

Agenda item 9.2

Designation and management of transnational Ramsar sites

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to consider and approve the attached draft Resolution for consideration by COP9.

Note by the Ramsar Secretariat

1. It has been recognized many times that a coherent national and international network of Ramsar sites and their sustainable management can provide a powerful demonstration and important contribution to countries achieving their sustainable development goals, through the recognition and maintenance of the wetland services and functions they provide in water and food security and poverty eradication, especially for local communities and indigenous people.
2. What has not been well developed is the issue of transnational Ramsar sites, their “status”, and importantly their management. “Transnational Ramsar sites” are defined as those internationally important wetlands which cross international borders and have been designated as Ramsar sites by at least two Contracting Parties within whose territories they lie.
3. Following discussions at the Ramsar European Regional Meeting in Armenia in December 2004, it has been suggested that Parties should be encouraged to identify shared wetland sites and catchment basins, and that such initial identification of sites and catchments should be followed by an assessment of their specific features and services that would merit recognition as Wetlands of International Importance. As a matter of priority, such wetlands which at present have only unilateral designation (i.e., on only one side of a border) should be identified for listing by the neighbouring Party (or Parties) as well.
4. During recent years, a number of new Ramsar sites in the European region have been formally (*de jure*) declared jointly as “transboundary sites”, i.e., through a common letter of designation, signed by the two national administrative Authorities, sometimes also complemented by a common Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) covering both parts of the site, specifying its values on each side of the border. Such sites may carry the same name or different names, for reasons of overriding importance of local names, different languages and alphabets used, etc. A detailed paper on this matter was presented to the European Regional Meeting in Armenia in December 2004 and is available at http://www.ramsar.org/mtg_reg_europe2004_docs1d1.pdf.
5. A related issue is that which concerns the desirability and feasibility of developing a mechanism for specifically identifying transnational Ramsar sites in the Ramsar List and any reporting requirements for this.

6. At its meeting in March 2005, the Subgroup on COP9 requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution for consideration by SC31 on transboundary Ramsar sites, ensuring that it will be facilitative rather than prescriptive and careful in its use of language. This draft Resolution is attached.

COP9 DR6

Designation and management of transnational Ramsar sites

1. RECALLING that the preamble to the Convention text states that “The Contracting Parties [are] confident that the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining far-sighted national policies with *coordinated international action*” (emphasis added);
2. ALSO RECALLING that Article 5 of the Convention text indicates that “the Contracting Parties shall *consult with each other* about implementing obligations arising from the Convention especially in the case of a *wetland extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party* or where a *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” (emphasis added);
3. FURTHER RECALLING that Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks 7 & 9 provide, *inter alia*, guidance on the designation and management of shared wetland sites and river basins, and on shared (migratory) species, and that Resolution VII.11 encourages Contracting Parties “to be mindful, when identifying priority sites for designation, of their obligations under Article 5 of the Convention (and the related *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention*, adopted by Resolution VII.19), and to ensure that suitable transboundary wetlands and those providing important habitat for migratory wetland-dependent species are given prominence in these considerations”;
4. AWARE that the UNESCO-MAB programme has adopted a recommendation for the establishment and functioning of Transboundary Biosphere Reserves, and ALSO AWARE that in Europe the Europarc Federation (of National and Nature Parks) has established a working group that elaborated basic standards for transnational cooperation in protected areas; and
5. WELCOMING the increasing number of shared wetlands which are being designated by Contracting Parties as *de facto* transnational Ramsar sites, i.e. being designated as Ramsar Sites and benefiting from a regular and formal cooperation of both sides, without necessarily being formally declared jointly as a “transnational Ramsar site”;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

6. INSTRUCES the Secretariat to undertake consultations with Parties and the STRP so as to develop procedures for fully recognising transnational Ramsar Sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, using the attached annex as a framework for advancing this work;
7. REQUESTS the Secretariat to incorporate elements of this annex as additional guidance to Contracting Parties in the *Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, as revised in [COP9 DR1 Annex D];

8. REQUESTS Contracting Parties, as part of their establishment of a strategy and priorities for Ramsar site designation called for by Resolution VIII.10, to identify and assess wetlands in their border zones with a view to designating them as transnational wetlands where feasible, where appropriate and where doing so will contribute to the development of the comprehensive List of Wetlands of International Importance;
9. URGES Contracting Parties with transnational wetlands and Ramsar sites to establish mechanisms for the cooperation in their management so as to secure the conservation and wise use of such wetlands; and
10. REQUESTS the Secretariat to report to COP10 on progress with this issue.

ANNEX

An outline framework for the identification, designation and management of transnational wetlands and Ramsar sites

1. *Identification of transnational wetlands.* As part of their establishment of a strategy and priorities for the further development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Resolution VIII.10), Contracting Parties should identify wetlands and catchment basins shared with adjacent countries. This could be based on an inventory of the following broad categories of such wetland ecosystems: a) shared river stretches and their floodplains, b) shared lakes and related floodplains and rivers, c) shared individual inland wetlands of any other wetland type, d) shared individual coastal wetlands of any other wetland type, and e) shared karst areas and their associated transnational underground water systems. Such initial identification of sites and catchments should be followed by an assessment of their specific features and services that fulfil their recognition for designation of Wetlands of International Importance according to the Ramsar Criteria.
2. *Designation of transnational wetlands.* Any wetland site or catchment which meets the Ramsar Criteria should have all its parts designated as Ramsar sites within the territories of the Contracting Parties concerned¹. As a matter of priority, qualifying sites which so far have part of their area designated by only one Party should be identified for urgent Listing of the remainder of their area by the relevant neighbouring country or countries.
3. *Steps in establishing cooperation for transnational wetlands.* Transnational cooperation for shared wetland sites and catchments is a process. Possible steps in developing a process are: 1) unilateral work on each side, by NGOs, local stakeholders, governmental authorities; 2) establishment of contacts across the border, through regular consultations, joint actions and formal cooperation; 3) joint planning to elaborate common management strategies and plans; 4) coordinated and common activities in the implementation of these strategies and plans, including monitoring of results; and 5) formal joint administration and sharing of resources and personnel. For each transnational wetland site or catchment, identifying

¹ This is consistent with aspects of the Ramsar Criteria proposed by the 2nd International Conference on Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl (Heiligenhafen, 1974): 4 (ii) "A wetland of national value only may nevertheless be considered of international importance if it forms a complex with another adjacent wetland of similar value across an international border".

which stage of cooperation is currently attained and what should be the next stage of cooperation to be attained would be useful.

4. *Recognition of transnational wetlands in the Ramsar List.* It is proposed to establish a mechanism for clearly identifying transnational Ramsar sites as such in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. For a Ramsar Site to be recognised in the List as “transnational”, the following criteria would need to be met: a) the wetland ecosystem lies across national borders with functional links (hydrological or other) that are material to its management; b) the parts on each side of the national borders of the coherent wetland site are connected under one management entity; c) both/all responsible authorities engage in regular, formal and active management cooperation; and d) designation of their respective portions of the coherent wetland ecosystem as Ramsar sites (under each national jurisdictional authority) has been made.