

Agenda item 6

Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP):

**An integrating framework for Ramsar's suite of water-related guidance
- Working Draft**

Action requested. The Subgroup is invited to review the STRP's working draft and advise on its finalisation and consideration by COP9.

Note by the Ramsar secretariat

1. As outlined in DOC. COP9 SG-4, one of the key new framework guidelines which the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) has recognised is needed, in order to assist Parties in further understanding and promoting recognition of the role of the Ramsar Convention in relation to water issues, is an integrated framework explaining the inter-relationships between wetlands and water, as well as how and when to apply the various wetland and water resource management guidance, both already adopted by the Convention and being prepared for COP9 consideration by the STRP.
2. A working draft of this integrated framework is attached. It has been prepared by STRP's Working Group 3 (water resource management) co-led by Heather MacKay (Water Research Commission, South Africa) and Rebecca Tharme (International Water Management Institute, Sri Lanka). The Working Group is currently undertaking further drafting work on this document in the light of its review and comments by the 12th meeting of the STRP, and a fourth draft will be made available to the COP9 Subgroup meeting if it becomes available in time.
3. Since it is anticipated that the issues of water and the Ramsar Convention will be a key focus of substantive COP9 debate, the information in this framework guidance will form an important basis for COP9 discussion and decisions on future implementation issues.
4. STRP12 decided that this integrated water framework should be finalised for consideration by the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee and COP9, and that the advice of the Standing Committee should be sought concerning whether the framework should be presented to COP9 as an annex to the COP9 additional technical guidance draft Resolution or as an annex to a stand-alone draft Resolution on water-related issues.
5. The COP9 Subgroup may wish to consider the option that the framework could be taken to COP as one of the set of integrated frameworks being prepared for COP9 as annexes to the COP9 additional technical guidance draft Resolution, but also that a stand-alone draft COP9 Resolution on the future implementation of water-related issues by the Convention should be prepared for consideration by the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee, given the importance of these matters for the future focus of the Convention.

[Unedited draft, not for citation]

Working Draft

Water and Ramsar: An integrating framework for Ramsar's suite of water-related guidance

Prepared by STRP Working Group 3

Contents

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1. Water and Ramsar – an overview

- 1.1. Why does Ramsar need to be concerned about water ?
- 1.2. Why do water managers need to be involved with Ramsar ?
- 1.3. Why do wetland managers need to be involved in water management?

2. Ramsar's suite of resolutions and guidance related to water

3. Water in the environment

- 3.1. The hydrological cycle supports and links all components of the environment
- 3.2. The hydrological cycle is regulated by ecological processes
- 3.3. Changes in the broader environment affect water
- 3.4. Impacts on ecosystems in one part of the hydrological cycle can be propagated to others (often with unforeseen results)

4. Water resources management in the context of the hydrological cycle

- 4.1. Water: an integral part of ecosystems
- 4.2. Sufficient and reliable supplies of good quality water depend on healthy, functioning ecosystems
- 4.3. Water resources management needs cross-sectoral policy, governance and institutional processes
- 4.4. Ramsar's role in integrated water resources management

- 4.5. Principles for development and implementation of Ramsar's water-related guidance
5. A proposed framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance
6. Ramsar resolutions and guidance related directly to water
 - 6.1. Brief descriptions of water-related resolutions and guidance documents
7. Ongoing development of the framework for water-related guidance

Appendices [currently in preparation - not included in this draft text]:

1. *River Basin Management: additional guidance and framework for analysis of case studies*
2. *Supplemental guidelines for the determination and implementation of environmental water requirements for wetlands*
3. *Guidelines for the management of groundwater to maintain wetland ecological character*

What is in this document?

This document presents a framework for Ramsar's current and developing suite of water-related guidance. The document:

- Establishes and provides background on the links between wetland ecosystems and water resources management, through the hydrological cycle;
- Explores how Ramsar's water-related guidance addresses water in the context of the hydrological cycle;
- Illustrates Ramsar's role in integrated water resources management;
- Explains the linkages between the various elements of Ramsar's water-related guidance (scientific tools, policy and institutional aspects, basin planning and management frameworks);
- Indicates cross-references to other Ramsar guidance related to protection, conservation and wise use of wetlands.

1. Water and Ramsar – an overview

1.1. Why does Ramsar need to be concerned about water ?

The hydrological cycle operates at various levels, from planetary through continental scales to river basins and catchments. Wetland ecosystems, in their many shapes, sizes and characters, are integral components of the hydrological cycle, and are critically important in regulating the quantity, quality and reliability of water as it moves in its various forms (vapour, liquid, ice or snow) through the hydrological cycle.

Wetland ecosystems evolve and function within particular physical templates, the characteristics of which are determined primarily by the interaction between water and sediment. Water carves out channels, valleys and basins; sediment moves through these, sometimes accumulating, sometimes being flushed out by flowing water. The constant interplay between sediment and water has created and continues to create a diverse range of aquatic habitats, both on the land surface in rivers, estuaries, marshes and lakes, and beneath it in caves and aquifers. Chemistry modifies these habitats, as rocks and sediments are weathered and influence the range of different chemical signatures that water can display in the environment. People and biodiversity find their preferred places in this rich array of physical and chemical combinations, creating links between themselves and their habitat, and then in turn modifying their habitat or creating new habitats, through various physical, biochemical and ecological processes (such as nitrogen fixation, photosynthesis and decomposition).

Over-abstraction of water from wetlands, from the water catchments in which they occur, pollution of the water which feeds them, can all lead to significant changes in wetland ecological processes. These usually lead to changes in the physical and chemical habitat templates and a resulting, generally irreversible, loss of biodiversity. No amount of careful land management or vegetation management can mitigate these changes. Wetland ecosystems need water, in the right amount, at the right time, and of the right quality.

No water, no wetlands.

1.2. Why do water managers need to be involved with Ramsar ?

Most of the water which is utilised to meet human needs is extracted in the liquid form from surface water resources and groundwater bodies. While some fresh water is obtained through techniques such as fog harvesting and desalination, this currently serves only a small percentage of people's needs. The quantity, quality and reliability of fresh surface water and groundwater supplies are determined by the nature of the wetland ecosystems within which that water is found. Changes to wetland ecosystems, particularly to their structure and function, can lead to significant changes in the flow patterns and chemical and microbiological signatures of water resources. Changes in water resources, particularly in their predictability, can have profound impacts for the people who depend on those resources for basic drinking water, sanitation, food production, economic production and maintenance of social and cultural integrity.

If water managers are to be able to provide water and water-related services to the people of the world on a sustainable basis, then water resources need to be managed and protected in a way that recognises these resources as part of the complex ecosystems that sustain them. Wetland ecosystems are the primary resources from which water and all its benefits for man are derived, and are a major and critical component of the hydrological cycle which keeps us supplied with water. Protecting wetland ecosystems is as essential to people's survival as is wise utilisation of the water and water-related benefits that wetland ecosystems provide.

While the Ramsar Convention does not directly address all of the components of the hydrological cycle (such as atmospheric, terrestrial and marine), the Convention's scope certainly includes those components (surface and subterranean aquatic ecosystems) that are most important for ensuring water for people. Since its establishment in 1971, the Ramsar Convention has provided an array of practical tools and guidance that

are intended to support the protection and wise use of wetland ecosystems, and through this to underpin the protection and wise use of water resources.

No wetlands, no water.

1.3. Why do wetland managers need to be involved in water management?

In order to maintain a desired level of ecological health and function, wetlands require sufficient water of adequate quality, at the right time and in the right pattern. This means that the water requirements of wetlands, whether these requirements are to be met from surface runoff or groundwater, must be taken into account in any plan for abstraction of water from a river basin or discharge of water or waste into a river basin. Water users may have water requirements that conflict with those of wetlands; alternatively, water users' needs may be dependent on the maintenance of wetland ecological character. There may be opportunities for achieving significant ecological, social and economic benefits as a result of negotiating tradeoffs and different ways of sharing the benefits of water (including ecosystem products and services), rather than sharing just the water itself. If the needs of wetlands are to be adequately integrated into water resources management planning and implementation, then wetland managers must enter the "water debate" and get involved, through co-operative planning and management processes, in water allocation and water management decision-making.

2. Ramsar's suite of resolutions and guidance related to water

The Ramsar Convention has always recognised the interdependence between people, water resources and wetland ecosystems. The opening points of the Convention text refer to "the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands as regulators of water regimes". Article 2 of the Convention states that "international significance in...hydrology" is one of the criteria on which wetlands should be selected for the Ramsar List.

The Convention has addressed water issues indirectly since its establishment in 1971, primarily through resolutions and guidance related to maintaining the ecological character of wetlands. However, until COP6 in 1996, water for maintaining wetland ecosystem functions and ecological character was treated as an external factor; seen as beyond the scope of the Convention and generally outside the control or influence of wetland managers. The acceptance of **Resolution VI.23: Ramsar and Water** by the Contracting Parties marked a significant step forward, for the first time making explicit the recognition that (a) water resources management is dependent to a large degree on the hydrological functions of wetlands, and (b) wetland ecosystems need a certain amount of water allocated for maintenance of ecological character, in order to maintain these hydrological functions.

In order to support the development of policy and practice for implementing this perspective, Ramsar needed to become "an audible voice in water debates" at community level, at national level and at global level. To ensure that Ramsar's voice is not only audible, but practical, realistic and based on sound science, a growing suite of guidance related specifically to water issues has been adopted by the Contracting Parties, and is planned for the future. It is worth noting, however, that almost all of Ramsar's resolutions and guidance have addressed water issues in some way, whether directly, indirectly or peripherally, since wetlands and water cannot be separated. The major cross-linkages are indicated in section 6 of this document, which provides a framework for the relationships between the various sets of guidance.

3. Water in the environment

3.1. The hydrological cycle supports and links all components of the environment

The broader biophysical environment is composed of the marine environment, the terrestrial environment (which includes the unsaturated zone of the soil horizon), the aquatic environment, the subterranean environment (which includes aquifers, cave systems and the saturated zone of the soil horizon) and the atmospheric environment. The hydrological cycle (Figure 1) links all these components of the broader environment, and this means that water resources are linked, via the water itself, to all the other components of the broader environment (such as soil, biota, vegetation, air).

Water itself appears in various forms in the environment, reflecting the different phases of the hydrological cycle:

- In atmospheric ecosystems, water is generally found in the vapour or liquid form, or may occur temporarily in the solid form as hail or snow.
- In terrestrial ecosystems, water may be found in vegetation and/or the unsaturated zone of the soil horizon and be part of the evapo-transpiration cycle – the term “green water” has been recently adopted to describe water in this aspect¹.
- Water in aquatic, marine and subterranean ecosystems appears in its liquid form, where it is usually termed “blue water” – this includes water held in aquifers, or in the saturated zone of the soil horizon. In the context of this background paper, aquatic ecosystems are those in which water is generally fresh or brackish (but may include hypersaline inland systems). Coastal marine ecosystems include the estuarine and nearshore marine aspects of water, while the offshore marine ecosystem’s primary influence on the hydrological cycle is through global, continental and regional weather patterns.
- Water as ice tends to be common to terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and when held in glaciers forms a kind of bridge between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

3.2. The hydrological cycle is regulated by ecological processes

There are biophysical, biochemical and ecological links within and between each of the components comprising the hydrological cycle. Ecological processes play a critical role in regulating the hydrological cycle, and are themselves affected by biophysical and biochemical processes occurring within the hydrological cycle. Here, the structural, functional and compositional aspects of biodiversity play a variety of roles, at several different scales, in governing linkages within and between the components of the hydrological cycle. In addition, ecological functions and processes occurring within the hydrological cycle both affect the humans who are part of the associated social system, and are affected by human activities.

3.3. Changes in the broader environment affect water

Water in the hydrological cycle is also affected by natural and human-induced processes of change to land, water and wetlands. These can be due to changes in the topography and morphology of the landscape, which primarily affect the “blue water” component of the hydrological cycle, or due to changes in vegetation and land cover, which primarily impact on “green water” through affecting infiltration and evapotranspiration rates and patterns. Changes in land and water environments affect the rates and pathways by which water moves within the hydrological cycle, and also affect the quality of the water in its various forms and places.

¹ Falkenmark, M. (1999). Competing freshwater and ecological services in the river basin perspective - an expanded conceptual framework. In: *Proceedings of the SIWI/IWRA Seminar "Towards Upstream/Downstream Hydrosolidarity"*. Swedish International Water Institute, Stockholm.

3.4. Impacts on ecosystems in one part of the hydrological cycle can be propagated to others (often with unforeseen results)

The point of the rather simplistic breakdown in Figure 1 of the hydrological cycle into different components (atmospheric, marine, aquatic, terrestrial and subterranean) is that a disturbance or perturbation in one component of the hydrological cycle, whether natural or as a result of a direct human-induced impact, can be propagated via indirect impacts to terrestrial, aquatic and marine components. Figure 1 indicates this, without showing the real-life complexity of feedback loops and higher-order effects. The connections between the hydrological cycle and the broader environment are bi-directional, in that direct impacts on the non-water aspect of the environment can affect water, while direct impacts on water (such as abstraction or waste discharge) can affect the broader environment as well.

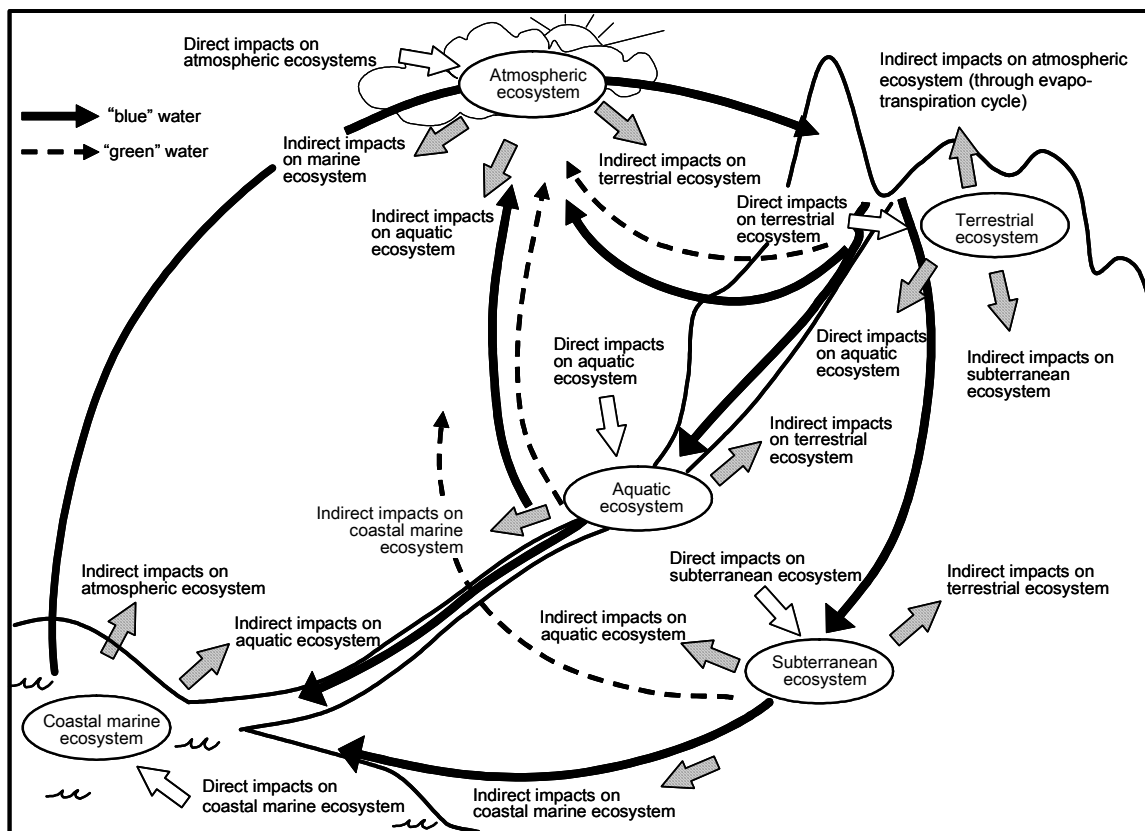


Figure 1: Phases of the Hydrological Cycle, showing the inter-relationships between environmental components and the so-called “blue” and “green” water components of the hydrological cycle, where “blue water” refers to all water that is controlled by physical processes and “green water” is the water that is influenced by biological processes such as evapo-transpiration by vegetation. Note that aquatic ecosystems include all surface water aquatic systems, i.e. riverine, wetland and estuarine ecosystems as well as subterranean systems. *From WRC (2004)*².

4. Water resources management in the context of the hydrological cycle

² WRC (2004). Investment Strategy for the Crosscutting Domain: Water and the Environment. Water Research Commission Report No. KV148/04. Pretoria, South Africa. 12pp + appendices. Also available at <http://www.wrc.org.za>

4.1. Water: an integral part of ecosystems

In most countries, the conventional water sector deals with water primarily as a commodity. From this point of view, water, while it may be provided by and is integral to an ecosystem, is usually delivered to people through some kind of infrastructure such as dams, pumps and pipes. The water is often utilised for agricultural production, industrial production, energy production or human consumption outside the ecosystem from which it was derived. The problem with the conventional approach to management of water as a commodity is that many of the values which humans place on water, aside from just having an adequate supply when they turn on a tap, are dependent on that water being a component of a healthy, functional ecosystem. Thus better connections need to be made between water supply and the water resources which are the origin of that supply.

4.2. Sufficient and reliable supplies of good quality water depend on healthy, functioning ecosystems

In addition to water supply for offstream use, humans have many uses for water as an integral part of ecosystems. These include maintenance of a supply of food, fibre and timber products, transport, recreation, support of cultural and spiritual practices, purification and removal of some kinds of wastes. Ecosystems, particularly those in which water is a critical component or the main component, are resilient and can withstand a certain degree of impact, including abstraction of water, abstraction of food and fibre resources, discharge of waste or modification of the biophysical and biochemical template. However, such disturbances have finite limits: exceeding these limits changes the structure and function of an ecosystem irreversibly, leading to irreparable changes in the range, availability and quality of the products and services which the ecosystem formerly provided, such as a predictable supply of water of good quality, or a certain stock of fish resources. Such changes in ecosystem products and services are usually irreversible and non-manageable.

4.3. Water resources management needs cross-sectoral policy, governance and institutional processes

Human activities impact ecosystems at different places in the hydrological cycle, and thus impact water itself. Hence the water sector needs to manage water resources in the context of ecosystem management, in order to sustain the values, benefits and services of water for both instream and offstream uses. From both government and governance points of view, this requires either removal of the artificial boundary between the environment sector and the water sector (and other relevant sectors), or very close co-operation between environment, water and related sectors. This is where the issue of co-operative governance becomes so important: the responsible agencies must share common objectives for the management of water throughout the hydrological cycle, and must act accordingly; otherwise, their interventions will, at best, be less effective than they could, and at worst, may even be in conflict. These common objectives should be largely defined by the people and societies dependent on the water resources, which requires that governance of water resources be underpinned by institutional structures and processes which ensure that the voice of civil society is integral to planning and decision-making on water issues.

4.4. Ramsar's role in integrated water resources management

The initial focus of the Ramsar Convention was, as its full original title indicates, on protecting "wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitats". However, with time and improved understanding, the role and scope of the Ramsar Convention has evolved, to recognise and address the fundamental linkages between human wellbeing, wetland ecosystem functions and water. This is reflected in the provision, through the Convention, of a rich array of knowledge and guidance related to the principle of "wise use" of wetlands, and also in the more recent initiatives (since COP6 in 1996) to move beyond viewing a few individual wetlands on the Ramsar List as self-contained ecological units, towards a view that all wetlands, wherever they occur in the hydrological cycle at planetary, continental, regional and basin scales, ultimately are important and have a role to play in regulation of the hydrological cycle and provision of benefits to human society. This approach is being widely promulgated in the Commission for Sustainable Development,

as an underpinning aspect of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), of which river basin management (RBM) is a primary component.

In principle, IWRM is an approach wherein a balance is sought between protection of the resource base for long term sustainability on the one hand, and on the other hand, utilisation of the products and services provided by the resource base in order to meet short- to medium-term social and economic development imperatives. In the IWRM approach, it is accepted that the benefits of utilisation of water resources are not limited just to abstraction of water for offstream use, but include many other products and services that are dependent on healthy, functional aquatic ecosystems. These aquatic ecosystems need to be supported within a hydrological cycle whose other component ecosystems (atmospheric, terrestrial and marine) are also healthy and functional.

Protection of wetland ecosystems and their products and services is essential to ensuring the sustainability of utilisation of water resources for human benefits. An IWRM approach recognises the importance of achieving the difficult and dynamic balance between protection and utilisation. Water resource protection strategies and water resource utilisation strategies are interdependent, and need to be equally effective and efficient in order to optimise and sustain products and services. The Ramsar Convention provides a range of mechanisms and technical guidance, aimed at the effective maintenance of wetland ecosystems, thus contributing a valuable foundation for the conservation side of the IWRM balance.

4.5. Principles for development and implementation of Ramsar's water-related guidance

A set of seven principles was set out in the guidance annexed to Resolution VIII.1 on water allocations for wetland ecosystems. These principles have been defined not only through analysis of previous policy documents of the Convention on Wetlands, but also by reference to IWRM principles developed by other international organizations and initiatives. The principles are applicable to the full suite of Ramsar's water-related guidance, and are set out in Box 2.

Box 2: Principles for development and implementation of Ramsar's water-related guidance

Sustainability as a goal. Adequate water has to be provided to wetlands to sustain the functioning of these ecosystems, respecting their natural dynamics for the benefit of future generations.

Clarity of process. The process by which decisions are made on the allocation and management of water and wetlands should be clear to all stakeholders.

Equity in participation and decision-making factors. There should be equity for different stakeholders in their participation in water allocation and water management decisions related to wetlands.

Credibility of science. Scientific methods used to support water allocation and water management decisions related to wetlands should be credible and supported by review from the scientific community.

Transparency in implementation. Once procedures for water allocation and water management decisions related to wetlands have been defined and agreed, it is important that they be seen to be implemented correctly.

Flexibility of management. Like many ecosystems, wetlands are characterized by complexity, changing conditions, and uncertainty. It is essential that an adaptive management strategy be adopted, which requires plans that can be changed as new information or understanding comes to light.

Accountability for decisions. Decision-makers should be accountable.

5. A proposed framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance

It is important to note that Ramsar's water-related guidance is not intended to lead or drive the formulation and implementation of core water sector policy regarding water services and water resources management. Rather, the intention is to provide guidance primarily for agencies and organisations responsible for management of wetland ecosystems, but in the context of the "water debate". Such guidance should promote improved understanding of water sector issues by the wetlands sector, and *vice versa*, and should support collaboration between the water and wetlands sectors. The goal of improved understanding and collaboration between the two sectors should be twofold: protection and wise use of wetland ecosystems, as well as protection and maintenance of a range of ecosystem-dependent goods and services from water resources.

Ramsar's scope and mandate does not include all components of the hydrological cycle (i.e. atmospheric, terrestrial, aquatic, subterranean and marine), being limited to aquatic, subterranean and coastal marine wetland ecosystems. However, Ramsar's water-related guidance does need to take cognisance of, and ensure integration with, other conventions, frameworks, initiatives and activities that affect the hydrological cycle in some way.

Almost all Ramsar guidance fits comfortably into the overarching framework of wise use of wetlands, one of the three main pillars of the Convention. The overall suite of Ramsar's technical guidance can be rather simplistically divided into core water-related guidance, and other Ramsar guidance relevant to water or containing water-related provisions. (We note that this is a very "water-centric" view of Ramsar, and do not intend that this view should in any way detract from the individual and collective importance of all the various available technical guidance documents).

The suite of water-related guidance addresses three main themes:

- **scientific and technical tools** needed to assist in management of those aspects of wetland ecosystems directly related to water (including indigenous knowledge systems);
- **policy, governance and institutional** aspects of water management, since these factors generally determine and influence the nature of people's interactions with water where it is found in wetland ecosystems;
- integrating frameworks, such as **planning and management** frameworks at various scales from regional through river basin to local catchment level, that promote the integration of human society's needs, values and aspirations into processes which utilise the best available knowledge to support the wise use of wetlands and hence the sustainability of water resources.

These three themes are also addressed to a lesser degree, or indirectly, in several other Ramsar guidance documents, that address wider wetland issues and that mention water. For example, the hydrological regime of a wetland is part of the definition of the wetland's ecological character, hence guidance related to ecological character has several relevant references to water-related aspects of wetlands.

Box 1 shows the core water-related guidance documents currently available, those documents intended for COP9, and those proposed as priorities for future STRP work.

Box 1: Development of Ramsar's suite of specific water-related guidance

Resolutions and guidance already adopted

Several resolutions and guidance related specifically to water management have already been adopted, that build on the vision of *Resolution VI.23: Ramsar and Water* (Brisbane, 1996) These are:

- *Resolution VII.18: River basin management* (San Jose, 1999);
- *Resolution VIII.1: Allocation and management of water* (Valencia, 2002);
- *Resolution VIII.2: World Commission on Dams* (Valencia, 2002);
- *Resolution VIII.40: Use of groundwater and wetland conservation* (Valencia, 2002);

Guidance to be tabled at COP9 (Uganda, 2005)

The STRP was requested to provide the following new guidance for discussion and possible adoption in 2005:

- *Additional guidance on river basin management*, which will address sequencing of activities from planning at river basin level to management at wetland site level;
- *Additional guidance on determination and implementation of environmental flows* for wetland ecosystems, which will provide more operation detail, and will also address specific wetland types;
- *Guidelines for the management of groundwater* to maintain wetland ecosystem functions;
- *A framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance* (this document).

Guidance proposed for future attention by the STRP

Water-related issues considered to be important for attention in the 2006-2008 triennium following COP9 are:

- *Guidance for management of water quality* to maintain wetland ecosystem functions
- *Detailed technical and operational guidance on management of groundwater* associated with wetland ecosystems;
- *Case studies and worked examples of the full cycle of determination and implementation of environmental flows* for wetland ecosystems.
- *Case studies of integration of wetlands into river basin management and planning*. This may require identification of suitable emerging case studies which can be tracked and updated as they progress over the next two to three triennia.
- *More detailed guidance on development of core water sector policy and legislation* that promotes integration of the protection, conservation, management and wise use of wetlands, with particular attention to legal instruments related to water allocations for wetland ecosystems.

Proposed future guidance, which could be deferred to post-COP10:

- Preparation of a single, integrated Handbook which brings together all Ramsar's core water-related guidance
- Detailed guidance on managing water-related aspects of wetlands under conditions of climate change and desertification;
- Additional guidance on cross-sectoral policy and legislation (including all the water use sectors) for addressing water-related aspects of wetland management.

6. Ramsar resolutions and guidance related directly to water

The proposed full suite of water-related guidance is presented diagrammatically in Figure 2a. The set of currently available water-related guidance (blue boxes in Figures 2a and 2b) has notable gaps, as the STRP programme of work in this field has been very much determined by the availability of resources and funds to undertake priority tasks. Some of the gaps will be addressed by new guidance to be tabled at COP9 (green boxes in Figures 2a and 2b). Possible future priorities for STRP attention (orange boxes), that should fill the major gaps in the suite of water-related guidance, are also indicated in Figures 2a and 2b.

The water-related guidance should also be consistent with the rest of Ramsar's technical guidance materials, and so in Figure 2b, we indicate where water is currently addressed indirectly in other guidance documents,

and where other guidance documents may need to be updated or revised to ensure consistency in the way in which water issues are addressed within the full suite of Ramsar guidance.

6.1. Brief descriptions of water-related resolutions and guidance documents

Recommendations and resolutions adopted previously, along with the supporting technical guidance materials, are briefly described below. Guidance proposed for adoption at COP9 and possible future guidance still to be developed are indicated in Figures 2a and 2b. It is envisaged that this list will be regularly updated as new resolutions and guidance are adopted and made available to the Contracting Parties.

(a) Strategic resolutions and guidance

- *Resolution VI.23: Ramsar and Water* (Brisbane, 1996) addresses the need for collaboration between the water sector and the wetlands conservation and management sector, notably through promoting integration of conservation and wise use of wetlands into decision-making on land use, groundwater management, catchment/river basin and coastal zone planning. This resolution identified the reconciliation of water management and wetland conservation as a key challenge for the Ramsar Convention in the 21st Century. Efforts to develop and expand Ramsar's water-related guidance all derive from Res VI.23.
- *Resolution VII.18: River basin management* (San Jose, 1999) provides guidance on integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management, and follows on from Res VI.23. The Annex to this resolution provides guidance related to various relevant components of river basin management, including institutional arrangements, policy and legislation, basin-level assessments, water resources planning, maintenance of natural water regimes and land use management. This is a key resolution in the suite of water-related guidance, and it is suggested that more detailed operational guidance on a number of the individual components should be developed in the future (see Figures 2a and 2b).
- *Resolution VIII.35: Natural disasters, particularly drought* (Valencia, 2002) addresses the need for planning and providing water for wetland ecosystems in times of drought and other natural disasters, to ensure that these ecosystems continue to provide values and functions for people and biological diversity. Protocols for allocating water to wetland ecosystems in drought conditions are essential elements of river basin planning and operations.
- *Resolution VIII.34: Agriculture, wetlands and water resource management* (Valencia, 2002) highlights the interdependencies between agricultural activities and wise use of wetlands, and notes the need to balance potential benefits and impacts of one on the other, within an integrated catchment planning approach. This is equally true of other land use activities, but generally agriculture is the most significant activity of those directly linked to wetland ecosystems.
- *An integrating framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance* (proposed for COP9, Uganda 2005 – this document)

(b) Scientific and technical tools

- *Res VIII.1: water allocations for maintenance of wetland ecosystems* (Valencia 2002) deals very specifically, in its Annex and the supporting Technical Paper, with the determination of water requirements for maintenance of wetland ecosystems, and addresses the allocation of water for this purpose. Implementation (for example, design of operating rules for environmental water releases from dams) is not addressed in detail, being the subject of additional guidance proposed for COP9 (Uganda, 2005). Although the emphasis is on determination, allocation and management of water for wetland ecosystems, this cannot be achieved without also addressing

the necessary supporting institutional arrangements, policy and legislation, and decision-making frameworks, and so the guidance includes some discussion of these supporting factors.

- *Res VIII.40: groundwater use and wetland conservation* (Valencia, 2002) recognises the often critical hydrological and ecological linkages between groundwater bodies and wetland ecosystems, and highlights the impacts that groundwater exploitation and use can have on wetlands. This resolution led to the development of the guidelines on groundwater management (see Appendix 3 of this document) which will be tabled at COP9 (Uganda, 2005). Preparation of additional technical guidance related to groundwater and wetlands is seen as a priority STRP task for the 2006-2008 triennium (see Figure 2a).
- *Res VIII.2: Report of the World Commission on Dams* (Valencia 2002) addresses the role of dams, both positive and negative, in water management and wise use of wetlands; highlights the need for integrated water resources planning frameworks that balance the commissioning and operation of dams with wise use of wetlands; notes the report of the World Commission on Dams as a valuable source of technical guidance and “advisory tools” to support decision-making related to large dams. These tools are seen as complementary to Ramsar’s current suite of water-related guidance, contributing a component of the guidance that is specifically focused on dams.

(c) Policy, governance and institutional aspects

- *Res VII.18: River basin management* (San Jose, 1999) is the primary source of guidance on relevant policy, governance and institutional aspects of water resources management, providing an overall framework for addressing these aspects. Additional operation detail may be required in future (see Figure 2a), on options for the content of revised water sector policy and legislation to support determination and implementation particularly of water allocations for wetland ecosystems.
- *Res VIII.1: Water allocations for wetland ecosystems* (Valencia, 2002) and the supporting technical paper provide guidance on policy, legislation and institutional arrangements specifically related to determination and allocation of water for maintaining wetland ecosystems. Additional detail on options for policy and legislation related to water entitlements may be required in future (see Figures 2a and 2b), and could be integrated into a revised version of the current guidance contained in the Annex to Res VII.7 on reviewing laws, or could be a stand-alone element of the water-related guidance suite.
- *Res VII.7: Reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands* (San Jose, 1999) provides guidance on processes for review of legislation and institutional arrangements. While the focus is on legal and institutional provisions for general wetland conservation and management, the processes described in the guidance annexed to this resolution are quite generic and provide a valuable template for similar processes to review laws and institutions in the water sector, thus complementing Res VII.23 and Res VIII.1 which provide information on content and composition of water-related laws and institutions.
- *Res VII.6: Developing national wetland policies* (San Jose, 1999) deals with the development of wetland policy and does not address water sector policy in any detail. However, the advice related to the policy development process, described in the guidance annexed to this resolution, could provide useful pointers for review of water sector policy in order to better integrate the protection, conservation, management and wise use of wetlands. Additional detail on appropriate wetland-specific content of water sector policy may be required in the future (see Figures 2a and 2b).

(d) Basin planning and management frameworks

- Res VII.18: River basin management (San Jose, 1999) and its Annex are the key documents related to planning frameworks at river basin level. *Additional guidance* on integration of wetland conservation and management into river basin management planning and decision-making will be tabled at COP9 (Uganda, 2005: see Appendix 1). The additional guidance is focused on sequencing of the primary activities and issues covered in the guidance adopted in Resolution VII.18. This sequencing, presented as a “Critical Path” is intended to provide a template for selection, recording, analysis and presentation of *river basin management case studies*, considered to be a priority task for the STRP in the 2006-2009 triennium.
- Less detailed guidance on river basin management, related specifically to water allocations for wetlands, is contained in the Annex to Res VIII.1. Similarly, some guidance on river basin planning and strategic environmental assessment related to dams and water resources is to be found in the report of the World Commission on Dams, which is the subject of Res VIII.2.
- *Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7* (2nd edition, 2004: Designating Ramsar sites) contains references to identification of hydrological functions of wetlands and linkages of wetlands with surface and groundwater resources, a necessary task in planning at river basin level as well as at site level. Likewise *Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 8* (2nd edition, 2004: Managing wetlands) contains brief guidance related to integration of wetland management planning with river basin management planning, though like Handbook 7, its primary focus is at site or sub-basin level.

7. Ongoing development of the framework for water-related guidance

The integrating framework described in this document is intended to provide, when fully developed, a “road-map” of the various elements of Ramsar’s suite of water-related guidance, and to indicate linkages between water-related guidance and other Ramsar guidance related to protection, management and wise use of wetland ecosystems. Ultimately, the suite of guidance is expected to take the form of a framework and road-map (this document), supported by a substantial set of technical appendices dealing with specific water-related issues. Appendices would be added to the set over time, and individual appendices might be replaced by updated or more detailed versions as new knowledge and information becomes available. Identified gaps or areas in the suite requiring more detailed attention would be addressed in the STRP programme of work.

It is envisaged that the preceding framework (this document) would be updated regularly as additional resolutions and pieces of water-related guidance are prepared for adoption by the Contracting Parties, depending on the priority tasks taken up by the STRP in each triennium.

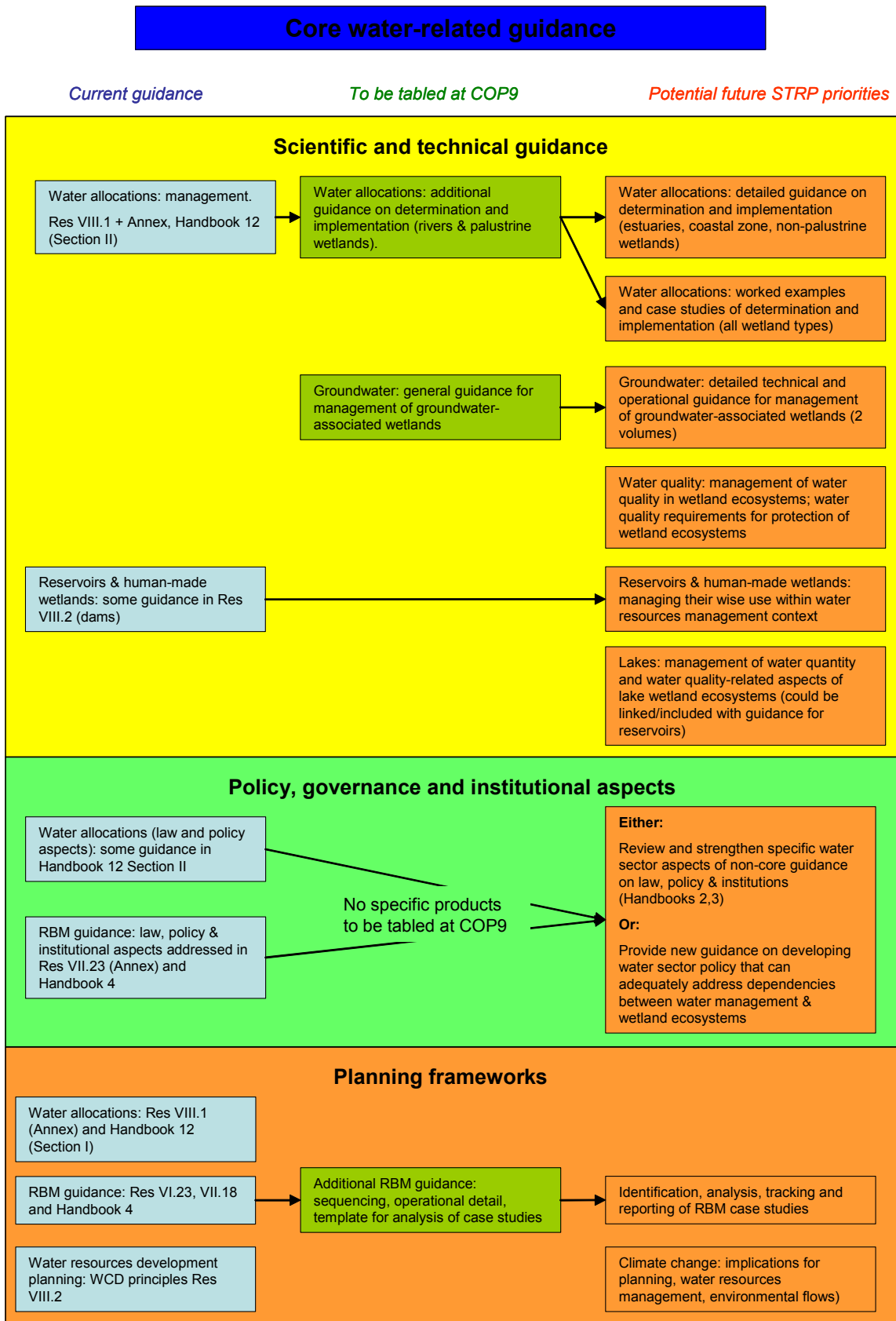


Figure 2a: Core water-related guidance. Blue boxes indicate currently available guidance; green boxes indicate guidance to be tabled at COP9; orange boxes indicate proposed future guidance to be developed as part of the suite of water-related guidance.

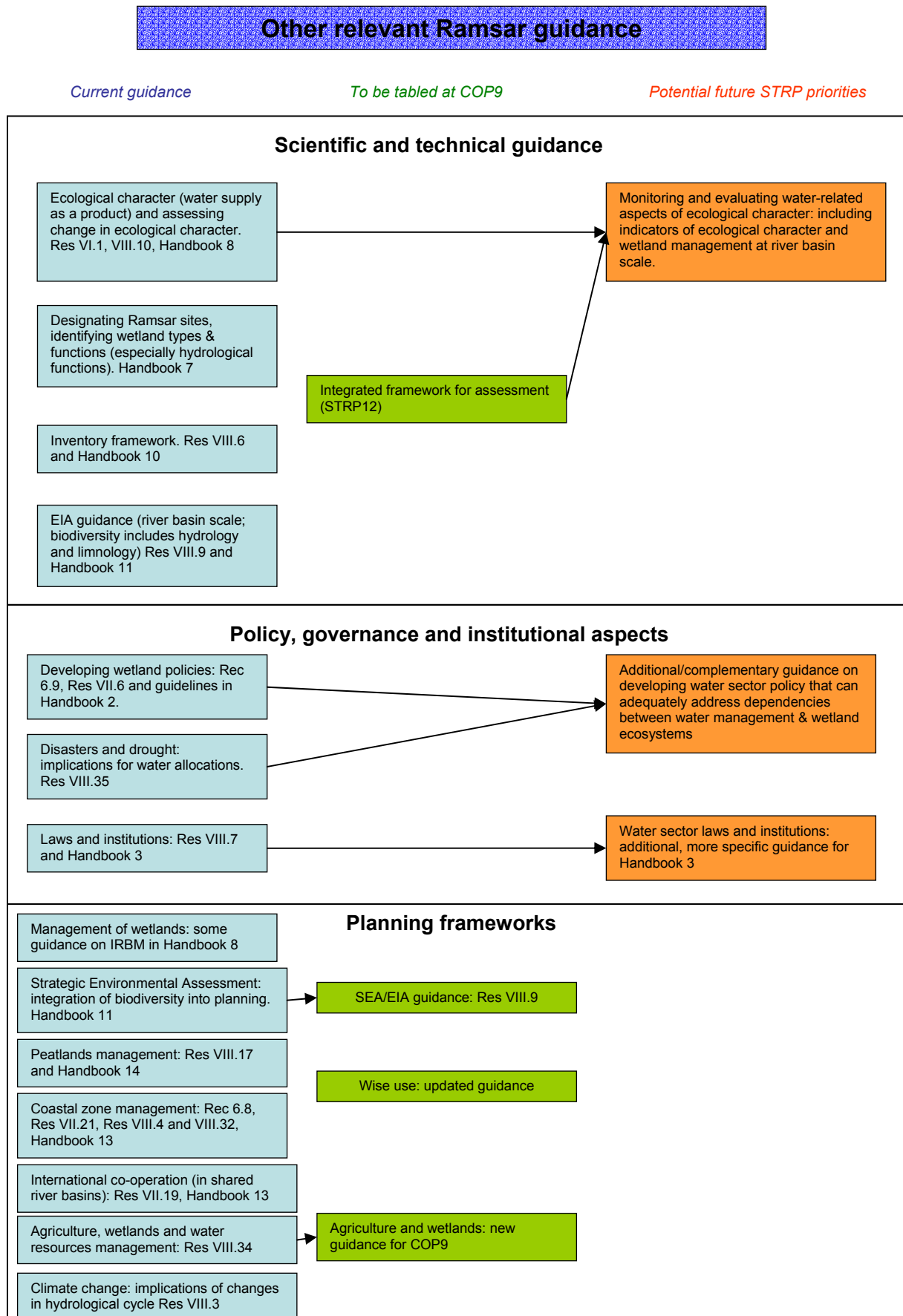


Figure 2b: Other Ramsar guidance containing relevant references to water. Blue boxes indicate currently available guidance; green boxes indicate guidance to be tabled at COP9; orange boxes indicate proposed areas for refinement of guidance to ensure consistency with core water guidance.

Appendices

[in preparation - not included in this draft text]