



The Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative

Summary from the Working Group Meeting in Trondheim, Norway, 3 – 4 March 2005

Establishing a Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative

In light of obligations under the Convention on wetlands (Ramsar 1971), in particular Resolution VIII.30 on regional initiatives for the further implementation of the Convention, the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management (DN) had invited representatives from Nordic and Baltic Ramsar authorities to a working group meeting on the establishment of a Nordic-Baltic Forum on Wetlands. The meeting also had participation from the Ramsar Secretariat and from the MedWet initiative.

Following an opening session and a session with background on relevant Ramsar decisions and other initiatives, frank and constructive discussions took place regarding the establishment of a Nordic-Baltic wetlands Forum. Questions raised included geographical scope, participation, objectives, priority areas, relationship to other initiatives, possible means and approaches, financing, management and governance, and ways forward.

Participants recalled the discussions made at the Nordic Wetlands Conference at Brekstad in May 2004, and reconfirmed the conclusions made in the closing statement from this conference¹. The meeting also revisited some of the key recommendations in the report Nordic Wetlands Conservation² and key points in the summary report of the fifth European regional meeting in Yerevan, Armenia, 4 – 8 December 2004³.

Agreeing that there is a number of issues of common concern related to implementation of the Ramsar Convention that could benefit from regional co-operation and co-ordination, and in light of the recommendations included in Res. VIII.30, participants agreed that a sub-regional initiative for the Baltic and Nordic regions should be established.

It was agreed to use as a working name "The Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative", and that a possible tentative abbreviation could be NorBalWet, (The abbreviation word has to be found and agreed about later – e. g. at the Initiatives first ordinary meeting).

The overall aim of the regional initiative will be to promote the objectives of the Convention, thereby contributing to more effective conservation and wise use of wetlands and enhanced international wetlands co-operation in the region.

An initial approach of NorBalWet is to establish a communication network for exchange of information and experiences, thereby enhancing multilateral and transboundary co-operation by embracing a problem-oriented and practical approach to improve wise use and conservation of wetlands, in particular the network of Ramsar sites and other protected areas.

¹ The proceedings from this conference are to be published shortly by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and an advance draft copy was made available to participants.

² Published by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2004 (TemaNord 2004:506).

³ Summary report published by the Ramsar Bureau was made available to all participants.

Priority areas and possible means and approaches

The meeting identified a number of areas of common concern that could benefit from sub-regional co-operation⁴:

- Management of wetlands, including restoration of wetlands, monitoring and assessment
- Stakeholder/sector involvement
- Alleviation of threats and impacts
- Protection of wetlands, in particular Ramsar sites
- Global action plan for peatlands
- Transboundary co-operation

These areas of common concern may be taken up through a number of means and approaches, but this will have to be further developed as the initiative matures.

It was also agreed that the initiative could prove useful in securing resources for joint efforts, including financing of projects of common interest (*inter alia* European Union, private sector). This will, however, have to be further elaborated and developed.

Output from activities related to the initiative should be disseminated, as appropriate, to relevant parties.

Initial steps

Based on present priorities and resources, it was agreed that the following initial steps should be taken:

- Announce at COP9 the establishment of a sub-regional Nordic-Baltic wetland initiative and to inform about progress so far (Norway)
- Compile a review on existing transboundary wetlands co-operation issues, focusing on transboundary Ramsar sites (Lithuania will consider to take on the lead with support from all countries and the Ramsar Secretariat and tentatively compile a draft report before COP9)
- (To approach the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) to contribute Ramsar networking on peatlands conservation and wise use in the Nordic and Baltic region using their capacity, particularly the upcoming IMCG Congress scheduled to take place in Finland in 2006 – text to be finalised)
- Compile available information pertaining to the Global Action Plan on Peatlands and the Nordic and Baltic region (IMCG)
- To jointly consider relevant issues to be taken up at COP9 (All)
- Arranging a first meeting of NorBalWet in the spring of 2006, with a preliminary recommendation to consider *inter alia* the following topics, and requesting the Chair to develop this further (Sweden)
 - Follow-up of recommendations in Nordic Wetlands Conservation report, national reports to COP9 and issues arising from COP9
 - Peatlands restoration and conservation
 - Agriculture and wetlands
 - Transboundary co-operation

⁴ A list of areas and topics identified during the meeting is included in Appendix I for information.

Management and governance

The initiative will be led by the Administrative authorities responsible for the application of the Convention in the Contracting Parties involved in the region. This will initially include the participation of relevant authorities in Denmark/Greenland, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Russia and Sweden, which will preferably meet annually.

In addition, participation will be encouraged from other relevant stakeholders with an interest in and having responsibility for wetland issues in the region, including intergovernmental organisations, NGOs and the private sector.

It was agreed that in order to secure timely preparations and coordination of activities under the initiative, a working group should be established. The chairmanship will be rotated among the member countries.

It was agreed, however, that management and governance related to the initiative will have to be refined further as the initiative develops and matures.

Closing Remarks

The meeting participants expressed gratefulness for the efforts made by Norway (through the Directorate for Nature Management and the County Governor of Sør-Trøndelag), to prepare for this meeting and establish the initiative. Furthermore, they expressed their gratitude for Norway's willingness to take on the initial Chairmanship until October 2005.

The meeting further welcomed the offer made by Sweden to continue the first Chairmanship (from October 2005) and to prepare for the first meeting of the initiative, and the offers from Estonia and Norway to be Co-chairs.

Participants welcomed the participation of and contributions made by the Regional Co-ordinator for Europe from the Ramsar Bureau, Tobias Salathé; and from Senior Advisor Mr Thymio Papayannis of the MedWet Initiative.

They also appreciated the funding made available from the Nordic Council of Ministers through its Nordic working group for nature, outdoor recreation and cultural heritage (NFK), for holding this meeting.

Appendix I – Issues and themes

The following list includes the issues and themes that were raised during the meeting, and are included here for information and as reference for the further development of the initiative:

- Global action plan for peatlands
- Transboundary co-operation
- Protected area networks
- Existing and new Ramsar sites
- Representativeness at a regional scale in order to conserve important elements of biodiversity
- Management of wetlands
- restoration of wetlands
- monitoring and assessment
- stakeholder/sector involvement
- alleviation of threats and impacts (e.g. drainage for forestry purposes, climate change)
- Networks
- communication networks
- migratory issues (flyways)
- Climate issues, including permafrost melting and sea level rise
- Exchanges of experiences (pragmatic) for wetland managers working at Ramsar Sites (methods/techniques – monitoring, assessments, restoration, monitoring of NATURA 2000 sites – what is required)
- Coastal wetlands
- remote sensing of wetland changes