

Tourism and Wetlands

Action requested. The Standing Committee is invited to approve the Draft Resolution on “Tourism and wetlands” for COP11 consideration subject to the amendments agreed by the Committee.

1. The attached Draft Resolution responds to the request to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in Resolution X.10 (2008) to conduct a scoping review of needs, options and opportunities for development of advice on scientific and technical aspects of tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and other recreational activities in relation to wetlands.
2. The Standing Committee will recall that in February 2010 the Ramsar Secretariat and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation designed to enhance collaboration on issues of tourism and wetlands.
3. The Draft Resolution has been developed in a collaboration between the STRP, the Ramsar Secretariat, UNWTO, and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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Tourism and wetlands

- A) Opportunities for wetlands and tourism
1. AWARE that wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world’s ecosystems; that many wetlands worldwide, both coastal and inland, natural and artificial, offer major opportunities for tourism and recreation; and that such tourism and recreation is of high economic value to governments, the tourism industry, and local communities;
 2. RECOGNIZING the additional unique tourism opportunities and attractions provided through the internationally acknowledged importance of Ramsar Sites (Wetlands of International Importance);
 3. ALSO RECOGNIZING the value of tourism in and around wetlands for development, poverty alleviation, human health, wetland conservation and wise use;
 4. AWARE that sustainable tourism can bring strong political attention and economic opportunities to securing wetland wise use and the maintenance of key socio-economic wetland values, both in Ramsar Sites and in other wetlands;

5. NOTING that well-managed sustainable tourism can both benefit wetlands and contribute to global biodiversity and sustainable development goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), climate change adaptation & mitigation, the “Aichi targets” established in the “Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020” adopted by CBD COP10, and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015;
- B) Direct and indirect threats to, and impacts on, wetlands from tourism
6. NOTING that many countries have established national (sustainable) tourism strategies, policies and plans, but CONCERNED that these do not always address fully the role of wetlands in tourism and their potential or actual impacts, nor are they linked with national wetland policies and strategies;
 7. AWARE that negative impacts of tourism on wetlands can be both direct (*in situ*), such as through unregulated infrastructure development and disturbance of wetland biodiversity by tourism activities, and indirect (*ex situ*), such as through upstream unsustainable land and water use, and CONCERNED that unsustainable or uncontrolled tourism can result in human-induced negative changes to the vital services provided to human societies by Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;
 8. RECOGNIZING that whilst wetland tourism can be a positive alternative to other land uses, it does not always bring socio-cultural benefits to local communities and other stakeholders, and that in some cases it might lead to the exacerbation of existing problems and the creation of new inequalities in access to resources and distribution of benefits;
- C) Definitions and available guidance relevant to tourism in wetlands
9. AWARE of the role of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in addressing issues of tourism and wetlands and RECOGNIZING that the UNWTO principles for sustainable tourism are consistent with application of the Ramsar wise use principle;
 10. RECALLING that the “Key messages” on “Planning, decision-making, finance and economics” in the *Changwon Declaration on human well-being and wetlands*, adopted as Resolution X.3 (2008), are relevant to issues of planning and decision-making for tourism and wetlands;
 11. AWARE of existing tourism and biodiversity guidelines that are useful for addressing tourism in and around Ramsar Sites and other wetlands, including among others the IUCN-WCPA *Sustainable tourism in protected areas: guidelines for planning and management*, the CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development adopted by CBD COP7, the 2002 World Heritage Convention’s *Managing tourism at World Heritage Sites: a practical manual for World Heritage site managers* and the 2004 UNWTO publication “Tourism congestion management at natural and cultural sites”;
 12. ALSO AWARE of the attention to tourism in multilateral environmental agreements, including through the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme, the CBD’s Biodiversity and Tourism Network, the Convention on Migratory Species’ publication *Wildlife watching and tourism: A study on the benefits and risks of a fast growing tourism activity and its*

impacts on species, and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)
Guideline No. 7: Guidelines on the development of ecotourism at wetlands;

13. ALSO AWARE of the relevance of sustainable tourism in poverty eradication strategies and policies and as a potential contributor to a Green Economy; and
14. WELCOMING the report and analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and tourism” being launched at this meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

15. ENDORSES the UNWTO descriptions and definitions of “sustainable tourism” and “eco-tourism” (Annex 1 to this Resolution) for application in addressing tourism issues for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;
16. RECOGNIZES that additional efforts are needed to increase awareness amongst all stakeholders about the role of wetlands in providing key services for tourism activities and in supporting local communities and their livelihoods, and CALLS for:
 - i) improved integration and recognition of wetland values and wetland wise use approaches into tourism policies and planning in order to ensure effective implementation of sustainable tourism;
 - ii) closer collaboration between the tourism sector and the wetland conservation and wise use sector in order to maximize and sustain the long-term benefits derived from each other’s expertise;
 - iii) support for the active participation of local communities in tourism decision making, development planning, and management as well as provision of financial resources for capacity-building;
 - iv) equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism for local communities; and
 - v) sharing of best practices in sustainable tourism within and around wetlands;
17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, and especially their Ramsar CEPA National Focal Points, to seek synergies between tourism, the branding of Ramsar Sites, and CEPA Programme implementation as an opportunity to raise awareness of wetland wise use;
18. URGES Contracting Parties to work closely and in collaboration with all stakeholders, local, national and international, governmental and non-governmental, involved in tourism and wetland management – such as national/regional policy-makers and planners in the tourism and land-use planning sectors, other national/provincial wetland policy implementation agencies, protected area management authorities and environment ministries and departments, private sector/ tourism investors and developers, and local tourism operators offering services to tourists and wetland site managers – in order to address the challenges for achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands as listed in Annex 2 to this Resolution;

19. ALSO URGES Contracting Parties and others to make full use of the existing Ramsar guidance on the conservation and wise use of wetlands (the Wise Use Handbooks, 4th edition, 2010) and other available tourism, biodiversity and protected areas guidelines, many of which are relevant to addressing aspects of tourism and wetland management;
20. FURTHER URGES Contracting Parties, when considering restoring degraded wetlands, to recognize the opportunities such restoration provides for enhancing tourism experiences;
21. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and others to use Ramsar Sites as a branding opportunity to promote sustainable tourism practices;
22. URGES the Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat, the UNWTO and others to draw the attention of the tourism sector, both governmental and private, nationally and locally, to the importance of wetlands for tourism;
23. ALSO URGES the secretariats and scientific and technical subsidiary bodies of Multilateral Environmental Agreements at international level, and their national focal points at national level, to continue to work collaboratively on sustainable tourism issues;
24. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and others involved in sustainable tourism in wetlands to share experiences and best practices for such tourism in and around Ramsar Sites and other wetlands;
25. INVITES Contracting Parties to advise the Ramsar Secretariat of any issues concerning tourism and wetlands upon which further advice and guidance would be helpful;
26. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat, the STRP, the UNWTO, and other interested organizations to consider developing further advice, including key messages and/or guiding principles for tourism in and around wetlands, drawing upon *inter alia* the analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and tourism”; and
27. THANKS the UNWTO, the International Organization Partners, the STRP, and the Ramsar Secretariat for their contributions to the preparation of this Resolution, the supporting World Wetlands Day 2012 materials, and the case studies in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on “Wetlands and Tourism”, and ENCOURAGES all Contracting Parties and others to make good use of, and disseminate widely, these materials to tourism and wetlands stakeholders.

Annex 1

Tourism-related definitions and concepts

A. Conceptual definition of “sustainable tourism” (UNWTO, 2004)

“Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the **environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects** of tourism development, and a **suitable balance must be established** between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- 1) **Make optimal use of environmental resources** that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;
- 2) **Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities**, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance; and
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, **providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders** that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the **informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership** to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a **continuous process** and it requires **constant monitoring of impacts**, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a **high level of tourist satisfaction** and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”

B. Definition of “ecotourism” (UNWTO, 2001)

“Ecotourism” is used to mean forms of tourism which have the following characteristics:

- 1) All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- 2) It contains educational and interpretation features.

- 3) It is generally, but not exclusively organized by specialized tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small, locally-owned businesses.
- 4) It minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
- 5) It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by:
 - generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,
 - providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities,
 - increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

C. The “carrying capacity” of a wetland for tourism

Assessing and determining such a “carrying capacity” needs to take into consideration two components:

- a) the maximum tourism capacity which does not lead to degradation of the wetland ecosystem and its services (including limits of acceptable change); and
- b) the maximum tourism capacity which does not diminish the tourism experience (visitor satisfaction).

Annex 2

Issues for stakeholders to address in achieving sustainable tourism in and around wetlands

National/regional policy-makers and planners in the tourism and land-use planning sectors should ensure that:

- i) tourism activities and developments do not compromise national commitments to ensuring the wise use of all wetlands under the Ramsar Convention;
- ii) policies and decision-making processes recognize that healthy wetlands can sustain tourism over the long term and so generate continued benefits and livelihoods, both locally and more widely, and, where national or regional tourism plans and policies exist or are under development, wetlands and their tourism value are well integrated into such plans and policies;
- iii) there is increased awareness about the mutual benefit opportunities between wetlands and tourism objectives: the success of each sector’s business is interdependent, for wetlands are the “*natural capital*” of tourism development and sustainability;

- iv) incentives for tourism development are not perverse incentives in terms of wetland conservation and wise use; and
- v) since many wetlands have a wide range of economic benefits for local communities, these must be recognized and integrated in tourism planning in order to enhance and not reduce them.

Other national/provincial wetland policy implementation agencies, protected area management authorities, and environment ministries and departments should ensure that:

- i) there is full integration of wetlands into tourism policy and planning by engaging with the tourism sector; and
- ii) tourism issues are integrated into wetlands policy and planning, including training opportunities for wetland managers.

National and local tourism authorities, the private sector, tourism investors and developers should ensure that:

- i) tourism income can provide financial resources for wetland conservation and management, including supporting maintenance of the wetland features and functions of importance for tourism;
- ii) local communities participate in the tourism planning and tourism benefits are equitably shared with local/host communities; and
- iii) tourism activities in and around wetlands contribute to the creation of alternative sustainable livelihoods for the local communities, such as investing in training for wetland managers and tourism guides.

National and local tourism authorities and local tourism operators offering services to tourists (including guides associations, travel agencies, local communities, lodging, accommodation and transport providers) should ensure that:

- i) sufficient resources are invested into local livelihoods to provide a positive incentive for wetland resource custodianship, as well as into the management and conservation of the wetland in order to maintain its attraction to tourists;
- ii) tourists' behavior is positively influenced and controlled so as to protect the wetland resource they are visiting;
- iii) there is close collaboration with the wetland site managers, in order to optimize the benefits derived from each other's expertise in ensuring that wetlands are well managed to support a long-term tourism experience; this could include study of the wetland carrying capacity, control of tour groups and tourists, monitoring of tourism impact, provision of interpretive information of the features and importance of the wetland to visiting tourists; and

- iv) the status of any wetland as a “Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) is fully displayed and promoted to tourists (through branding and promotion).

Wetland site managers (including NGOs, private and government agencies) should ensure that:

- i) tourism provides opportunities to create and strengthen local community participation in wetland management (see Ramsar guidelines on *Establishing and strengthening local communities’ and indigenous people’s participation in the management of wetlands*, Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 4th edition, 2010);
- ii) tourism’s revenue and investment help provide management capacity to maintain the ecological character of the wetland;
- iii) monitoring of tourism impacts and assessment of tourism carrying capacity are integrated into wetland management planning, including limits of acceptable change to its ecological character, and this information is communicated to those responsible for tourism policy and planning;
- iv) assessments of wetland values are incorporated into tourism and land-use planning and decision making; and
- v) tourism operators in the wetland only promote activities that are compatible with the wetland’s characteristics and with its management plan.