

Agenda item 9.6

**The role of the Ramsar Convention in natural disaster prevention,
mitigation and adaptation**

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. In March 2005 the Standing Committee's Subgroup on COP9 approved a proposal to prepare a draft Resolution on the prevention and response to natural disasters for consideration by SC31 (Decision COP9 SG-13).
2. The purpose of the proposed draft Resolution is to take forward and elaborate on the role of the Convention in the issue of natural disasters raised in COP8 Resolution VIII.35, in the context especially of the attention now being paid to the mitigating role of natural coastal ecosystems in the aftermath of the disastrous Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004.
3. Concerning the Indian Ocean tsunami, the Ramsar Secretariat requested Wetlands International to establish a 'Ramsar Tsunami Reference Group' of the Convention's International Organization Partners and other relevant organizations, in order to provide the best possible advice to the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties on the role natural ecosystems may have played in reducing the impacts of the tsunami and on approaches to the restoration and maintenance of such natural systems. This work is being supported with funding from the Government of Japan. A summary report from the Ramsar Tsunami Reference Group is provided in DOC. SC31-30.
4. In addition, a special World Wetlands Day/STRP debate on the Natural Mitigation of Natural Disasters was held on 2 February 2005, which issued a 'Declaration of Principles', and the February 2005 Asian Wetland Symposium held a special session on the tsunami and coastal wetlands which has prepared 'Recommendations for Action'. These documents are available in DOC. SC31-30.

[blank page]

COP9 DR10

**The role of the Ramsar Convention in natural disaster prevention,
mitigation and adaptation**

1. RECALLING that COP8 adopted Resolution VIII.35 on *The impact of natural disasters, particularly drought, on wetland ecosystems*, but RECOGNIZING that the spectrum of natural disasters is much wider than this, as witnessed by continuing extreme climatic and other events and especially the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004;
2. AWARE that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has established a strategic Post-Conflict Assessment Unit which is increasingly being utilized to deal with a range of natural disaster issues;
3. RECALLING that the International Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 2005) has established a Framework for Action the scope of which encompasses disasters caused by hazards of natural origin and related environmental and technological hazards and risks; which thus reflects a holistic and multi-hazard approach to disaster risk management and the relationships between the various hazards which can have a significant impact on social, economic, cultural and environmental systems;
4. RECOGNIZING the important role that the Ramsar Convention can play as one of the international actors potentially involved in disaster avoidance and mitigation and in post-disaster restoration;
5. RECALLING that through Resolution VIII.1 Contracting Parties have emphasized the critical importance of maintaining water allocations to ensure that wetlands can continue to deliver their many services, including, *inter alia*, water retention and purification, groundwater recharge, and the provision of water, food and fiber for people and for the maintenance of global biological diversity, and that this need is particularly high in a post-disaster phase; and
6. RECOGNIZING the significance of synergies with the other multilateral environmental agreements and agencies with a particular focus on the impacts of natural disasters; including the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction – ISDR, UNEP, WHO, WMO, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; and also RECOGNIZING the role that can be played in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially the Convention's International Organization Partners (IOPs);

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

7. UNDERLINES the devastating impacts of natural disasters on the delivery of ecosystem services, including cultural, social and economic services, and thus on the maintenance of the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance and other wetlands in affected countries;
8. URGES Contracting Parties affected by natural disasters to give attention to Ramsar sites and other wetlands in accordance with their natural hydrological regimes, so as to ensure

that they can continue to deliver their full range of ecosystem services for people and for biological diversity, as called for in Resolution VIII.1;

9. REQUESTS affected Contracting Parties to monitor and assess the impacts of natural disasters on the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands and on the livelihoods of local communities and indigenous people dependent upon these wetlands within their territory and, for designated Ramsar sites, to report this to the Ramsar Secretariat so that this information can be made available to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel to assist in its reporting to subsequent COPs on the status and trends in the ecological character of sites in the Ramsar List and other wetlands, as called for in Resolution VIII.8;
10. URGES Contracting Parties to establish an international fund to be used for emergency assessment and on-going restoration work for wetlands, especially Ramsar sites, following natural disasters, and to make voluntary contributions to this fund;
11. INSTRUCTS the STRP, working with relevant agencies and IOPs, to provide guidance, as a matter of urgency, on efforts needed for restoring and rehabilitating ecosystems and water resources affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, and to develop for Contracting Parties a set of restoration guidelines to be implemented following natural disasters in general;
12. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat, working with relevant international organizations and agencies, including *inter alia* ISDR, WMO and UNEP, as well as, where appropriate, IOPs to develop guidance on a set of responses which can be initiated by governments and others immediately following the onset of a natural disaster affecting or likely to affect wetlands, especially sites in the Ramsar List; and
13. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to undertake appropriate activities to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, especially droughts, tidal surges and floods.