CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
37th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 2-6 June 2008

DOC. SC37-28

Agenda item 8.11

Wetlands and 'biofuels'

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached draft COP10 Resolution, amend it as appropriate, and approve it for finalization for COP10 consideration.

Note by the Secretariat

1. In Decision SC36-24 "The Standing Committee noted the progress of the STRP's work on wetlands and climate change, encouraged the Panel to take the SC's comments into account and develop a draft Resolution for consideration by SC37, and requested the Panel to consider how best to reflect 'biofuel' issues in this or a separate draft Resolution."

2. Following consultation with the Chair and members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), the Panel considers that it is more appropriate to bring forward a separate draft COP10 Resolution on wetlands and biofuels, rather than incorporate the issue within the broader and different scope of a draft Resolution on wetlands and climate change, which is intended to focus on issues concerning wetlands and their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, including in the global carbon cycle.

3. The Panel and Secretariat have therefore prepared the attached draft Resolution on wetlands and biofuels, which principally addresses this issue as primarily one of land use change and change in agricultural practices, including water use, and the potential for these changes to adversely impact upon wetlands and their ecosystem services (including carbon storage and sequestration).

4. Given the limited time and capacity available in the STRP between the 36th and 37th meetings of the Standing Committee to progress this matter, the Standing Committee should consider the attached draft COP10 Resolution as a working draft, and the Secretariat and STRP will welcome the advice to the Standing Committee on how best to finalise the draft for COP10 consideration.

Draft Resolution X.00

Wetlands and 'biofuels'

1. RECOGNIZING that attempts to create new energy supplies and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fossil fuels is an urgent global priority;

2. AWARE of the increasingly global attention to the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy, including *inter alia* biofuel production, and EXPRESSING CONCERN

that such changes in energy policy can have actual or potential detrimental effects upon wetlands and their ecosystem services to people;

3. ALSO AWARE that biofuel can be manufactured from many different crops, such as sugar cane, corn, beets, wheat and sorghum (grown for conversion to bioethanol) and rapeseed, sunflower, soya, oil palm, coconut and jatropha (grown for conversion to biodiesel), each with different potential impacts on wetlands;

4. FURTHER AWARE that many parts of the world are now water-stressed and that this demand for water is projected to grow, and CONCERNED that, with 70% of abstracted water already being used for irrigated agriculture, not only will replacement crops with a high water demand add to this pressure but that global expansion of irrigated biofuel production systems could multiply this effect and potentially result in even more substantial impacts at local and regional levels;

5. RECOGNIZING that some biofuel crops have lower water demands, can be grown on marginal lands, and can perhaps assist in environmental rehabilitation;

6. AWARE of the work of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and Wetlands International (WI), among others, on issues of water, wetlands, agriculture and biofuels;

7. EXPRESSING CONCERN that with global demand for food production projected to increase substantially in line with efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goal on food security, competing demands upon agricultural land for food and biofuel production will lead to further pressure for the conversion of wetlands and other threatened ecosystems, including sites previously the subject of restoration programmes; and

8. FURTHER CONCERNED that such conversion risks damaging the high carbon sequestration and storage capacity of such wetlands [as recognized by DR X.00 on climate change] and risks major releases of greenhouse gases from such wetlands, as is already reported for the conversion of peatswamp forests to palm oil production in southeast Asia, and that decisions concerning conversion of wetlands for agricultural biofuel production may not necessarily take into account the full range of ecosystem services, such as flood protection, food and fiber, and groundwater recharge, provided by such wetlands;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

9. CALLS UPON all Contracting Parties to assess carefully the potential impacts, benefits and trade-offs of proposed biofuel crop production schemes affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands, particularly the implications for surface and groundwater resources, and to apply environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA), as appropriate and in line with Resolution VII.16 and [DR X.00];

10. STRONGLY URGES Contracting Parties to ensure that in any consideration of conversion of wetlands for biofuel crop production, the full range and value of ecosystem services provided to people by these wetlands is understood;

11. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, when seeking to increase their biofuel crop production, to prefer those crops that do not risk damage to wetlands either directly

through drainage and conversion to agricultural land or indirectly through increased water abstraction demands;

12. INSTRUCTS the Scientific & Technical Review Panel to:

    i) assess the global distribution of biofuel production in relation to impacts on wetlands;
    ii) review existing best management practice guidance for growing biofuels;
    iii) consider the preparation of further guidance for Contracting Parties on addressing biofuel issues in relations to wetlands and water; and
    iv) advise the Standing Committee of its conclusions; and

13. INVITES the FAO and other interested organizations to contribute to this work.