

Agenda item 8.7

Supplemental guidelines for the determination and implementation of environmental water requirements for wetlands

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to consider the issues raised by the STRP in relation to this guidance, and endorse the approach proposed for their further development.

Note by the Ramsar Secretariat

1. At COP8, Ramsar Contracting Parties adopted Resolution VIII.1 *Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands*, and Resolution VIII.2 on *The report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention*.
2. Resolution VIII.1 requested that appropriate technical institutions “contribute their ongoing work on environmental flow methodologies to further work requested of the STRP on water allocation and management, so as to ensure that they are made available to Contracting Parties to assist in their management of dam-related impacts, and requests the STRP to report on these methodologies to COP9”.
3. On the basis of the Ramsar Standing Committee’s recommendations, the STRP’s work plan for its Working Group 3 (Water resource management) was developed to include Task 3.3: “Guidance for environmental flow assessment for wetland ecosystems” as one of its priorities.
4. Working Group 3 established the following objectives for this task:
 - i. to prepare reviews and associated guidance for Parties for COP9 on environmental flow methodologies for rivers and other types of wetland ecosystems, and their biophysical components, appropriate for both regulated systems, with particular attention given to assistance in the management of dam-related impacts, and unregulated systems; and
 - ii. To prepare guidance, as appropriate, on both the processes of determination and implementation of environmental flows, building on the existing guidance provided at COP8 (Resolutions VIII.1 and VIII.2) with a synopsis of material derived from the technical reviews.
5. Given the highly technical nature and complex terminologies of this subject, the STRP agreed that much of Working Group 3’s guidance on environmental water requirements - EWRs (environmental flows) methodologies would be most appropriately prepared as detailed *Ramsar Technical Reports* rather than as guidelines annexed to a COP9 Resolution for adoption.

6. The Panel is currently preparing three such methodological reviews, which it is anticipated will become available later in 2005. These are for rivers, for non-riverine inland wetlands, and for estuaries and near-shore coastal environments.
7. The Panel recognized that since methods for environmental water requirements are a rapidly developing and evolving science, any guidelines for Parties on this subject focusing more on aspects of the determination and implementation of environmental water requirements for wetlands would ideally draw upon the material compiled in the *Ramsar Technical Reports*, and would need regular updating as more detailed information on methodologies becomes available and, particularly, as case-specific implementation of environmental water requirements (EWRs) determined for wetlands occurs.
8. However, after reviewing a recently-produced draft of the “Supplemental guidelines for the determination and implementation of environmental water requirements for wetlands” prepared by Rebecca Tharme (IWMI) working with STRP’s Working Group 3, the Working Group and the Ramsar Secretariat consider that, owing to the complexity of the topic, the draft guidance is necessarily too long (ca. 50 pages) and technical in nature to match the expectations of the shorter form and level of detail consistent with that of the other guidelines adopted by COP and included in the toolkit of Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks.
9. Given the importance of increasing awareness and understanding of this topic for future efforts to secure the conservation and wise use of wetlands, the STRP and Secretariat consider that this material is too detailed and not yet sufficiently developed to form guidelines for Parties annexed to COP9 DR1 as was originally intended, and that it would be better issued first, after some further drafting work, as a *Ramsar Technical Report*, acting as an overall introduction to the topic, supplemented by the *Ramsar Technical Reports* on methodologies for EWRs for the different wetland types.
10. The Secretariat and Chair and Vice-Chair of the STRP therefore propose that a priority task for the Panel in 2006-2008 should be included in COP9 DR2, to prepare shorter guidelines for Parties on the implementation of environmental water requirements for wetlands, drawing upon the material and case-studies contained in the *Ramsar Technical Reports* on this topic.
11. In addition, STRP’s Working Group 3 is preparing a short text on when and for what purpose assessment of environmental water requirements should be undertaken, for inclusion in the Panel’s “Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring (IF-WIAM) which is currently being prepared by Max Finlayson (DOC. SC31-8).
12. The Standing Committee should note that taking this approach to the provision of guidance on environmental water requirements for wetlands will necessitate amending some parts of the texts of the STRP’s other water-related guidance documents, notably DOC. SC31-10, before they are presented to COP9.