

Agenda item 8.3

Detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character: scientific and technical guidance

Action requested: The Standing Committee is requested to review and advise on the attached draft Resolution and its annex and to note that, because the STRP and Secretariat are currently considering options for possible outline guidance to accompany the annex flowcharts shown here, further information on this matter will be provided at SC37.

Note by the Secretariat

1. As part of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel's priority work during the 2006-2008 triennium, it was requested (in task 54) to prepare consolidated guidance on the process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character.
2. Work to develop this task has been undertaken by the Panel's Working Group 1 on wetland inventory and assessment, and the Panel and Secretariat are grateful to Dave Pritchard for leading these efforts.
3. The attached materials for SC37 consideration are a draft Resolution and an annexed framework guidance for the consolidated process for detecting, responding to and reporting change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites prepared in the form of a series of flowcharts. The Secretariat recognizes that some corrections and updating of the flowcharts provided here will be necessary to ensure that each is consistent with the others, and that will be addressed following consultations at the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee.
4. The STRP, in developing this framework for these processes, has also prepared and reviewed a discussion paper that provides the rationale and background to various aspects of the process steps summarized in the flowcharts. It is planned that a version of this discussion paper will be prepared as a COP10 Information Paper to provide background information to Parties on these matters.
5. This discussion paper also includes some new thinking on certain aspects of the overall process, particularly on the issue of determining when a change in ecological character is too trivial to require reporting (as requested in Resolution VIII.8 and STRP task 54), on assessing 'likelihood of change', and of the precautionary approach.
6. In its proposals for further work on change in ecological character, the STRP is proposing (cf. DOC. SC37-30) that it should undertake to develop further guidance on such matters, and this is also reflected in the attached draft Resolution.

Draft Resolution X.00

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;
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 advice and 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. XX];

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 all 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 2009-2011 triennium:
 - i) In the context of Article 3.2 and the guidance in the annex to [DR X.00 on Detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character], 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 [DR X.00 on Detecting, reporting and responding to change in 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; and
 - iii) Prepare proposals for updating and expanding existing Ramsar guidance on restoration and rehabilitation of lost or degraded wetlands, in the context of [DR X.00 on Detecting, reporting and responding to change in 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
9. 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

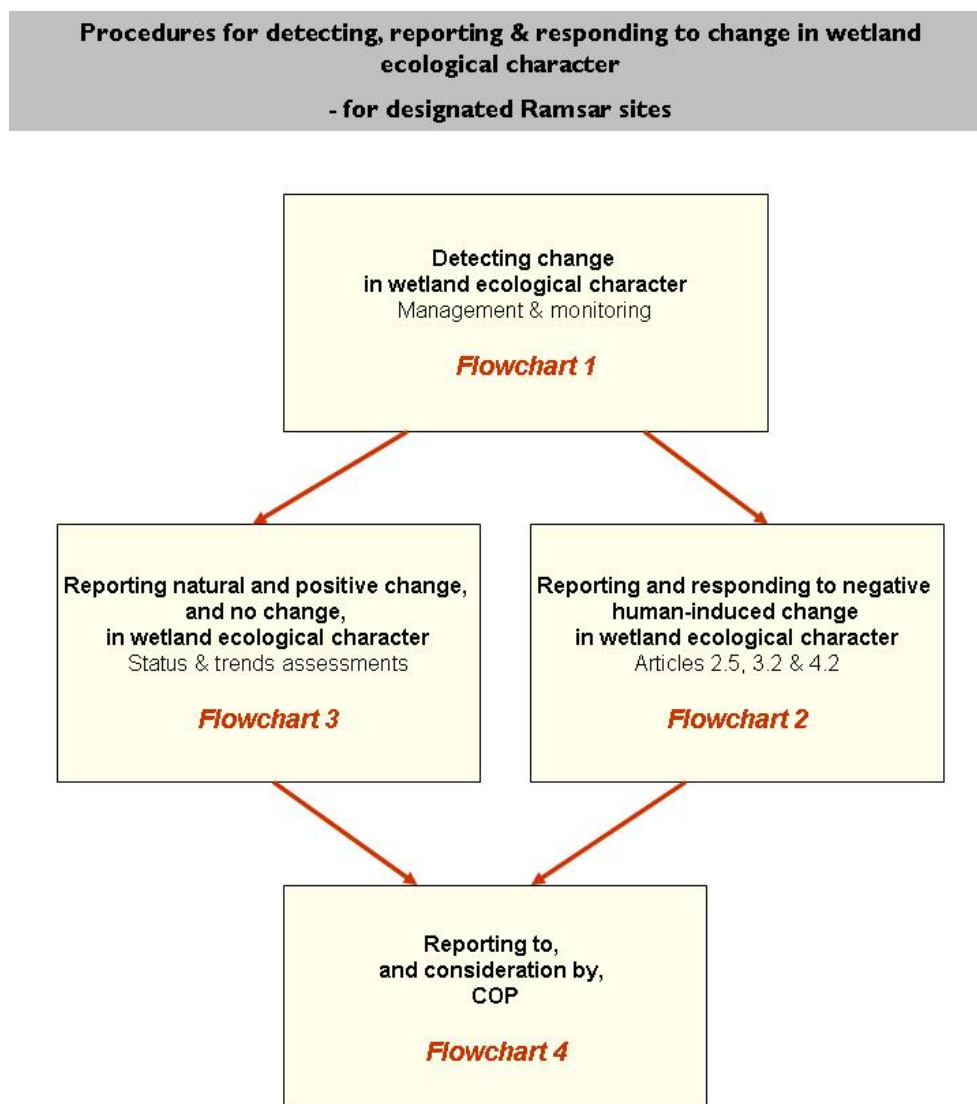
Introduction

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.
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

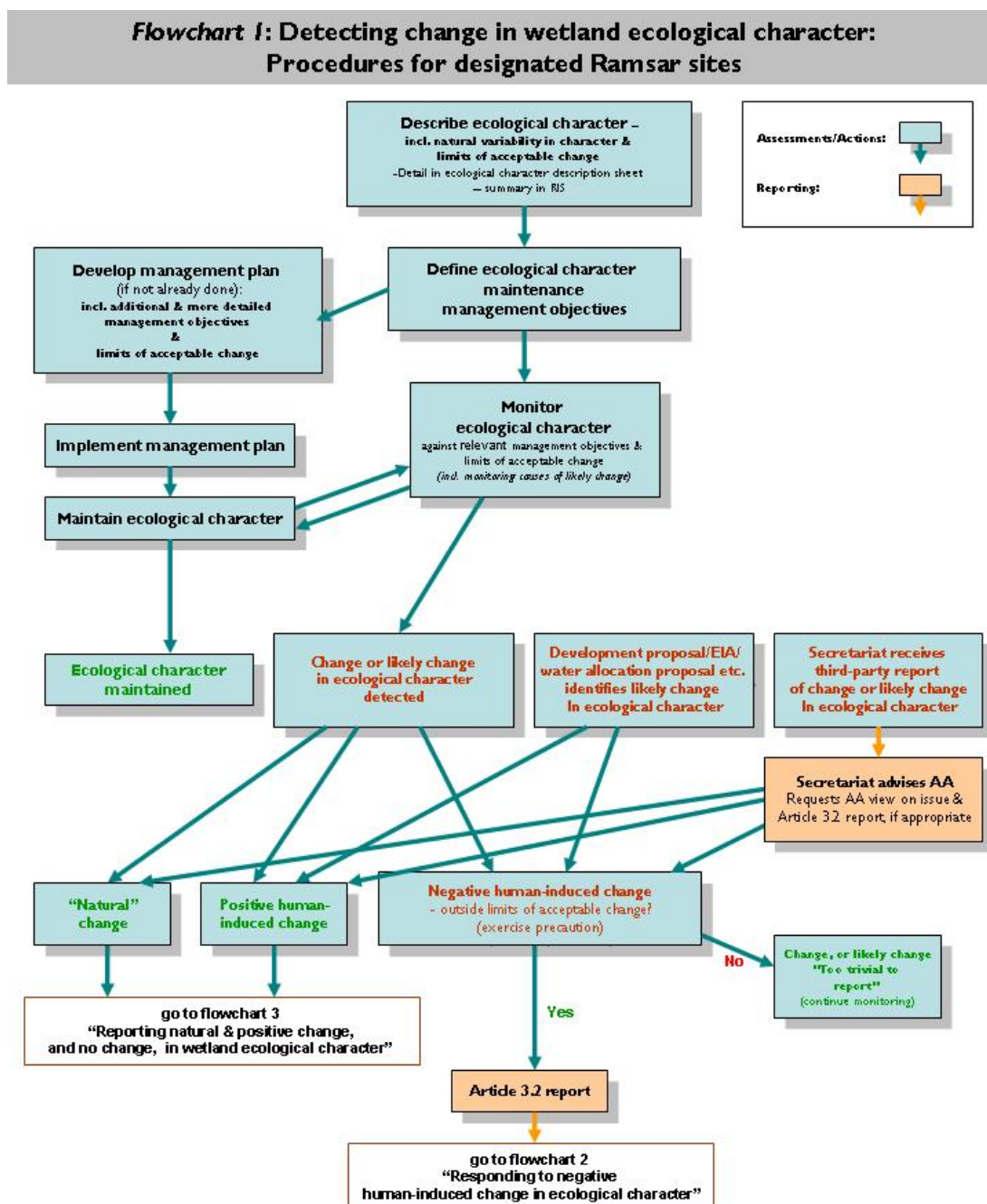
developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 [i.e., the Ramsar Secretariat]”.

4. Guidance relevant to various different aspects of these processes has been adopted by previous meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, and in 2007 this was compiled as Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 15 (3rd edition), *Addressing change in ecological character*. 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” [DR X.00, DOC. SC37-19].
5. The present 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 below is presented as a series of flowcharts, as follows:
 - A) Overview of the four flowcharts describing procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character – (for designated Ramsar sites)
 - B) *Flowchart 1*: Detecting change in wetland ecological character - procedures for designated Ramsar sites
 - C) *Flowchart 2*: Reporting and responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character – procedures for designated Ramsar sites
 - D) *Flowchart 3*: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character – procedures for designated Ramsar sites
 - E) *Flowchart 4*: Reporting to and consideration by the Conference of Contracting Parties of change in wetland ecological character; and
 - F) A consolidated flowchart showing all procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character (as provided in flowcharts 1 to 4.

- A. An overview of how the four flowcharts describing procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character interrelate

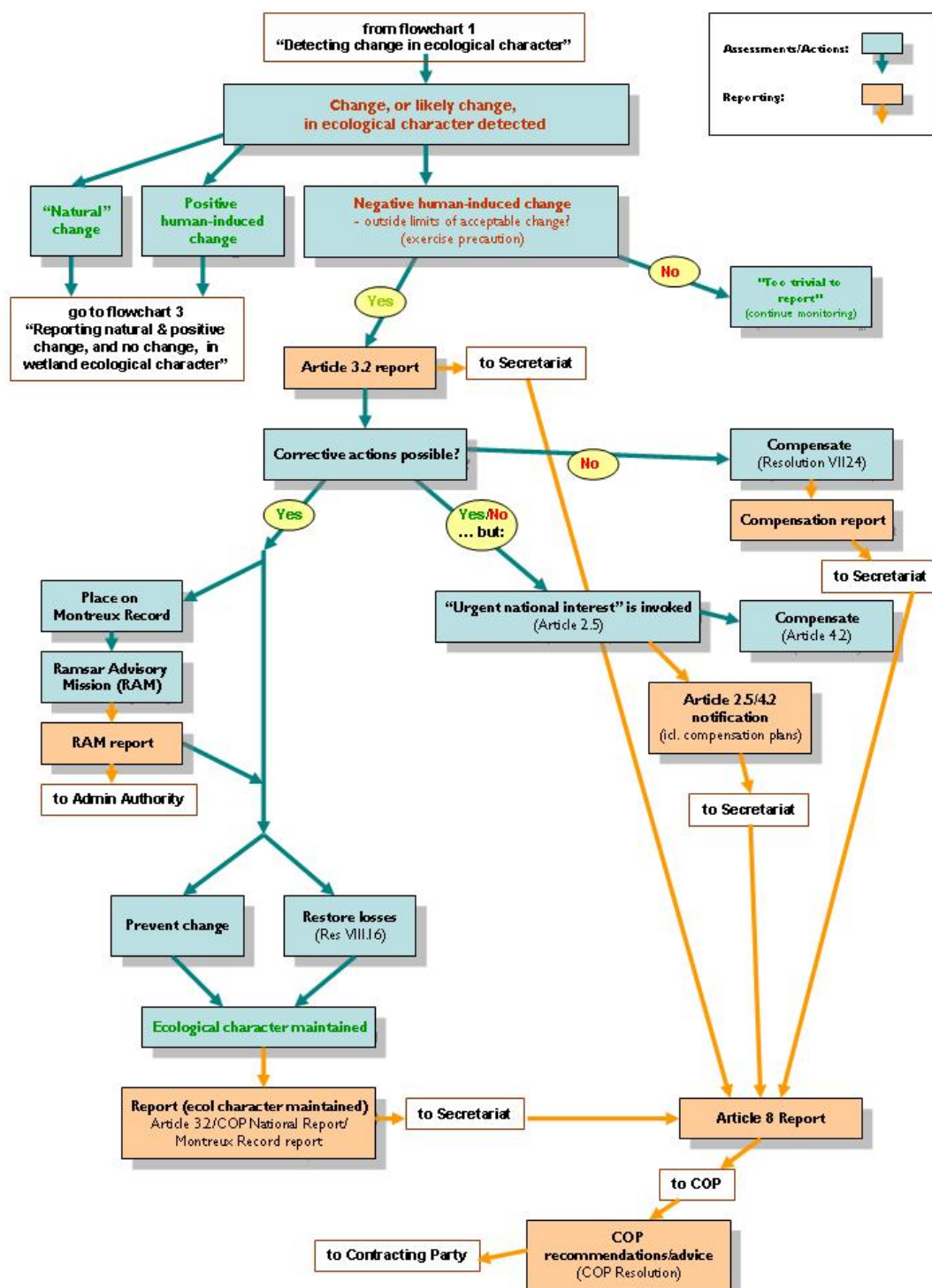


B. *Flowchart 1: Detecting change in wetland ecological character - procedures for designated Ramsar sites*



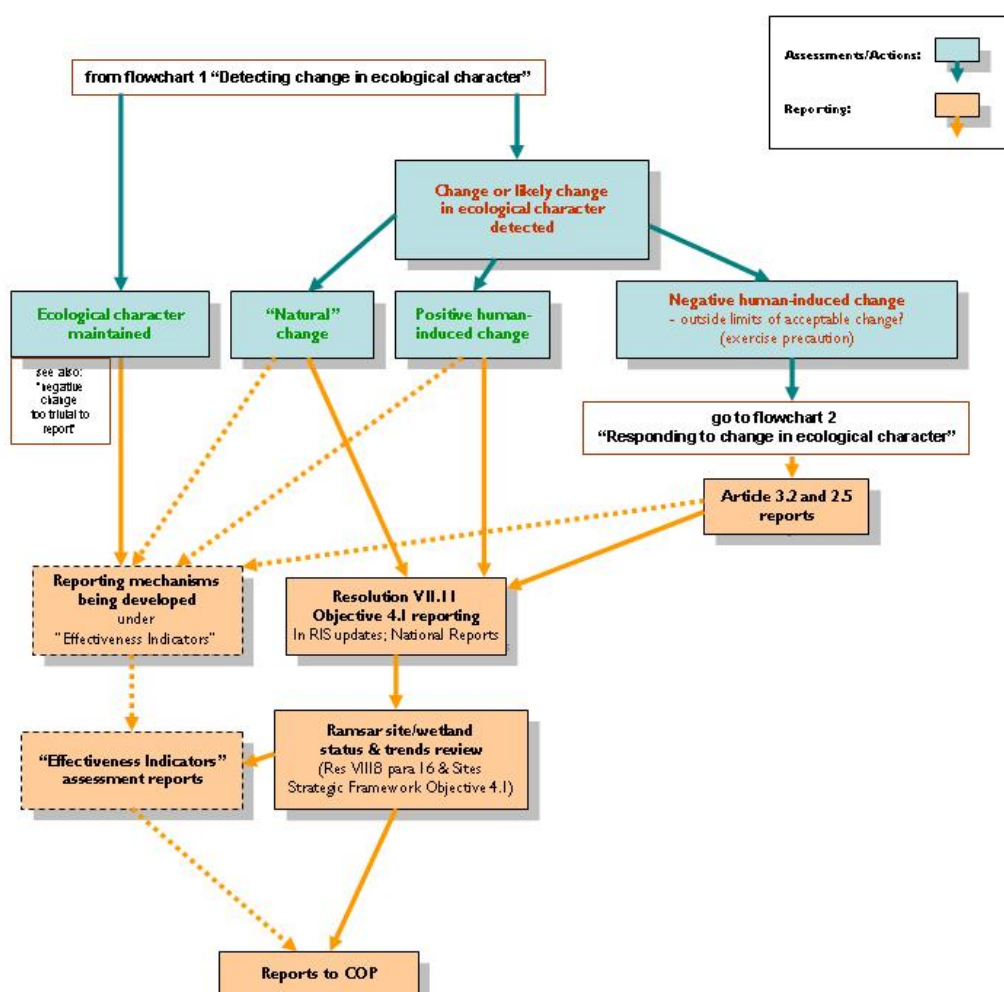
C. *Flowchart 2: Reporting & responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character – procedures for designated Ramsar sites*

**Flowchart 2: Reporting & responding to negative human-induced change in wetland ecological character
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



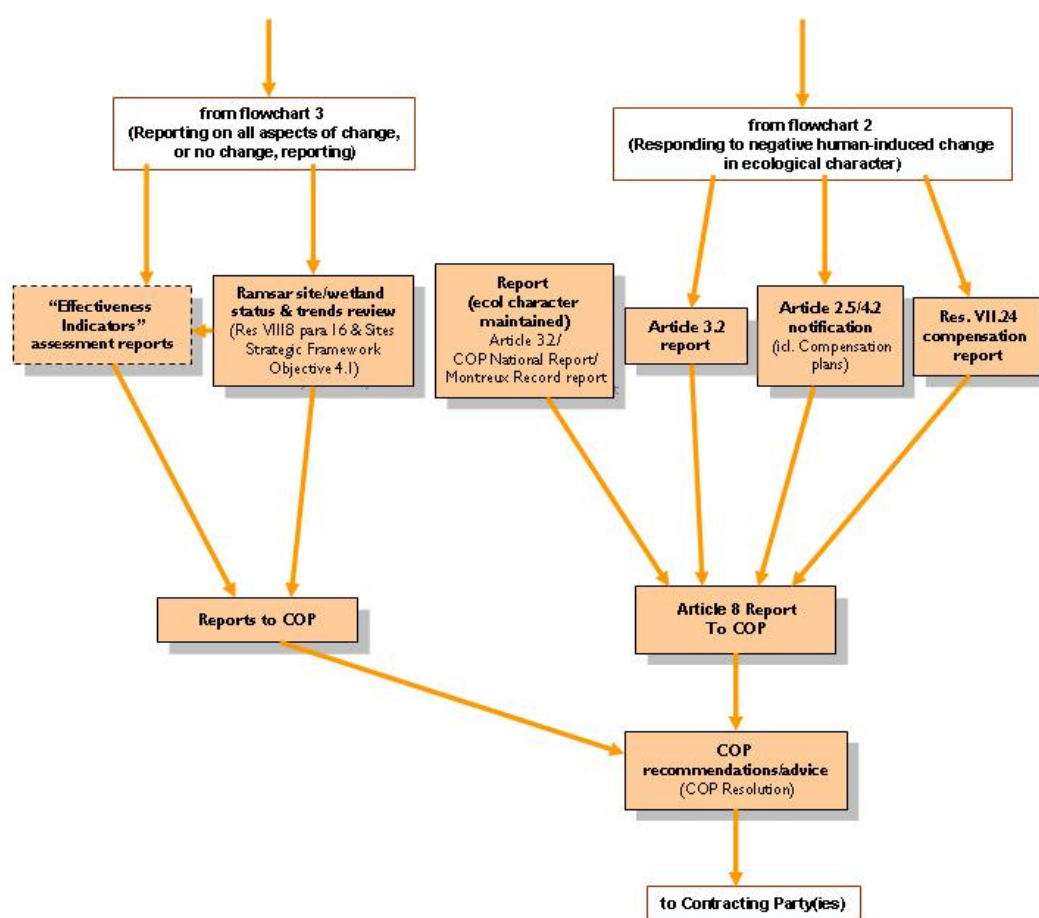
D. *Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character - procedures for designated Ramsar sites*

**Flowchart 3: Reporting natural and positive change, and no change, in wetland ecological character:
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



E. *Flowchart 4: Reporting to, and consideration by, the Conference of Contracting Parties of change in wetland ecological character*

**Flowchart 4: Reporting to, and consideration by, COP of change in ecological character:
Procedures for designated Ramsar sites**



- F. A Consolidated flowchart showing all procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character (as provided in flowcharts 1 to 4).

