

Matters arising from COP11 Resolutions: Establishing a “wetland city accreditation” mechanism

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to advise on the issues and a potential process to establish a “wetland city accreditation” mechanism.

Background

1. Resolution XI.11(2012) on *Principles for the planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands* in paragraph 28:

ALSO REQUESTS that the Convention explores establishing a wetland city accreditation, which may in turn provide positive branding opportunities for cities that demonstrate strong and positive relationships with wetlands.

2. That Resolution established neither any specific mechanism for the Convention to explore this matter nor any guidance as to which bodies of the Convention should progress it.
3. Since the Secretariat is aware that several Contracting Parties are actively developing initiatives related to wetland (and/or Ramsar) branding of cities, guidance for such Parties on what would be appropriate for a wetland city accreditation process is becoming increasingly necessary.
4. This matter was discussed during the recent 17th meeting of the Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP) under its “Wetlands and urbanisation” theme, and the issues that were identified for further consideration are listed below. The discussions touched on issues relating to existing initiatives which are evolving in several countries, including *inter alia* the Republic of Korea and Tunisia; these, together with examples from other regions, could provide learning opportunities that can assist in the development or field testing of an accreditation process.
5. Since this is becoming a rapidly emerging and evolving issue, the Secretariat and STRP seek the Standing Committee’s advice on the most appropriate approach to taking this matter forwards, noting that no core Convention budget allocation is available for such work.

Elements for consideration within an accreditation process

6. Discussions during STRP17 identified a considerable range of elements for consideration within any accreditation mechanism. These are listed in no particular order below. This is not intended to be a definitive list but simply to represent the main issues emanating from the initial discussions:

- What scale is being considered? Would accreditation be for an entire city or town or for a community within an urban area, or rather for various categories, e.g., “city”, “town”, “village” (in which case these would need to be defined)?
- Would different criteria be required for different global regions?
- Should the accreditation be time-bound or subject to renewal restrictions?
- Who would undertake the elements of an accreditation process, including providing information, filling in forms, validating data, etc.?
- Would there be one accreditation standard or would it be possible to have different grades of accreditation?
- Would accreditation only apply if there was an existing relationship between a city and a Ramsar Site or should it be related to the implementation of wise use principles across non-designated wetlands?
- How strong should the link be with urbanisation processes, such as agglomeration, densification or patterns of consumption and production, and what would the implications for wetland conservation be?
- How could such accreditation demonstrate that pressures on wetlands are proactively being managed and reduced, especially in the urban peripheries where local authorities’ jurisdictions end and environmental regulations are weakest?
- Would there be a “ceiling” or limited number of possible accreditations per triennium, e.g., one of each category (city, town, village, other)? in each of the Ramsar Regions or subregions, as a way to keep the standard and the value of the accreditation high and mobilizing for others ?
- To what extent should the recognition process of Ramsar-accredited urban places be “attached” to the triennial periodicity of Ramsar pre-COP regional meetings and Ramsar COPs?
- To what extent should the existence (or the ongoing development) of a Wetland Education Centre, of Ramsar information signs at the wetlands as well as in the city, town or village, of a water purification plant (avoiding urban waste water being directly released into the wetland), etc., be considered for criteria of accreditation?
- To what extent should regular communication and public awareness products and events, including the celebration, every year, of World Wetlands Day, be considered for criteria of accreditation?
- What should be the role of the local citizens in the city related to the accreditation procedures?
- Should criteria be defined for accreditation that require a close link between the wise use of wetlands by local people or just based on the physical existence of wetlands?
- Should the accreditation be integrated into urban programmes such as urban development master plans and urban development and interpretation plans?
- What interest would the authorities and local communities have in obtaining this accreditation? What would be the added value to the cities?
- Which types of economic activities would be boosted by this accreditation, particularly the promotion of tourism for towns, cities, villages, etc.?
- What would likely be the impacts of this accreditation on the educational system and cultural activities in the city, village, and town?
- What mechanism of accreditation monitoring and evaluation needs to be put in place?

7. The following suggestions were made in STRP discussions for consideration in taking the initiative forward:
 - Collate information on existing initiatives which use a relationship with Ramsar as a quality label, such as the concept of “Ramsar Communes”.
 - Investigate further what Parties actually want the accreditation process to include and achieve.
 - Consider convening a workshop in 2013, possibly in Tunisia or Korea, to explore further the accreditation process.
 - Seek support and resources from individual Parties to develop this initiative further.