



10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”

Changwon, Republic of Korea,
28 October-4 November 2008

Resolution X.16

**A Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding
to change in wetland ecological character**

1. AWARE of the suite of technical and scientific guidelines and other materials prepared by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to support Contracting Parties in their implementation of wetland conservation and wise use, including those concerning aspects of addressing change in the ecological character of wetlands compiled in Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2007);
2. NOTING that the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP9) instructed the STRP to prepare further advice and guidance for consideration by Contracting Parties at COP10, focusing on the immediate and high priority tasks set out in Annex 1 to Resolution IX.2; and
3. THANKING the STRP for its work in preparing the guidance annexed to this Resolution as part of its high priority work during the 2006-2008 triennium, and the background information on this issue provided in COP10 DOC. 26;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

4. WELCOMES the “Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character” provided in the annex to this Resolution, and URGES Contracting Parties to make good use of it as appropriate, adapting it as necessary to suit national conditions and circumstances, within the frameworks of existing regional initiatives and commitments and in the context of sustainable development;
5. RECOGNIZES that whilst some parts of this Framework concern processes specific to designated Ramsar sites, other aspects of the Framework can be applied equally well to any wetland being managed to maintain its ecological character as a contribution to achieving the wise use of wetlands;
6. URGES Contracting Parties to draw this Framework to the attention of relevant stakeholders with responsibilities for maintaining the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, including wetland site managers, government ministries, departments and agencies, water and basin management agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society, and FURTHER URGES Contracting Parties to encourage these stakeholders to take this Framework into account, together with the Ramsar Toolkit of Wise Use

Handbooks, in their decision-making and activities that relate to the delivery of the wise use of wetlands through the maintenance of their ecological character;

7. INSTRUCTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel to include in its work plan for the 2009-2012 period the following tasks:
 - i) In the context of Article 3.2 and the guidance in the annex to this Resolution, develop guidance on aspects of applying the framework provided as this annex, including on:
 - a) “limits of acceptable change”, including guidance on defining the range of natural variability of a site;
 - b) determining confidence limits and degree of likelihood in cases of “likely” change in the context of Article 3.2; and
 - c) the application of a precautionary approach in the Ramsar Convention;
 - ii) Develop guidance on mitigation of and compensation for losses of wetland area and wetland values, in the context of Resolution X.16 on *A Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character*, including lessons learned from available information on implementation of “no net loss” policies, the “urgent national interest” test, and other aspects relating to situations in which Article 2.5 and 4.2 and/or Resolution VII.24 are relevant;
 - iii) Prepare proposals for updating and expanding existing Ramsar guidance on restoration and rehabilitation of lost or degraded wetlands, in the context of Resolution X.16 on *A Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character*, including approaches to prioritization and links with other Ramsar tools and guidance, such as those on climate change and on economic values of ecosystem services; and
 - iv) Prepare guidance on how the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) developed by WWF, the World Bank and others can be applied by Contracting Parties for regularly assessing detection, reporting and responses to change in wetland ecological character;
8. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to disseminate widely the Framework annexed to this Resolution, including through amendment and updating of the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks.

Annex

A Framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character

Introduction

1. This Framework has been developed by the Ramsar Convention's Scientific & Technical Review Panel in response to the request from the Contracting Parties in Resolution VIII.8 (2002) on *Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention*; paragraph 17 of which "ALSO REQUESTS the STRP to prepare further consolidated guidance on the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character, including guidelines for determining when such a change is too trivial to require reporting, having regard to the reasons why a given site is important and to the conservation objectives which have been set for it, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties in the meantime to take a precautionary approach".
2. This request was also included as a task (task 54) in the STRP's 2006-2008 Work Plan (Annexes to Resolution IX.2).
3. The key basis for the need for clear understanding of the overall processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character is Article 3.2 of the Convention text which states that:

"Each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties [i.e., the Ramsar Secretariat] specified in Article 8".
4. The present Framework is intended to provide the overarching guidance to all processes relevant to maintaining the ecological character of wetlands, and it is complemented as another key part of the process identified in the framework by the Convention's guidance on "Describing the ecological character of wetlands" Resolution X.15.
5. The framework guidance is designed to give new advice on the overall scheme or "architecture" of Ramsar's regime on this issue, the ways in which different parts of it (detecting, reporting, responding) fit together, and the processes that should operate if implementation by Contracting Parties and others involved are to be consistent with the terms of the Convention.
6. The Framework is presented as a series of flowcharts appended to this guidance, as follows:

- A) Overview of the four flowcharts describing procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites;
 - B) *Flowchart 1*: Detecting change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites;
 - C) *Flowchart 2*: Reporting and responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites;
 - D) *Flowchart 3*: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites; and
 - E) *Flowchart 4*: Reporting to and consideration by the Conference of Contracting Parties of change in wetland ecological character.
7. Each flowchart identifies the steps in the process, identifies where decisions on next steps need to be made, and also identifies who (site managers, Administrative Authorities, Ramsar Secretariat, STRP, Standing Committee or COP) should be undertaking the steps and making the decisions.
 8. This framework also provides an example of supplemental guidance on data and information flows for implementing aspects of the overall “Framework for Ramsar data and information needs” (Resolution X.14), in this case speaking to Strategies 2.4 (Ramsar site ecological character) and 2.6 (Ramsar site status) of the new Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015 (Resolution X.1).
 9. Whilst this framework guidance is designed to address issues of the maintenance of ecological character, and changes in such character, for wetlands which have been designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), a number of aspects of the Framework are equally applicable to all wetlands in relation to the wise use aspects of Article 3.1 of the Convention, which states that “The Contracting Parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote ... as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory,” particularly since COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex A linked the concepts of wise use and ecological character such that the present definition of “wise use” is that:

“Wise use of wetlands is the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development.”
 10. Guidance relevant to various different aspects of the Framework for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character has been adopted by previous meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, and in 2007 much of this was compiled as Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 15 (3rd edition, 2007), *Addressing change in ecological character*. Guidance on certain other aspects of Convention implementation relevant to these issues (notably management planning, and assessment tools, is also provided in others of the Wise Use Handbooks (3rd edition).

11. A summary guide to sections of Handbook guidance relevant to applying various aspects of flowcharts 1 to 3 is provided below. This table also indicates other relevant guidance being considered for adoption by COP10.

Flowchart 1: Detecting change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites. HBx = Wise Use Handbook No. (3rd edition)

Step in flowchart	Available guidance
- Describe ecological character	Resolution X.15. Describing the ecological character of wetlands HB16 Managing wetlands, Section B
- Define ecological character maintenance management objectives - Develop management plan - Implement management plan	HB16, Section C
- Monitor ecological character	HB16, Sections D & E HB11 Inventory, assessment & monitoring, Section V & Appendix

Flowchart 2: Reporting and responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites. HBx = Wise Use Handbook No. (3rd edition)

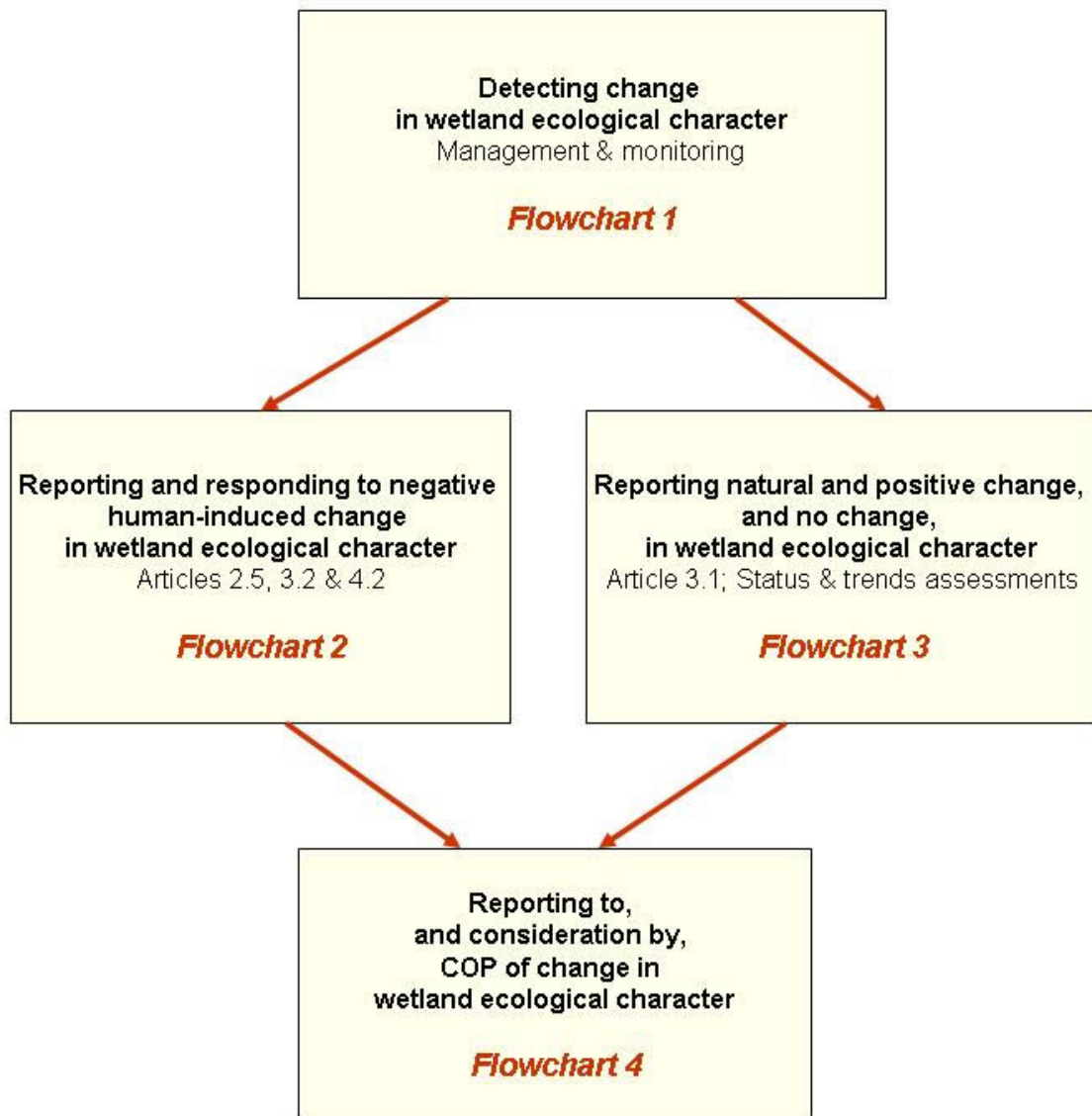
Step in flowchart	Available guidance
- Negative human-induced change or likely change in ecological character detected	HB15 Addressing change in ecological character, Sections B, D & Appendix
- Article 3.2 report	HB15, Section B; Resolution X. 15. Describing the ecological character of wetlands
- Urgent National Interest (Article 2.5) invoked	HB15, Section D
- Compensate	HB15, Section G
- Place on Montreux Record	HB15, Section C
- Restore losses	HB15, Section F

Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites. HBx = Wise Use Handbook No. (3rd edition)

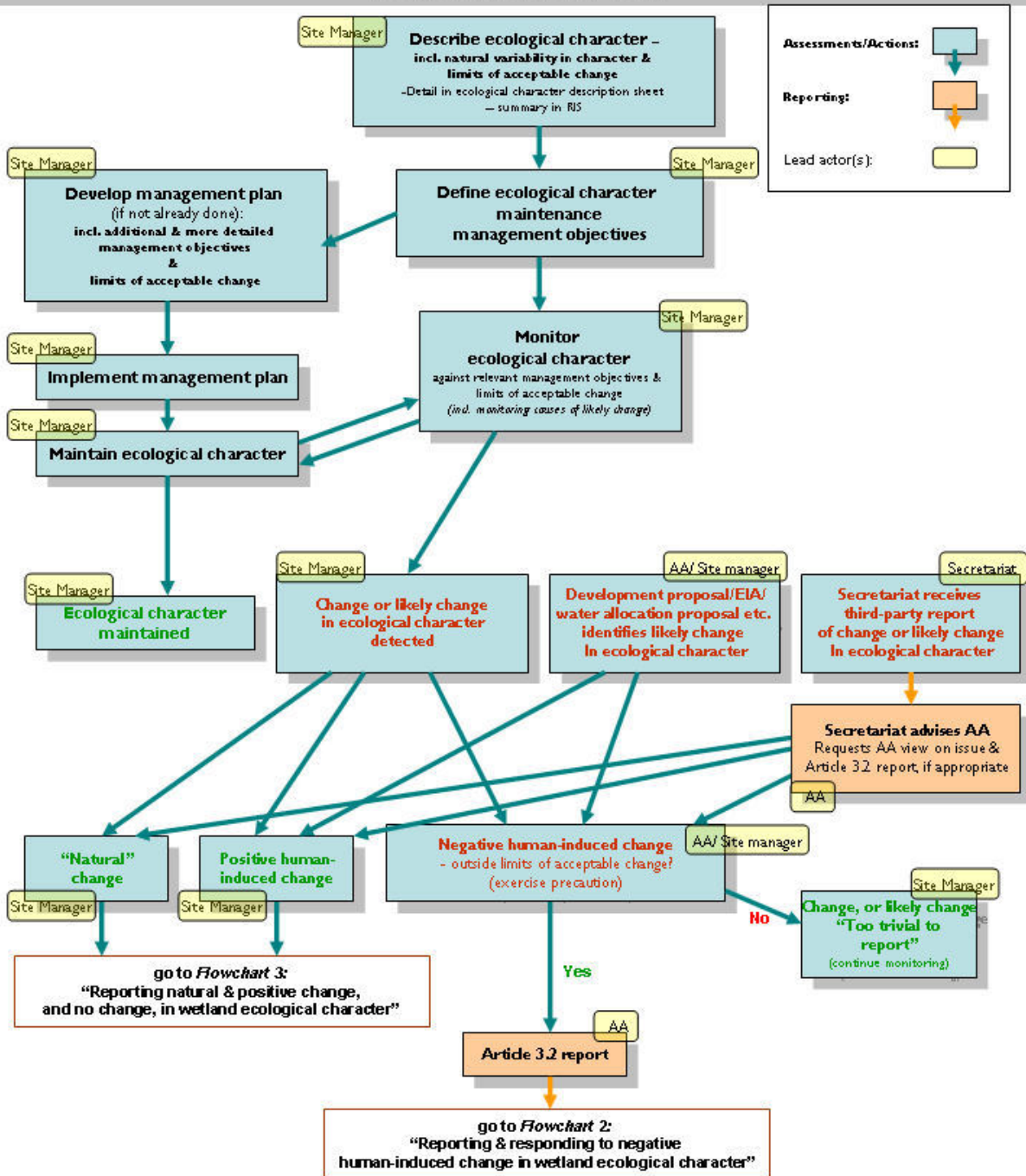
Step in flowchart	Available guidance
- Reporting: - “natural change” - positive human-induced change - ecological character maintained	HB11 Inventory, assessment & monitoring, Section V (indicator assessment); Resolution IX.1 Annex D; HB14 Designating Ramsar sites, Section II (Objective 4.1)

Appendix

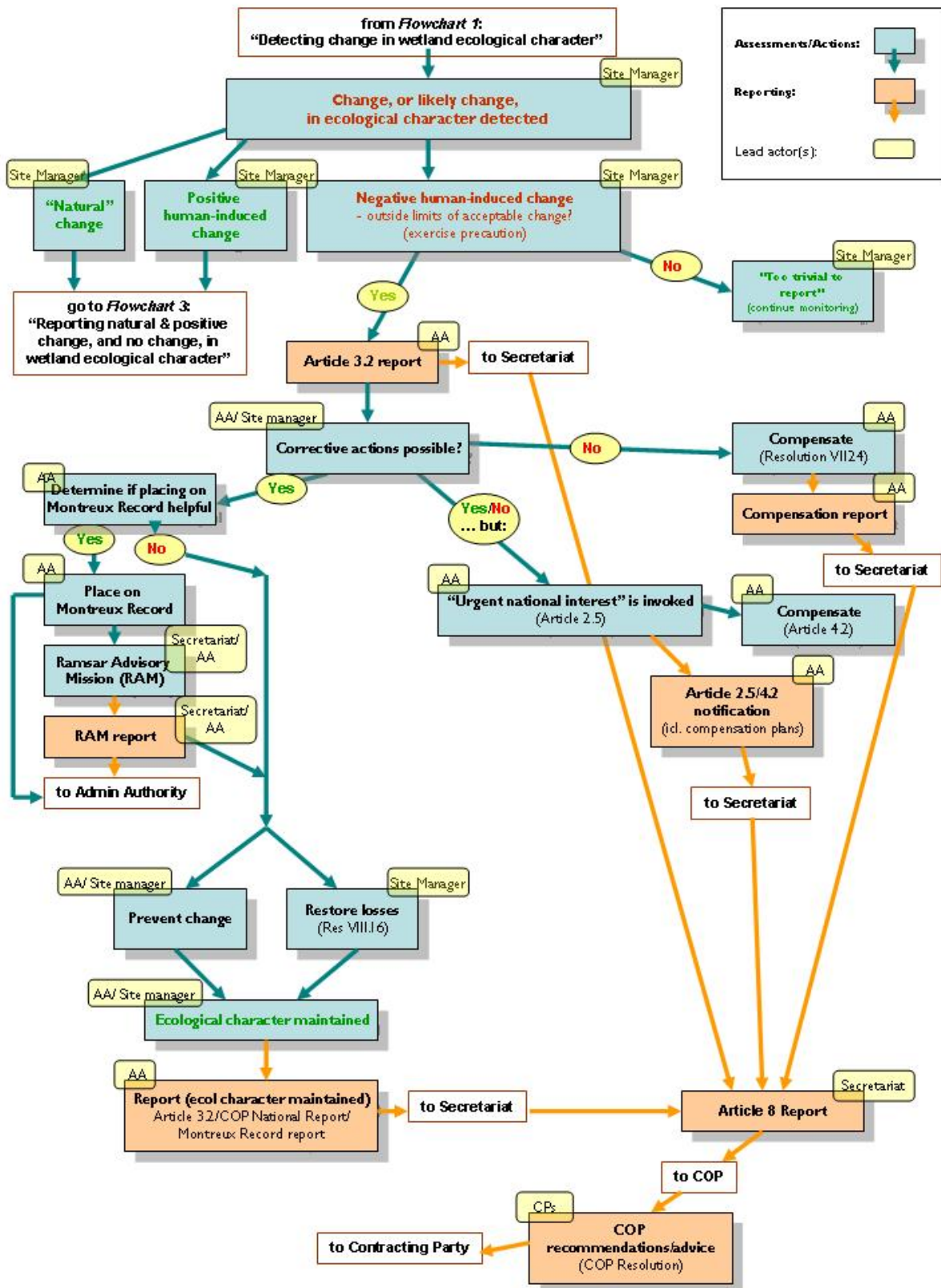
A. Overview of the four flowcharts describing procedures for detecting, reporting & responding to change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites



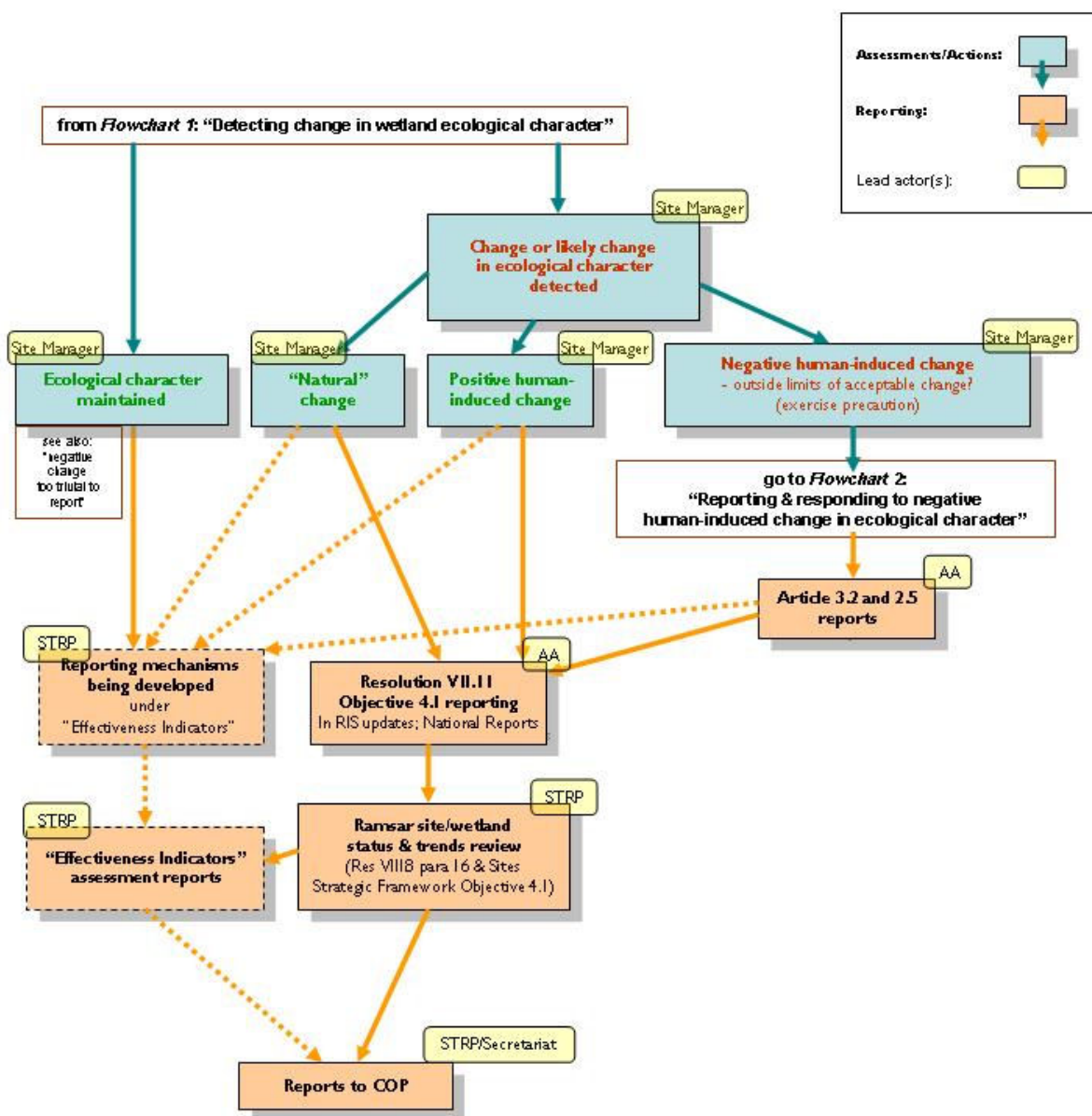
B. Flowchart 1: Detecting change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites



C. Flowchart 2: Reporting & responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites



D. Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites



E. Flowchart 4: Reporting to, and consideration by, COP of change in wetland ecological character of designated Ramsar sites

