategy has been recognized as perhaps the best way of integrating wetlands into the national conservation and development agenda (Resolution VII.6 on *Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies*).
46. In the same way, Recommendation 3.4 urged development assistance agencies “*to use their influence with borrowing or recipient governments to promote the formulation and adoption of national policies for wise use and conservation of wetlands*” and this should remain a priority. The formulation of wetland policies should also be an integral part of broader national planning related to social issues and economic development, and Contracting Parties are encouraged to promote such approaches. This may require assistance by means of capacity building or with direct assistance for incorporating wetland conservation and wise use considerations into sectoral development policies and the overall economic development plans for each country.

§2.5.4 *Improving capacity of development assistance agencies*

47. One mechanism for increasing the number of wetland-related projects supported by development assistance agencies is to raise the level of awareness amongst planners and policy-makers within these organizations, of the many functions and benefits provided by wetlands. The Outreach Programme of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution VII.9) identifies these officials as a priority target group, and Contracting Parties are urged to ensure that efforts are made to provide appropriate training and resource materials for the key decision-makers within their development assistance agencies.
48. Some assistance has been forthcoming in this area with publications such as the OECD Guidelines on Aid and Environment No.9: *Guidelines for Aid Agencies for Improved Conservation and Sustainable Use of Tropical and Sub-tropical Wetlands*. However, there remains a need to raise the general awareness and understanding of these agencies through a range of actions, many of which have been considered by previous decisions of Conferences of the Contracting Parties. Actions encouraged include internal and external training programmes “*to strengthen the ecological expertise in all departments involved in development and implementation of projects affecting wetlands*” (Recommendation 3.4), enhancing linkages with the Ramsar Administrative Authority within the country (Strategic Plan Action 7.4.2) and “*including representatives of ministries responsible for the granting or receipt of development assistance in the delegations to meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties*” (Recommendation 5.5).

§2.5.5 *Enhancing capacity of recipient governments*

49. Success in mobilizing the flow of development assistance for wetland-related projects is in part determined by the capacities, in terms of project development and implementation, of the recipient country and its willingness to give priority to wetland projects when seeking development assistance. The issue of capacity is a complex one that has to be considered on a case by case basis. The constraints may be determined by factors such as lack of human resources or the lack of experience with project development and dealings with donor agencies. The failure to have wetland-related projects given priority within national governments is also a complex question and may relate to factors such as a lack of awareness of the true values of wetlands among key decision-makers or a failure to have wetlands considered within the mainstream of government business through instruments such as a integrated planning processes, a National Wetland Policy, or a National Ramsar Committee.
50. Previous Ramsar Conferences of the Contracting Parties have agreed that development assistance agencies should seek to “*strengthen the institutional arrangements and the ecological expertise both at the national level and among regional development authorities in the project regions, in order to implement . . . policies and to train and educate personnel at project implementation level*” (Recommendation 3.4). Potential recipient countries should seek training opportunities for their personnel to provide them with the necessary technical and project development skills. §Section 2.4 of these Guidelines is relevant here. Recipient countries are also further urged to seek resources from donors for the development of National Wetland Policies (or similar) and for implementing national communication, education and public awareness programmes for wetlands consistent with the Convention’s Outreach Programme (Resolution VII.9). Both measures should serve to give wetland-related projects higher priority for funding assistance.

§2.5.6 *Enhancing cooperation among development assistance agencies and with Ramsar Administrative Authorities*

51. As wetland conservation and its wise use continues to be an increasingly important issue in many developing countries, development agencies should “*coordinate their programmes at the international level to ensure that their independent activities do not in combination adversely affect wetlands*” (Recommendation 3.4) and enhance cooperation with other development assistance agencies in sharing experiences and avoiding possible duplication of their activities in countries receiving assistance.
52. The matter of enhancing cooperation between the development assistance agency and the Ramsar Administrative Authority of the country was recognized under §Section 2.5.4 above as an important aspect of raising the capacity of the former, and is encouraged through Action 7.4.2 of the Strategic Plan 1997-2002. Contracting Parties are encouraged to develop a formal mechanism for consultations between their development assistance agency and the Ramsar Administrative Authority, and to ensure that National Ramsar Committees, where they exist, include a representative of the development assistance agency. The participation of a representative of the development assistance agency on the delegation to Ramsar Conference of the Contracting Parties is also urged (Recommendation 5.5).

Section E

Guidelines related to international assistance to support wetland conservation and wise use

- E1. A continuing high priority for the Ramsar Convention is for Contracting Parties, and especially their bilateral development assistance agencies, to increase allocations for wetland conservation and wise use.
- E2. The bilateral development assistance agencies are urged to investigate and consider supporting the establishment in developing countries of innovative mechanisms for long-term fund generation for wetland conservation activities, such as trust funds and user-pays contribution schemes, together with other incentive measures for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- E3. Contracting Parties of both the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are urged to examine CBD's Decision IV/4 and where appropriate to respond to its indications in terms of seeking financial support from the Global Environment Facility for suitable proposals related to the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems.
- E4. Contracting Parties and development assistance agencies are requested to make long-term financial commitments to support the operations of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) (Resolution VII.5).
- E5. Contracting Parties should also ensure that for their bilateral donor agencies there is appropriate monitoring of expenditures which will allow them to indicate to the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties the level, type, and effectiveness of assistance provided to developing countries in meeting their Ramsar obligations.
- E6. In order to ensure that wetland issues are appropriately considered within sectoral strategies and the general programmes of the development assistance agencies, Contracting Parties are encouraged to undertake reviews to determine the extent to which the Ramsar wise use principles are adequately considered in the policies related to the agriculture, fisheries, water resources, forestry, transport and power generation sectors, and to seek the necessary additions or amendments to these policies.
- E7. Through their bilateral assistance programmes, and involvements with multilateral programmes, Contracting Parties should also support projects which apply the wise use principles of the Convention through environmentally sound development activities in wetlands.
- E8. As recognized by the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept*, it is important that Contracting Parties prepare a suitable national policy framework for implementing the Convention, and this should remain a priority for those countries

seeking donor assistance. The formulation of wetland policies should also be an integral part of broader national planning related to social issues and economic development (Resolution VII.6).

- E9. The Outreach Programme of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution VII.9) identifies the key decision-makers within the development assistance agencies as a priority target group, and Contracting Parties are urged to ensure that efforts are made to provide appropriate training and resource materials for these officials.
- E10. There remains a need to raise the general awareness and understanding of wetland functions and values among the staff of the development assistance agencies. Actions encouraged include internal and external training programmes, enhanced linkages with the Ramsar Administrative Authority within the country, and the inclusion of representatives of development assistance agencies in the delegations to meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.
- E11. Contracting Parties should continue to implement Recommendation 3.4 which agreed that development assistance agencies should seek to “*strengthen the institutional arrangements and the ecological expertise both at the national level and among regional development authorities in the project regions, in order to implement . . . policies and to train and educate personnel at project implementation level*”.
- E12. In order to increase the level of funds flowing to wetland-related projects, potential recipient countries are encouraged, as appropriate, to seek training opportunities for their personnel in order to provide them with the necessary technical and project development skills.
- E13. Recipient countries are urged to seek resources from donors for the development of National Wetland Policies (or similar) and for implementing national communication, education and public awareness programmes for wetlands consistent with the Convention’s Outreach Programme (Resolution VII.9). Both measures should serve to give wetland-related projects higher national priority for gaining funding assistance.
- E14. Development assistance agencies should “*coordinate their programmes at the international level to ensure that their independent activities do not in combination adversely affect wetlands*” (Recommendation 3.4) and enhance cooperation with other development assistance agencies in sharing experiences and avoiding possible duplication of their activities in countries receiving assistance.
- E15. Contracting Parties are encouraged to develop a formal mechanism for consultations between their development assistance agency and the Ramsar Administrative Authority, and to ensure that National Ramsar Committees, where they exist, include a representative of the development assistance agency.

§2.6 Sustainable harvesting and international trade in wetland-derived plant and animal products

53. The Ramsar Convention promotes the conservation and wise (sustainable) use of wetlands, and this includes the harvesting of plant and animal products from these wetlands. At the local scale, such harvesting at Ramsar-listed sites should be regulated by a management plan developed in close consultation with the stakeholders (Recommendation 6.13). Article 3.1 of the Convention also urges that Contracting Parties promote “*as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory*”.
54. In terms of international cooperation under the Convention, trade in plant and animal products derived from wetlands which extend beyond national boundaries should therefore also be regulated to ensure that harvesting is being done in a sustainable way. If such harvesting is taking place at a Ramsar-listed site, then the Contracting Party has a clear obligation to ensure that the impact of the harvesting will not threaten or alter the ecological character of the site. This applies especially for transboundary wetland sites, shared by two or more Contracting Parties.

§2.6.1 *Harvesting controls and monitoring*

55. Wetlands, as highly productive ecosystems, have always been exploited for their natural products. Through its Wise Use concept the Ramsar Convention recognizes that such harvesting will continue and seeks to ensure that it is done in such a way that the resource can be available to sustain future generations. There are several ways that Contracting Parties can seek to ensure that the harvesting of wetland-derived plant and animal products is sustainable. The special case of trade in protected or endangered species is considered below, but for other species Contracting Parties are encouraged to monitor international trade and, where it involves wetland-derived species, to implement the necessary legal, institutional and administrative measures to require that harvesting is biologically sustainable. In some instances, it may even be desirable to have mechanisms in place which direct resources from the trade in these products back to wetland conservation and wise use. Management plans for the sites where these products originate, as well as scientifically-based Species Management Plans, are also strongly encouraged.
56. Ramsar Contracting Parties also have a responsibility to ensure that wetland-derived plant and animal products being imported into their territory from another Contracting Party are being harvested sustainably, especially where these involve species listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) - see below. The act of poaching by the nationals of one Contracting Party within the territory of another Contracting Party is counter to the spirit of Article 5 of the Ramsar Convention.
57. There are many complex issues associated with this area which are not dealt with in detail here, such as access to and ownership of genetic resources, and bioprospecting. Contracting Parties are urged to consult with the relevant focal points within their countries on these matters in developing an appropriate national response to the issues of international trade in wetland-derived products.

§2.6.2 *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)*

58. Where Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention are also Contracting Parties of CITES, they have responsibilities under that Convention to ensure that international trade

in endangered or potentially endangered plant and animal species, and certain derivatives from them, are regulated and monitored. Where this applies to species derived from wetlands, Contracting Parties to both Conventions have a dual obligation to take the necessary action to guarantee that the harvesting is sustainable and in accordance with CITES rules. Under the Ramsar definition of a wetland, this would apply to animal species such as crocodiles, freshwater and marine turtles (although none can be traded commercially), fish, corals, a large number of wetland-derived plants with medicinal values, and some peat forest timbers.

59. For species listed on the CITES Appendix I, no international trade is permitted, and for those in Appendix II Contracting Parties are required to prepare scientifically-based Species Management Plans and to regulate and monitor trade in these products through legislative and administrative means.

Section F

Guidelines related to trade in wetland derived products

- F1. Contracting Parties are urged to review all international trade in wetland-derived plant and animal products, both exports and imports, and as appropriate to implement the necessary legal, institutional and administrative measures to require that harvesting is sustainable and in accordance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and other relevant local regulations and international agreements.
- F2. Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention which are also Contracting Parties to CITES are urged to review their international trade in wetland-derived products, and as necessary to seek the listing of these species under the appropriate Appendix of CITES.
- F3. For wetland-derived species that are already listed under CITES, Contracting Parties should be vigilant in meeting their obligations under CITES for these species and report violations of these obligations to the Ramsar Bureau.
- F4. Where such species are being harvested at Ramsar and other wetland sites, Contracting Parties are encouraged to consider these activities within the development of management plans for these, possibly integrating them with the Species Management Plans encouraged by CITES.
- F5. Administrative Authorities of the Ramsar Convention should establish a cooperative working arrangement with their CITES equivalent (both scientific and management authorities) and seek to work together in pursuing the above actions.
- F6. In developing an appropriate national response to the issues of international trade in wetland-derived products, in addition to consultation with the CITES authorities, Ramsar Administrative Authorities are also urged to consult with the relevant focal points for the Convention on Biological Diversity, and in particular those officials involved with issues such as biotrade, sustainable use of genetic resources and bioprospecting.

F7. Noting the adoption of *Guidelines for the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies* (Resolution VII.6) and *Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands* (Resolution VII.7), Contracting Parties are urged to ensure that issues of international trade in wetland-derived products are considered through these processes.

§2.7 Regulation of foreign investment to ensure wetland conservation and wise use

60. The regulation of foreign investment is clearly a sovereign right and an issue of self-determination which must be respected by the Ramsar Convention. Through these Guidelines on International Cooperation, the Convention does not seek to restrain such investments or inhibit economic development, simply to provide advice to Contracting Parties which will assist them to avoid activities supported by foreign investments which are counter to their obligations under the Convention. It is also important to note the potential which exists for Contracting Parties to regulate foreign investment in ways that ensure that it contributes in a positive way to the long-term sustainability of the wetland resource being utilised (see §2.7.2 below).

§2.7.1 *Impact assessment*

61. Foreign investments in many countries are closely regulated by law, while in others this is not the case. Where foreign investments support actions that can impact on wetlands, Contracting Parties have a clear obligation to require rigorous assessment (environmental, economic and social) of the potential impacts of these, just as they would for domestically funded activities.
62. Under the Ramsar Convention, Contracting Parties are encouraged to have in place suitable impact assessment practices which can work to avoid wetland destruction or degradation from development proposals. Where such practices are not in place, their introduction should be a high priority. Administratively, it is also essential that development proposals, whether totally domestically funded, partly domestically funded, or totally foreign investment, are subjected to impact assessment.

§2.7.2 *Codes of Conduct for foreign interests and financial measures*

63. In some countries, members of the business sector have adopted voluntary Codes of Conduct which also apply to their foreign investment activities. These are promoted by organizations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the Ramsar Convention should strongly endorse and promote this responsible attitude by some sectors which have in the past gained a reputation for wetland destruction. Contracting Parties need to give much greater emphasis to this aspect of foreign investment, and even to expect that investors will have such Codes of Conduct and be able to demonstrate their credentials as proponents of ecologically sustainable development activities. The Ramsar Bureau is requested to gather and disseminate models of such Codes of Conduct to all Contracting Parties for their consideration.
64. As indicated above, some countries now require of their foreign investors (and in some cases the domestic ones as well) the payment of environmental bonds or other similar

endowments which support activities directed at the long-term sustainability of the resource being utilised. For example, a foreign investor may be expected as part of the conditions of approval for a wetland-related development to establish and help maintain a community education facility which can serve as a centre for training wetland managers, raising awareness about wetland values, and also generate local economic benefits for the community through tourism, etc. Under such schemes, however, there need to be safeguards in place to ensure that locally-based agents of foreign investors are not bypassing such requirements.

Section G

Guidelines related to foreign investment

- G1. Contracting Parties are urged to have in place suitable impact assessment practices which can work to avoid wetland destruction or degradation from development proposals. Administratively, it is also essential that development proposals be subjected to rigorous impact assessment which considers the full range, environmental, economic and social, of possible impacts (Resolution VII.16).
- G2. For foreign investors, Contracting Parties should seek to promote and encourage the concept of Codes of Conduct which are designed to ensure the development activities of these companies are ecologically sustainable. To support this, the Ramsar Bureau is requested to gather and disseminate suitable model Codes of Conduct.
- G3. Contracting Parties should also examine their development approval processes and consider the introduction of mechanisms which will result in resources derived from development activities being directed back to hands-on wetlands management or other activities which will ensure the long term sustainability of the site.