

DOC. SC43-21

Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Action requested. The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached Draft Resolution on “Climate change and wetlands” and approve it for subsequent finalization for COP11 consideration.

1. The attached Draft Resolution has been prepared by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and its working group on climate change and wetlands, led by STRP member Prof. C. Max Finlayson. It focuses on certain aspects of the wetlands and climate change nexus concerning recent developments and progress on those matters, in order to inform and update the Parties on the issues addressed in Resolution X.24, *Climate change and wetlands* (2008).
2. A number of the issues addressed in this Draft Resolution will be supported by further information to be provided in an Information Paper for the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, including wetlands and the REDD+ mechanism; a synthesis of wetland information in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th Assessment Reports (AR4) and other recent IPCC reports; a summary of the Danone Fund for Nature (DFN) 2009 expert workshop on “Achieving carbon offsets through mangroves and other wetlands”; and the emerging issue of “novel ecosystems” in a changing climate.

Draft Resolution XI.xx

Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Prepared by the STRP, submitted by the Standing Committee

1. RECALLING Resolutions VIII.3 on *Climate change and wetlands: impacts, adaptation and mitigation* (2002) and X.24 on *Climate change and wetlands* (2008), which recognized the potential implications of climate change for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and, among other things, called upon Contracting Parties to manage their wetlands in such a way as to increase their resilience to climate change and extreme climatic events and to ensure that adaptation interventions to climate change would not lead to serious damage to the ecological character of wetlands;
2. ALSO RECALLING that in its Third and Fourth Assessment Reports (AR), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that wetlands are amongst

those natural systems especially vulnerable to climate change because of their limited adaptive capacity and that they may therefore undergo significant and irreversible damage, and AWARE that the IPCC is conducting a Fifth Assessment Report to provide in 2013/2014 an update of knowledge on the scientific, technical and socio-economic aspects of climate change;

3. RECOGNIZING the significant progress made since Ramsar COP10 (2008) with respect to knowledge and awareness of the importance of the carbon sequestration and storage function of wetlands, including *inter alia* inland peatlands and coastal vegetated wetlands such as mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrass beds, through ‘wet-carbon’ and ‘blue carbon’ assessments made by UNEP, the World Bank, IUCN, the Ramsar Convention (with the Danone Fund for Nature), and others; ALSO RECOGNIZING, however, that the continuing degradation and loss of these wetlands releases large amounts of stored carbon and so exacerbates climate change and that avoiding such loss and degradation is the primary commitment under Convention [as indicated [COP11 DRxx] on a ‘Framework for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses’]; and STILL CONCERNED that the importance of wetlands in managing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is not yet fully recognized by international and national climate change response strategies, processes, and mechanisms;
4. RECALLING the establishment by the Danone Group, IUCN, and the Ramsar Convention at COP10 of the “Danone Fund for Nature” (DFN) initiative to develop a programme for restoring wetlands, especially mangroves, for carbon storage and offsets, and WELCOMING the progress made by this initiative since COP10, including the development of a large-scale methodology for the restoration of mangroves for carbon offsets, which was approved by the UNFCCC Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in 2011;
5. RECOGNIZING that wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being, and that some wetland types deliver services that are important for climate change adaptation, including by acting as natural infrastructures to reduce the impacts from severe weather events such storms, flooding, and coastline erosion and the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater systems;
6. AWARE that the UNFCCC’s REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism has the potential to provide the developing nations with significant funding for forest restoration activities that contribute to climate change mitigation, sustainable management, and carbon stock, and that forested wetlands are covered by this mechanism, and ALSO AWARE that in 2011 the Society for Ecological Restoration made available a review of the opportunities and challenges for ecological restoration within REDD+;
7. ALSO AWARE that the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) has, at the request of Contracting Parties in Resolution X.25, continued to address wetlands and climate change issues during the 2009-2012 triennium, including on:
 - i) methods for assessing the vulnerability of different wetland types to climate change;
 - ii) opportunities for adaptation to climate change;
 - iii) wetland restoration as a tool for climate responses;
 - iv) the role and importance of different wetland types in the global carbon cycle; and

- v) recent key messages and recommendations concerning wetlands, water and climate change from relevant intergovernmental and international processes and initiatives (see COP11 DOC. Xx); and
8. THANKING the STRP for making much of this work available to the Parties and others through Ramsar Technical Reports and other documents and noting that more of this work is still in progress;
 9. RECALLING that the Key Messages of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) *Wetlands and Water Synthesis Report* and subsequent scientific reports indicate that the degradation and loss of wetlands is occurring more rapidly than for other ecosystems, that global climate change is likely to exacerbate the loss and degradation of many wetlands, that the adverse effects of global climate change will lead to a reduction in the services provided by wetlands, and that the projected continued loss and degradation of wetlands will reduce the capacity of wetlands to mitigate impacts;
 10. RECOGNIZING that the conservation and wise use of wetlands enables organisms to adapt to climate change by providing connectivity, corridors and flyways along which they can move, and AWARE of efforts by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) to address these issues [including through the adoption by CMS at its 10th Conference of the Contracting Parties (November 2011) of Resolution 10.xx on migratory species conservation in the light of climate change];
 11. NOTING the preparation by the Convention on Biological Diversity's Ad-Hoc Technical Expert Group on Climate Change and Biodiversity of a report containing scientific and technical advice on the incorporation of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into climate change mitigation and adaptation activities, and WELCOMING Decision X/33 of the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on biodiversity and climate change, which *inter alia* calls for:
 - i) undertaking actions to reduce the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and biodiversity-based livelihoods;
 - ii) taking ecosystem-based approaches for adaptation, including the protection of peatlands, sustainable wetland management, restoration of degraded wetlands and natural grasslands, and conservation of mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass beds; and
 - iii) enhancing the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of marine and coastal habitats that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change or which contribute to climate-change mitigation, such as mangroves, peatlands, tidal salt marshes, kelp forests, and seagrass beds,

as a contribution to achieving the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Convention on Biological Diversity;

12. REAFFIRMING that integrative policies and planning measures for the wise use of wetlands need to be encouraged in order to address the influence of global climate change on the interdependencies between wetlands, water management, agriculture, energy

production, poverty reduction and human health, and WELCOMING the Ramsar Technical Report from the STRP on wetlands and human health interactions and [COP11 DR xx] which further elaborates upon the many benefits that people obtain from healthy wetlands and the need to incorporate climate change adaptation approaches into efforts to alleviate poverty; and

13. RECALLING that Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (established by COP7 Resolution VII.11 and reaffirmed in [COP11 DRxx]) is “to use Ramsar Sites as baseline and reference areas for national, supranational/regional, and international environmental monitoring to detect trends in the loss of biological diversity, climate change, and the processes of desertification”, but CONCERNED that mechanisms may not be in place for determining limits of acceptable change or adequate baselines or reference conditions against which change can be assessed, or for reporting under Article 3.2 of the Convention;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

14. AFFIRMS that this Resolution builds upon Resolution X.24 on *Climate change and wetlands*, in which the importance of climate change for wetland management was recognized and which requested the Ramsar Secretariat, the STRP, and the Co-ordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CCGAP) to work together with relevant international conventions and agencies, including the CBD, CMS, UNCCD, UNEP, UNDP, FAO and the World Bank, and especially UNFCCC and IPCC, to investigate the potential contribution of wetland ecosystems to climate change mitigation and adaptation, in particular for reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to climate change;
15. URGES Contracting Parties to maintain the ecological character of wetlands as far as possible in the face of climate driven ecological changes and, where necessary, to promote the restoration of degraded wetlands, in order to enhance their resilience, their ability to contribute to nature-based climate adaptation, and their capacity to sequester and store carbon as important responses to climate change;
16. REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to develop guidance on the implications of climate change for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands, including *inter alia* the reporting of change in ecological character and determining limits of acceptable change, the determination of appropriate reference conditions for assessing change in ecological character, and strategies for dealing with the emergence of novel or hybrid ecosystems as a consequence of climate change;
17. URGES Contracting Parties and other governments, where appropriate, to include wetland conservation, management, and restoration activities in REDD+ national strategies or action plans to reduce GHG emissions, sequester carbon and contribute to its long term stability, and provide multiple co-benefits to humans, ecosystems, and biodiversity;
18. REQUESTS Contracting Parties and their representatives to reach out to their counterparts in the UNFCCC and its Ad-Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) in order to initiate and foster greater information exchange on the actual and potential roles of wetland conservation, management, and restoration activities within the REDD+ mechanism;

19. ALSO ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, the private sector, and other stakeholders, respecting national legislation, to pay attention to the potential of incentive measures and funding mechanisms under climate change adaptation and mitigation activities to support the sustainable use and restoration of wetlands as well as to support local livelihoods and contribute to poverty eradication, including exploration of the concept of payments for ecosystem services (PES), consistent with the Convention, internationally agreed development goals, and other relevant obligations;
20. URGES Contracting Parties to develop and implement policies that promote opportunities to take advantage of the regulatory services already provided by wetlands to the global climate system, while at the same time contributing to improving human livelihoods, alleviation of poverty, and meeting biodiversity goals, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets established by CBD COP10 Decision X/1, and to communicate progress, successes and best practices to the Secretariat;
21. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other organizations, where possible, to undertake studies of the role of wetlands in carbon storage and sequestration, in adaptation to climate change, including for flood mitigation and water supply and storage, and in mitigating the impacts of sea level rise, and to make their findings available to the Ramsar Secretariat, the UNFCCC and other relevant bodies, and REQUESTS the STRP to collate and assess such case studies and other information and make this available to Contracting Parties;
22. URGES Contracting Parties and others to make full use of the existing Ramsar guidance on the wise use of wetlands (available in the Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands), much of which is applicable to many of the threats and impacts on wetlands arising from climate change, in developing their policies and adaptations to climate change impacts on wetlands;
23. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat and the STRP to use appropriate mechanisms to work with the UNFCCC and other relevant bodies, recognizing the distinct mandates and independent legal status of each convention and the need to avoid duplication and promote cost savings, to develop guidance for the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes that recognize the critical role of wetlands in relation to water and food security as well as human health and to explicitly define the role of wetland conservation, management, and restoration activities within the REDD+ mechanism;
24. URGES Contracting Parties and other governments, and INVITES the secretariats and scientific and technical subsidiary bodies of environment conventions, to improve collaboration on biodiversity and climate change at the international level through capacity building, resource mobilisation and implementation of collaborative work programmes, including under established mechanisms including the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio conventions and the Biodiversity Liaison Group;
25. INSTRUCTS the STRP to continue its work on climate change as a high priority and, in conjunction with the Secretariat, to collaborate with relevant international conventions and agencies, including UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD, IPCC, UNEP, UNDP, FAO and the World Bank, in the development of a multi-institutional coordinated programme of work

to investigate the potential contribution of wetland ecosystems to climate change mitigation and adaptation, in particular for reducing vulnerability and increasing adaptation to climate change, and also to investigate how social vulnerability to climate change can be explicitly included in the current guidance on biophysical vulnerability of a wetland to climate change;

26. URGES the STRP National Focal Points to engage in and contribute to this work in order to contribute national and regional issues and expertise from their in-country networks of wetland scientists and other experts; and
27. INVITES Ramsar Administrative Authorities to bring this Resolution to the attention of the national focal points of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to promote collaborative work among the national focal points of MEAs in support of its implementation.