

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS¹

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

STRATEGIC PLAN 1997-2002

adopted by the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
(Brisbane, Australia, 19-27 March 1996)

INTRODUCTION

1. At the threshold of a new millennium, the Ramsar Convention is making a critical review of its achievements to date and setting a clear course for the future, stressing the need to integrate the conservation of wetland biodiversity with sustainable development (considered as synonymous with the Convention's concept of "wise use") and the health and well-being of people everywhere. In all regions of the world, human populations are suffering social, economic and environmental hardships resulting from the destruction and mismanagement of the natural resource base, in particular wetlands.
2. Wetlands provide important services to human societies, such as water supply, sanitation, flood control and food resources. All over the world, management of water -- the key component of wetlands -- will be an issue of crucial importance in the 21st century, affecting the daily lives of millions of people. Furthermore, wetlands are cradles of biodiversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival.
3. The Ramsar Convention celebrated its 25th anniversary in February 1996. It is the only global convention devoted to a specific ecosystem -- wetlands -- which are defined by the Convention in the broadest possible terms. Since 1971:
 - 93 States have become Contracting Parties to the Convention;
 - the Convention has made a significant contribution to an increased recognition and understanding of the crucial role of wetland functions and values in the daily lives of human beings;
 - the Contracting Parties have designated over 800 wetlands covering over 500,000 square kilometres -- the size of France or Kenya -- for the List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List);
 - the Contracting Parties have adopted Wise Use Guidelines to aid development and implementation of national wetland policies;
 - a Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use has been established since 1990;
 - the Convention has acted as a mechanism for exchange of information, technical assistance and advice and, in some cases, financial support between Contracting Parties;
 - meetings have been organized throughout the world to promote technical exchange, awareness of wetland values and regional coordination.
4. In the first 25 years, a series of technical guidelines and norms for the application of the Convention have been developed:

¹ The official name of the treaty is Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat. To facilitate reading, the short names Convention on Wetlands and Ramsar Convention have been used.

- criteria for identification of wetlands of international importance;
 - a standardized information sheet for describing wetlands;
 - a global classification of wetland types;
 - Guidelines and Additional guidance on implementation of the wise use concept;
 - guidelines on management planning for wetlands;
 - the Montreux Record, which identifies Ramsar sites in need of urgent conservation action; and
 - the Management Guidance Procedure (formerly the Monitoring Procedure) by which the Convention provides advice and assistance for sites on the *Montreux Record*.
5. As recognized in the Kushiro Statement (adopted at the 5th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Kushiro, Japan, 1993), awareness of environmental issues and their close relationship to development needs has greatly increased in the last 25 years. New instruments and institutions have been created, more especially following the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro: Agenda 21, the Global Environment Facility, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (the Barbados Declaration).
6. There is a new recognition of the need for conservation and wise use of wetlands in key bodies such as the World Bank and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). At regional level too, there is increased interest and awareness, as instanced by the Council of the European Union's Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna, and the European Commission's Communication on Wise Use and Conservation of Wetlands and the Council of the European Union's conclusions (4 March 1996) with regard to the Communication, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (especially in action themes 5, 6 and 7), the MedWet initiative for Mediterranean wetlands, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, UNEP Regional Seas Programmes, or the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. Concern for environmental, and especially wetland, issues is increasingly evident in all branches of government and at all levels -- national, provincial and local -- among Contracting Parties.
7. Against the background of these global developments, the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, held in Brisbane in March 1996, adopted this Strategic Plan for the period 1997-2002. The Plan constitutes a challenge directed towards the Convention's Contracting Parties, Standing Committee, Scientific & Technical Review Panel, and Bureau, and the wider constituency involved with the conservation and wise use of wetlands. To be fully successful, it will need even greater involvement of the community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which in the past has made such a substantive contribution to the Convention. Naturally, its objectives will more rapidly be achieved if significant additional resources are obtained, through voluntary contributions outside the core budget of the Convention. Execution of the Plan will be largely in the hands of the Contracting Parties who, in full recognition of the sovereignty of each state, have agreed to work together towards implementing obligations accepted under the Convention.

8. Through this Plan, the Convention's long-standing technical work in wetlands is strengthened, and a new catalytic role vis-à-vis the development assistance community is established. The Convention's technical and policy work becomes more closely related to the broader concerns of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and its traditional involvement with waterfowl is related more clearly to the Convention on Migratory Species. The long-standing links between the Ramsar Convention and its international partner organizations, IUCN - the World Conservation Union, Wetlands International (which has superseded the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and BirdLife International are maintained and enhanced, and new partnerships in the area of wise use of wetlands sought.
9. Furthermore, the Plan defines a number of new orientations for the future, based on the text of the Convention, including greater emphasis on:
 - education and public awareness;
 - capacity-building for all stakeholders;
 - including wetlands in national, provincial and local planning and decision-making, through active and informed participation of local communities, and involvement of the private sector;
 - designation for the Ramsar List of sites from under-represented wetland categories, notably coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds and peatlands;
 - strengthened partnerships with other conventions and agencies, especially those linked with the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992;
 - catalytic role in finding funds for wetland work in developing countries and in states whose economies are in transition;
 - universal membership.
10. Although it is fully acknowledged that each Contracting Party is free to choose the extent to which it will implement this Strategic Plan, the level of resources that it would allocate to this endeavour, and the pace of its actions, the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, in adopting the Plan on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention, wishes to commit the Parties to a renewed effort to achieve the mission of the Convention. In doing so, the Conference also invites all countries that are not yet Contracting Parties and the international community at large to join in that effort.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world².

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES³

Within the overall mission the General Objectives of this Strategic Plan are:

1. To progress towards universal membership of the Convention.
2. To achieve the wise use of wetlands by implementing and further developing the Ramsar Wise Use Guidelines.
3. To raise awareness of wetland values and functions throughout the world and at all levels.
4. To reinforce the capacity of institutions in each Contracting Party to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.
5. To ensure the conservation of all sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).
6. To designate for the Ramsar List those wetlands which meet the Convention's criteria, especially wetland types still under-represented in the List and transfrontier wetlands.
7. To mobilize international cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.
8. To provide the Convention with the required institutional mechanisms and resources.

² Throughout the Strategic Plan, the Ramsar Convention's established terminology of "conservation and wise use of wetlands" is maintained. "Wise use", as defined by the 3rd Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (Regina, Canada, 1987), is considered as synonymous with "sustainable use".

³ The sequence of General Objectives follows the logic and order of the Guidelines for the implementation of the Wise Use Concept adopted by the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (Montreux, Switzerland, 1990) and does not imply any hierarchy.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 1

TO PROGRESS TOWARDS UNIVERSAL MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONVENTION.

Rationale

In order for the Convention to achieve its mission, as many states as possible should be Contracting Parties. Membership has grown steadily to encompass all regions of the world, with 93 Contracting Parties at the time of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Nevertheless, some parts of the world (notably the Caribbean, the Near East, Southern Africa, and the South Pacific) are less well represented and states in these regions will be encouraged to join, as will the remaining states in better represented regions. A special effort will be made to encourage Small Island Development States to join, in recognition of their special needs and significant wetlands, including coral reefs, sea-grass beds and mangroves. On the basis of growth in recent years, the objective of at least 120 Contracting Parties by 2002 appears attainable.

Operational Objective 1.1: To endeavour to secure at least 120 Contracting Parties to the Convention by 2002.

Actions:

1.1.1 Recruit new Contracting Parties, especially in the less well represented regions and among states with significant and/or transboundary wetland resources (including shared species), through:

- encouraging attendance by observers from non-Contracting Parties at the Conference of the Parties (COP);
- increasing contacts by neighbouring states that are already Contracting Parties;
- intensifying contacts with diplomatic representations of non-Contracting Parties;
- providing information on the benefits of membership;
- identifying and overcoming any obstacles to accession.

[CPs, SC regional representatives, Bureau, Partners]⁴

1.1.2 Promote membership of Ramsar through regional meetings and activities, and through partners' regional offices. [SC regional representatives, Bureau, Partners]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 2

TO ACHIEVE THE WISE USE OF WETLANDS BY IMPLEMENTING AND FURTHER DEVELOPING THE RAMSAR WISE USE GUIDELINES.

⁴ The body or bodies responsible for carrying out each Action is indicated in square brackets: Conference of the Parties ["COP"], Standing Committee ["SC"], Scientific and Technical Review Panel ["STRP"], the Ramsar Convention Bureau ["Bureau"], international partner organizations – BirdLife International, IUCN - the World Conservation Union, Wetlands International and WWF ["Partners"].

Rationale

Under Article 3.1 of the Convention, Contracting Parties agree to “formulate and implement their planning so as to promote as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory”. Through this concept of “wise use”, the Convention has always emphasized that human usage on a sustainable basis is entirely compatible with Ramsar listing and wetland conservation in general. The Conference of the Contracting Parties has determined that the concept of wise use applies to broad planning affecting wetlands, and has therefore adopted Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept (Recommendation 4.10) and Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept (Resolution 5.6).

In the coming triennia, the greatest emphasis in Ramsar implementation will be placed on wetlands in the context of land-use planning, water resource management and other decisions affecting wetlands. Where Contracting Parties are developing national wetland policies (or other policies encompassing conservation and wise use of wetlands), such policies should be in conformity with other national environmental planning measures. Legislative changes may also be necessary. The present section of the Strategic Plan accordingly addresses the interaction between wise use and legislation, institutions, policy development, planning, and general decision-making.

Operational Objective 2.1: To review and, if necessary, amend national or supra-national (e.g., European Community) legislation, institutions and practices in all Contracting Parties, to ensure that the Wise Use Guidelines are applied.

Actions:

2.1.1 Carry out a review of legislation and practices, and indicate in National Reports to the COP how the Wise Use Guidelines are applied. [CPs]

2.1.2 Promote much greater efforts to develop national wetland policies, either separately or as a clearly identifiable component of other national conservation planning initiatives, such as National Environment Action Plans, National Biodiversity Strategies, or National Conservation Strategies. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 2.2: To integrate conservation and wise use of wetlands in all Contracting Parties into national, provincial and local planning and decision-making on land use, groundwater management, catchment/river basin and coastal zone planning, and all other environmental planning and management.

Actions:

2.2.1 Gather and make available to Contracting Parties information on land use planning related to wetlands, and catchment/river basin and coastal zone planning in particular. [Bureau]

2.2.2 Promote the inclusion of wetlands in national, provincial and local land use planning documents and activities, and in all relevant sectoral and budgetary provisions. [CPs]

Operational Objective 2.3: To expand the Guidelines and Additional Guidance to provide advice to Contracting Parties on specific issues not hitherto covered, and examples of best current practice.

Actions:

2.3.1 Expand the Additional Guidance on Wise Use to address specific issues such as oil spill prevention and clean-up, agricultural runoff, and urban/industrial discharges in cooperation with other bodies. [CPs, STRP, Bureau, Partners]

2.3.2. Publicize examples of effective application of existing Guidelines and Additional Guidance. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 2.4: To provide economic evaluations of the benefits and functions of wetlands for environmental planning purposes.

Actions:

2.4.1 Promote the development, wide dissemination and application of documents and methodologies which give economic evaluations of the benefits and functions of wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

2.4.2 Publish, with the assistance of IUCN and other collaborators, information on economic evaluations of wetlands presented at the 6th COP. [Bureau, Partners]

2.4.3 Initiate specific activities which implement the findings on economic evaluations published under 2.4.2 [CPs]

2.4.4 Review content and implementation of recommended best practice in economic evaluations of wetlands at a technical session of the 7th COP (1999). [STRP, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 2.5: To carry out environmental impact assessments (EIAs) at wetlands, particularly of proposed developments or changes in land/water use which have potential to affect them, notably at Ramsar sites, whose ecological character “is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference” (Article 3.2 of the Convention).

Actions:

2.5.1 Expand the Additional Guidance on Wise Use by preparing, for a technical session at the 7th COP (1999), the results of a review of environmental appraisal guidelines and examples of current best practice in EIA. [SC, STRP, Bureau, Partners]

2.5.2 Ensure that, at Ramsar sites where change in ecological character is likely as a result of proposed developments or changes in land/water use which have potential to affect them, EIAs are carried out (with due consideration of economic evaluations of wetland benefits and functions), and that the resulting conclusions are communicated to the Ramsar Bureau and fully taken into account by the authorities concerned. [CPs]

2.5.3 Carry out EIAs at other important sites, particularly where adverse impact on wetland resources is likely, due to a development proposal or change in land/water use. [CPs]

2.5.4 Take account of Integrated Environmental Management and Strategic Environmental Assessment (at local, provincial and catchment/river basin or coastal zone levels) when assessing impacts of development proposals or changes in land/water use. [CPs]

Operational Objective 2.6: To identify wetlands in need of restoration and rehabilitation, and to implement the necessary measures.

Actions:

2.6.1 Use regional or national scientific inventories of wetlands (Recommendation 4.6), or monitoring processes, to identify wetlands in need of restoration or rehabilitation. [CPs, Partners]

2.6.2 Provide and implement methodologies for restoration and rehabilitation of lost or degraded wetlands. [CPs, STRP, Bureau, Partners]

2.6.3 Establish wetland restoration/rehabilitation programmes at destroyed or degraded wetlands, especially in association with major river systems or areas of high nature conservation value (Recommendation 4.1). [CPs]

2.6.4 Organize at the 7th COP (1999) a technical session on restoration and rehabilitation, and identify ten best practice case studies at local, provincial and catchment levels. [STRP, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 2.7: To encourage active and informed participation of local communities, including indigenous people, and in particular women, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Actions:

2.7.1 Implement Recommendation 6.3 on involving local and indigenous people in the management of wetlands. [CPs, Bureau]

2.7.2 Encourage site managers and local communities to work in partnership at all levels to monitor the ecological character of wetlands, thus providing a better understanding of management needs and human impacts. [CPs]

2.7.3 Involve local communities in the management of wetlands by establishing wetland management committees, especially at Ramsar sites, on which local stakeholders, landowners, managers, developers and community interest groups, in particular women's groups, are represented. [CPs, Partners]

2.7.4 Recognize and apply traditional knowledge and management practice of indigenous people and local communities in the conservation and wise use of wetlands. [CPs]

Operational Objective 2.8: To encourage involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Actions:

2.8.1. Encourage the private sector to give increased recognition to wetland attributes, functions and values when carrying out projects affecting wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

2.8.2 Encourage the private sector to apply the Wise Use Guidelines when executing development projects affecting wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

2.8.3 Encourage the private sector to work in partnership with site managers to monitor the ecological character of wetlands. [CPs]

2.8.4 Involve the private sector in the management of wetlands through participation in wetland management committees. [CPs]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 3

TO RAISE AWARENESS OF WETLAND VALUES AND FUNCTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND AT ALL LEVELS.

Rationale

Public support is essential to generate political and legislative action, to obtain financial resources, and to ensure the successful implementation of wetland legislation and management. In turn, public support can only be achieved through information about, and understanding of, the issues, including the benefits that individuals and societies can derive from wetlands.

In order to achieve the Convention's mission, it is essential that wetland values and functions, the Convention itself, and its activities become better known, appreciated and supported, as recognized in Recommendations 5.8 and 5.10.

Operational Objective 3.1: To support and assist in implementing, in cooperation with partners and other institutions, an international programme of Education and Public Awareness (EPA) on wetlands, their functions and values, designed to promote national EPA programmes.

Actions:

3.1.1 Assist in identifying and establishing coordinating mechanisms and structures for the development and implementation of a concerted global programme of EPA on wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.1.2 Participate in the identification of regional EPA needs and in the establishment of priorities for resource development. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.1.3 Assist in the development of international resource materials in support of national EPA programmes, including:

- catalogue of existing EPA materials;

- EPA Wetlands Kit (brochures, posters, videos, CD-ROMs, exhibition panels);
- EPA manuals for wetland educators and managers.

[CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.1.4 Support international programmes that encourage transfer of information, knowledge and skills between wetland education centres and educators (e.g., Wetland International's EPA Working Group, Global Rivers Environment Education Network (GREEN), Wetland Link International).

[CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.1.5 Encourage development of the concept of a World Wetland Week, based around the date of the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention (2 February 1971), in the first instance for a trial period of five years. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.1.6 Facilitate a review of international EPA initiatives for wetlands, in conjunction with the 7th COP. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 3.2: To develop and encourage national programmes of EPA on wetlands, targeted at a wide range of people, including key decision-makers, people living in and around wetlands, other wetland users and the public at large.

Actions:

3.2.1 Encourage partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations and other organizations capable of developing national EPA programmes on wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.2.2 On the basis of identified needs and target groups, support national programmes and campaigns to generate a positive vision of wetlands and create awareness at all levels of their values and functions. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.2.3 Encourage the development of educational centres at wetland sites. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.2.4 Work with museums, zoos, botanic gardens, aquaria and educational environment education centres to encourage the development of exhibits and programmes that support non-formal EPA on wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

3.2.5 Encourage the inclusion of modules related to wetlands in the curricula at all levels of education, including tertiary courses and specialized training courses. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 3.3: To improve the Ramsar Bureau's communications activities and to develop a Convention Communications Strategy, capable of further promoting the Convention and its wider application, and of raising awareness of wetland values and functions.

Actions:

3.3.1 Review the Bureau's communications activities, especially those related to the creation and functioning of regional and national communication networks; develop new material and use of technology, and improve existing material. [Bureau]

3.3.2 Develop existing Bureau productions, notably the Newsletter, videos and CD-ROMs. [CPs, Bureau]

3.3.3 Prepare material, complementary to the existing Ramsar information package, to highlight specific regional issues and the benefits of membership for non-Contracting Parties. [SC regional representatives, Bureau, Partners]

3.3.4 Seek the support of an electronic communications carrier to provide and maintain an electronic mail network and electronic bulletin board/ mailing lists linking the Contracting Parties, Standing Committee members, the STRP, the Bureau, and partner organizations. [All]

3.3.5 Prepare for the 7th COP a Convention Communications Strategy, on the basis of the experience gained during the triennium 1997-1999. [SC, Bureau, Partners]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 4

TO REINFORCE THE CAPACITY OF INSTITUTIONS IN EACH CONTRACTING PARTY TO ACHIEVE CONSERVATION AND WISE USE OF WETLANDS.

Rationale

The Wise Use Guidelines emphasize that conservation and wise use of wetlands require appropriately structured institutions in each Contracting Party. There is a need in all regions and at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to strengthen the capacity of the institutions responsible for achieving the Convention's mission and objectives.

In order to strengthen existing institutions, an extensive programme of training is required. A strategic approach to identifying the precise training needs and target audiences will take account of the differences between regions, countries and sites. Furthermore, existing training opportunities need to be developed and supported, and new initiatives developed in regions and subjects where such opportunities are lacking. A high level of international cooperation, including the transfer of environmentally sound technology and the exchange of information, will be a significant feature of this approach.

Operational Objective 4.1: To develop the capacity of institutions in Contracting Parties, particularly in developing countries, to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Actions:

4.1.1 Review existing national institutions responsible for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. [CPs]

4.1.2 On the basis of such a review, identify and implement measures to:

- increase cooperation and synergy between institutions;
- promote the continued operation of these institutions;
- provide appropriately trained staff, in adequate numbers, for these institutions.

[CPs]

Operational Objective 4.2: To identify the training needs of institutions and individuals concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands, particularly in developing countries, and to implement follow-up actions.

Actions:

4.2.1 Identify at national, provincial and local level the needs and target audiences for training in implementation of the Wise Use Guidelines. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

4.2.2 Identify current training opportunities in disciplines essential for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

4.2.3 Develop new training activities and general training modules, for application in all regions, concerning implementation of the Wise Use Guidelines, with specialized modules covering the following fields:

- integrated catchment/river basin and coastal zone planning and management;
- integrated site management planning at the provincial, local or catchment/river basin level;
- wetland restoration and rehabilitation;
- education and public awareness techniques.

[CPs, Bureau, Partners]

4.2.4 Provide opportunities for manager training by:

- personnel exchanges for on-the-job training;
- holding pilot training courses at specific Ramsar sites;
- siting wetland manager training facilities at Ramsar sites;
- obtaining and disseminating information about training courses for wetland managers around the world.

[CPs, Bureau, Partners]

4.2.5 Give higher priority in the 'Operational Guidelines' of the Small Grants Fund to support for training activities. [CPs, SC]

4.2.6 Exchange information, technical assistance and advice, and expertise about the conservation and wise use of wetlands, also with regard to South-South cooperation. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 5

TO ENSURE THE CONSERVATION OF ALL SITES INCLUDED IN THE LIST OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE (RAMSAR LIST).

Rationale

Designation of a wetland for the Ramsar List is only the starting point, since Contracting Parties accept an undertaking to conserve listed sites. The Conference of the Parties has placed increasing emphasis on maintaining the ecological character of Ramsar sites, as a key to their conservation. This does not preclude human usage but aims to avoid fundamental adverse changes to wetland functions, values or attributes. The aim is at least to maintain the ecological character recorded at the time of designation, and, in many cases, additional measures will be required to restore functions, values or attributes lost prior to designation.

Working Definitions of “ecological character” and “change in ecological character” and Guidelines for describing and maintaining the of ecological character of listed sites were adopted at the 6th COP in Brisbane, 1996. The Conference of the Parties has adopted mechanisms to assist the Contracting Parties: the Montreux Record (Recommendation 4.8, Resolution 5.4, and Resolution VI.1) identifies Ramsar sites in need of priority action; the Management Guidance Procedure (Recommendation 4.7 and Resolution VI.14) enables the Bureau to provide Parties with expert advice. Resolution 5.7 calls for all Ramsar sites to have a management plan and its annex includes Guidelines on management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands; one management option is to decide that no specific action is required.

Operational Objective 5.1: To maintain the ecological character of Ramsar sites.

Actions:

5.1.1 Define and apply the precise measures required to maintain the ecological character of each listed site, in the light of the working definitions of ecological character adopted at the 6th COP (1996). [CPs]

5.1.2 Conduct regular internal reviews to identify potential changes in ecological character, with input from local communities and other stakeholders; take remedial action and/or nominate the site for the Montreux Record. [CPs]

5.1.3 Review and regularly update the Montreux Record (Resolutions 5.4, 5.5, and VI.1). [CPs, STRP, Bureau]

5.1.4 Increase application of the Management Guidance Procedure (Recommendation 4.7) to provide advice on future management of Ramsar sites. [CPs, SC, Bureau]

5.1.5 Improve implementation of the recommendations made in reports of Management Guidance Procedure missions. [CPs]

5.1.6 Identify the potential impact on the ecological character of Ramsar sites of global threats, including toxic chemicals (Recommendation 6.14), climate change and sea level change. [STRP, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 5.2: To develop and implement management plans for all Ramsar sites, consistent with the Convention's Guidelines on Management Planning and emphasizing involvement of local communities and other stakeholders.

Actions:

5.2.1 Review the Guidelines on Management Planning in the light of practical experience and Recommendation 6.13. [COP]

5.2.2 Publish for the guidance of Contracting Parties, before the 7th COP (1999), ten best practice case studies of management planning for Ramsar sites, at local, regional and catchment or coastal zone levels. [STRP, Bureau, Partners]

5.2.3 Ensure that, by the 8th COP (2002), management plans or other mechanisms are in preparation, or in place, for at least half of the Ramsar sites in each Contracting Party, beginning with pilot programmes at selected sites with input from local communities and other stakeholders. [CPs, Partners]

5.2.4 Promote the establishment and implementation of zoning measures related to larger Ramsar sites, wetland reserves and other wetlands (Kushiro Recommendation 5.3). [CPs, Partners]

5.2.5 Promote the establishment and implementation of strict protection measures for certain Ramsar sites and other wetlands of small size and/or particular sensitivity (Recommendation 5.3). [CPs, Partners]

5.2.6 Give high priority in the Operational Guidelines for the Small Grants Fund to support for management planning at Ramsar sites. [CPs, SC]

Operational Objective 5.3: To obtain regularly updated information on wetlands of international importance, in accordance with the approved standard format.

Actions:

5.3.1 Ensure that the maps and descriptions of Ramsar sites submitted to the Ramsar Database by the Contracting Parties at the time of designation are complete, in the approved standard format of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands, and provide sufficient detail to be used for management planning and monitoring of ecological character. [CPs, Bureau, Wetlands International]

5.3.2 Ensure that missing or incomplete data sheets and/or maps of listed sites are submitted as a matter of priority and in the shortest possible time, as a means to enhance the relevance and use of the Ramsar Database. [CPs]

5.3.3 Ensure that data sheets on Ramsar Sites are regularly updated, at least for every second meeting of the COP, so that they can be used for reviewing the achievements of the Convention, for future strategic planning, for promotional purposes, and for site, regional and thematic analysis (Resolution VI.13). [CPs, STRP, Bureau, Wetlands International]

5.3.4 Review, update and reprint the *Directory of Ramsar Sites* for the 7th COP (1999), and produce, for the 8th COP (2002), a summary of sites listed between the 7th and 8th COPs. [Bureau, Wetlands International]

Operational Objective 5.4: To keep under review the content and structure, as well as the hardware and software, of the Ramsar Database, in order to ensure that it retains its relevance in light of evolving information and communication technology.

Actions:

5.4.1 Assess data currently available in the database and identify any gaps in the data provided by Contracting Parties. [CPs, STRP, Bureau, Wetlands International]

5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS). [Bureau, Wetlands International]

5.4.3. Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs. [Bureau, Wetlands International]

5.4.4 Support the establishment of national wetland databases compatible with the Ramsar Database and develop a common protocol to facilitate exchange and interaction. [CPs, Partners]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 6

TO DESIGNATE FOR THE RAMSAR LIST THOSE WETLANDS WHICH MEET THE CONVENTION'S CRITERIA, ESPECIALLY WETLAND TYPES STILL UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE LIST AND TRANSFRONTIER WETLANDS.

Rationale

The inclusion of wetlands in the Ramsar List has proved to be an effective means of conserving wetlands, especially in cases where they have not been formally designated as protected areas. The number of sites on the List has grown at a steady pace over the years as new Contracting Parties have joined the Convention and as existing Parties have designated additional sites. As of 27 March 1996, the List includes over 800 sites, covering over 500,000 square kilometres. While this is a welcome development, over 500 of these sites are in only 24 Contracting Parties which are developed countries, and more than 80 sites are located in 15 Contracting Parties that are countries with economies in transition. Much greater effort is required to promote the listing of sites by developing countries. The listing of under-represented wetland types and transfrontier sites also requires priority attention.

Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance have been adopted by the Conference of the Parties (Recommendation 4.2), while the 6th Conference of the Parties (1996) adopted criteria on wetlands important for fish (Resolution VI.2). The Ramsar criteria have served in developing regional or national scientific inventories of wetlands (Recommendation 4.6) and thus in identifying candidate Ramsar sites.

Operational Objective 6.1: To identify those wetlands that meet the Ramsar criteria, and to give due consideration to their designation for the List.

Actions:

6.1.1 Develop, regularly update -- especially in the case of Africa -- and disseminate regional wetland directories, which identify potential Ramsar sites. [CPs, Partners]

6.1.2 Establish, update and disseminate national scientific inventories of wetlands which identify potential Ramsar sites and wetlands of provincial or local importance in the territory of each Contracting Party. [CPs, Partners]

6.1.3 Utilize information from regional wetland directories, national scientific inventories of wetlands and other sources, to begin development of a quantification of global wetland resources, as baseline information for considering trends in wetland conservation or loss. [Bureau, Partners]

6.1.4 Support the work of Wetlands International and IUCN in updating information on population sizes of waterfowl and other taxa, and utilize these data in identification of potential Ramsar sites. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 6.2: To increase the area of wetland designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, particularly for wetland types that are under-represented either at global or national level.

Actions:

6.2.1 Promote the designation for the Ramsar List of an increased area of wetland, through listing by new Contracting Parties, and through further designations by current Contracting Parties, in particular developing countries, in order to ensure the listing of a representative range of wetland types in the territory of each Contracting Party and in each Ramsar region. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

6.2.2 Provide assistance and advice to Contracting Parties in the process of ensuring that wetlands being considered for Ramsar designation meet the criteria (Resolution 5.3). [Bureau]

6.2.3 Give priority attention to the designation of new sites from wetland types currently under-represented on the Ramsar List, and in particular, when appropriate, coral reefs, mangroves, sea-grass beds and peatlands. [CPs]

6.2.4 Pay particular attention to the designation of new sites currently enjoying no special conservation status at national level, as a first step towards developing measures for their conservation and wise use. [CPs]

6.2.5 Consider as a matter of priority the designation of transfrontier wetland sites. [CPs]

Operational Objective 6.3: To keep under review the Ramsar Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance (Resolution VI.3).

Actions:

6.3.1 Keep general criteria under review to ensure they reflect global wetland conservation priorities and values. [COP, STRP, Bureau]

6.3.2 Develop specific criteria for taxonomic groups other than waterfowl and fish. [COP, STRP, Bureau]

6.3.3 Provide further guidance on the application of existing criteria in different regions. [COP, STRP, Bureau]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 7

TO PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND MOBILIZE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR WETLAND CONSERVATION AND WISE USE IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CONVENTIONS AND AGENCIES, BOTH GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL.

Rationale

Under Article 5 of the Convention, Contracting Parties accept an obligation to consult one another over implementation of the Convention, particularly in the case of wetlands extending over the territories of more than one Party and of water systems shared by Contracting Parties. This Article also refers to co-ordination of policies on wetlands and their flora and fauna. The Parties have further interpreted Article 5 to cover development assistance affecting wetlands (Recommendation 4.13).

The Convention will intensify its international cooperation activities, *inter alia* those related to transfrontier wetlands, will develop further the coordination of activities with other global and regional conventions on natural resources use, and will promote coordination at national level in implementation of such conventions. In order to achieve the preceding General Objectives, the Convention will develop its catalytic role in ensuring that funds are available, especially to developing countries and to countries whose economies are in transition, for implementation of these states' Ramsar obligations.

Operational Objective 7.1: To identify international and/or regional needs for managing shared wetlands and shared catchments, and develop and implement common approaches.

Actions:

7.1.1 Identify transfrontier wetlands of international importance (including those within shared catchment/river basins), and encourage preparation and implementation of joint plans for such sites, using a "catchment approach" (Recommendation 5.3). [CPs, Partners]

7.1.2 Encourage twinning of transfrontier wetlands, and of other wetlands with similar characteristics, and use successful cases for illustrating the benefits of international cooperation. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 7.2: To strengthen and formalize linkages between Ramsar and other international and/or regional environmental conventions and agencies, so as to advance the achievement of shared goals and objectives relating to wetland species or issues.

Actions:

7.2.1 Participate in, or initiate, consultations with related conventions to foster information exchange and cooperation, and develop an agenda for potential joint actions. [SC, Bureau]

7.2.2 Prepare project proposals together with other conventions and partner organizations, and submit them jointly to potential funding agencies. [CPs, SC, Bureau, Partners]

7.2.3 Strengthen cooperation and synergy with the Convention on Biological Diversity, in particular as regards inclusion of wetland concerns in national biodiversity strategies, and planning and execution of projects affecting wetlands. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

7.2.4 Develop cooperation with the World Heritage Convention and UNESCO's Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB), especially as regards wetlands designated as World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and/or Ramsar sites. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

7.2.5 Enhance Ramsar's contribution to international cooperation on shared wetland species, notably through cooperative arrangements with the Convention on Migratory Species, flyway agreements, networks and other mechanisms dealing with migratory species (Recommendation 6.4). [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

7.2.6 Develop Ramsar's contribution to wildlife trade issues affecting wetlands, through increased interaction with CITES. [Bureau]

7.2.7 Initiate links with the Framework Convention on Climate Change, in view of the potential impacts on wetlands of climate change. [CP, Bureau]

7.2.8 Extend cooperation with conventions and agencies concerned with conservation and wise use of wetlands at regional level, and in particular: with the European Community, as regards application of its Habitats Directive to wetlands, and adoption and application of measures like the Habitats Directive for wetlands outside the states of the European Union; with the Council of Europe (Bern) Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats as regards the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy; with the Barcelona Convention and Mediterranean Action Plan in relation to the MedWet initiative; with the Western Hemisphere Convention; with UNEP programmes, in particular the Regional Seas Conventions; and with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). [CPs, Bureau]

7.2.9 Develop relationships with other specialized agencies that deal with wetland-related issues, such as the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and the World Water Council (Resolution VI.23). [Bureau]

Operational Objective 7.3: To ensure that the development assistance community, and multinational corporations, follow improved wetland practices

such as the Wise Use Guidelines in developing countries and countries whose economies are in transition.

Actions:

7.3.1 Identify representative examples of best practice in wetland projects supported by development agencies and/or initiated by multinational corporations. [Bureau, Partners]

7.3.2 Work with multilateral and bilateral development agencies and multinational corporations towards a full recognition of wetland values and functions (Recommendation 4.13), and assist them to improve their practices in favour of wetland conservation and wise use taking account of the *Guidelines for Aid Agencies for Improved Conservation and Sustainable Use of Tropical and Sub-Tropical Wetlands*, published by OECD's Development Assistance Committee (Recommendation 6.16). [Bureau, Partners]

7.3.3 Interact with multilateral development agencies and through bilateral development programmes, to assist developing countries in meeting their Ramsar obligations, and report on actions taken and results achieved (Recommendation 5.5). [CPs]

7.3.4 Develop, for consideration at a technical session of the 7th COP (1999), guidelines for Contracting Parties on how to carry out their obligations in the field of international cooperation, particularly as regards obligations concerning national funding agencies which provide assistance that may affect wetlands in developing countries. [SC, Bureau]

Operational Objective 7.4: To obtain funds to fulfil obligations contracted under the Convention, notably for developing countries and countries whose economies are in transition.

Actions:

7.4.1 Allocate funds for conservation and wise use of wetlands in the budget of each Contracting Party. [CPs]

7.4.2 Include projects for conservation and wise use of wetlands in development plans funded by development assistance agencies, and ensure the latter consult the Ramsar administrative authority in each Contracting Party. [CPs]

7.4.3 Maintain close working relations with multilateral agencies that provide development assistance in relation to project screening, development and evaluation, notably:

- the World Bank, UNDP, and UNEP, in particular as partners in the Global Environment Facility (GEF);
- regional funding agencies such as the Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Interamerican Development Bank and the European Investment Bank;
- the European Commission.

[Bureau]

7.4.4 Mobilize direct funding support from multilateral and bilateral development assistance agencies, to assist developing countries and countries whose economy is in transition, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands and in implementation of the present Strategic Plan. [CPs, Bureau]

7.4.5 Assist developing countries and countries whose economies are in transition to prepare wetland projects for funding by other agencies. [Bureau, Partners]

7.4.6 Assist bilateral development assistance agencies in the screening, development and evaluation of wetland projects. [STRP, Bureau]

GENERAL OBJECTIVE 8

TO PROVIDE THE CONVENTION WITH THE REQUIRED INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND RESOURCES.

Rationale

The operation of the Conference of the Parties and of Ramsar subsidiary bodies and mechanisms -- Standing Committee, Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Bureau, Small Grants Fund, Montreux Record and Management Guidance Procedure -- will be kept under review to ensure that they function as effectively as possible. Resources will be sought to guarantee the efficient operation of these mechanisms. Furthermore, new mechanisms may be required at international and at national level to promote more effective implementation of the Convention. The present General Objective provides the institutional structures and resources required to achieve the previous General Objectives.

Operational Objective 8.1: To maximize achievement of Ramsar's mission and objectives by evaluating and, if necessary, modifying the Convention's institutions and management structures.

Actions:

8.1.1 Reorganize, as of the 7th COP (1999), the meeting into a business session, focusing upon administrative matters, and a technical session, focusing upon wetland conservation and wise use priorities, with smaller working groups as required. [SC, Bureau]

8.1.2 Keep under review the regional representation in the Standing Committee as the number of Contracting Parties increases. [COP, SC]

8.1.3 Review and, if necessary, redefine the roles, responsibilities and possible financial needs of the Standing Committee, prior to the 7th COP (1999). [COP, SC]

8.1.4 Review the working priorities of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at each meeting of the COP. [COP, SC]

8.1.5 Review requirements for the Bureau's staff structure and size in line with decisions on programme, and review linkages between the Bureau, other convention secretariats and partner organizations. [COP, SC]

8.1.6 Evaluate and report on the implementation of the Strategic Plan at each meeting of the COP and prepare for every other meeting a draft Strategic Plan for the forthcoming two triennia. [COP, SC, Bureau]

8.1.7 Prepare annual Bureau Business Plans, based on the Strategic Plan and Triennial Programmes approved by the COP, for the consideration and approval of the Standing Committee. [SC, Bureau]

8.1.8 Develop liaison mechanisms based with Contracting Parties or partner organizations to enhance implementation of the Convention in the regions, in coordination with the Bureau. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

8.1.9 Promote the establishment of National Ramsar Committees to provide the opportunity for input from, and representation of, governmental and non-governmental organizations, key stakeholders, indigenous people, the private sector and interest groups, and land use planning and management authorities (Recommendation 5.13). [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

8.1.10 Review the designated national focal point in each Contracting Party, with a view to increasing involvement in the work of the Convention from all agencies concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands. [CPs]

8.1.11 Establish and ensure regular implementation of processes for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of all Ramsar Convention institutions, mechanisms, and programmes, including National Reports to the COP (Resolution VI.21); implement recommendations arising, and report to the COP and Standing Committee on the results obtained. [COP, SC, Bureau]

Operational Objective 8.2: To provide the financial resources required to carry out Ramsar activities.

Actions:

8.2.1 Pay invoiced contributions to the Convention's core budget in full, and promptly at the beginning of each calendar year. [CPs]

8.2.2 Provide sufficient support in both financial and staffing terms to enable the SC representatives from developing countries and countries whose economies are in transition to function effectively in coordinating Convention activities and information flow throughout their regions. [COP, SC]

8.2.3 Ensure the Bureau has adequate staff to play a catalytic role in presenting projects to potential donors for funding. [COP]

8.2.4 Give priority to funding for training programmes, education and public awareness work, development of the Ramsar Database, and the Convention's Communications Strategy. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 8.3: To maximize the benefits of working with partner organizations.

Actions:

8.3.1 Strengthen cooperative planning mechanisms with the partners and improve communications and information exchange, including exchange of staff. [CPs, Bureau, Partners]

8.3.2 Review and renew formal agreements with partners to ensure there is no duplication of effort and to maximize effective use of resources, and establish new partnerships, especially in relation to the Wise Use Guidelines. [Bureau, Partners]

Operational Objective 8.4: To secure at least one million US dollars per annum for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetlands Conservation and Wise Use (Resolutions 5.8 and VI.6) and to allocate these funds effectively.

Actions:

8.4.1 Develop a strategy for securing at least one million US dollars annually for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, to be approved by the first full meeting of the Standing Committee after the 6th COP (1996) and proceed immediately to its implementation. [Bureau, SC, CPs, Partners]

8.4.2 Evaluate critically, at the 7th COP (1999), the performance of the Small Grants Fund. [COP, SC, Bureau]

8.4.3 Encourage and assist the preparation of high quality applications to the Small Grants Fund. [SC, Bureau, Partners]