

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**Meeting of the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP9
Gland, Switzerland, 7-10 March 2005**

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Agenda item 16a

**Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA): a report on the
current state of play**

Action requested: The Subgroup is invited to note the progress of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its preparation of products of particular relevance to the Ramsar Convention.

Note by the Ramsar secretariat

1. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) is now in its final stages, and its main products are scheduled for launch in mid-2005. As has been previously reported, the Ramsar input to the work of the MA has continued in several ways. This note provides a brief update and summary of these inputs and the status of the MA's products.
2. MA Board: participation by the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Chair of Standing Committee and STRP Chair in MA Board processes, including in the preparation of a "Board Statement" of the MA's findings, has continued, and the Secretary General is a member of the MA Executive Committee. This "Board Statement" is scheduled for a global launch in late March 2005.
3. The many chapters of the four main MA reports (Conditions and Trends; Scenarios; Response Options; and Subglobal Assessments) are now completed and in final editing, with publication scheduled for July 2005. These include a number of chapters of high relevance to the interests of the Ramsar Convention, such as the Conditions and Trends chapters on inland waters, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems. Each of the four main reports will include a "Summary for Decision Makers" (SDM).
4. A number of "MA Synthesis Reports" are now nearing completion. These include a report specifically for the Ramsar Convention, as well as syntheses for CBD, for UNCCD, and for the health and private sectors. Each synthesis draws only on material in the underlying chapters of the four main MA reports.
5. The Ramsar Synthesis Report, entitled "Wetlands and Water: Ecosystem Services and Human Well-being", has been prepared by a team co-led by Rebecca D'Cruz, Max Finlayson (STRP Chair), and the Deputy Secretary General and also involved a number of key experts from the MA process.
6. The preparation of this report during 2004/5 has been a complex process, since owing to the tight timeframes for completion it has had to be drafted at the same time as the underlying MA chapters upon which it draws have been undergoing review and substantial revisions, including the addition of new material and removal of other material. In addition, during the drafting of the Ramsar Synthesis Report it became clear that key

material for the Convention's interests was missing from underlying chapters, whose authors had not adequately addressed the key Ramsar questions provided to the MA by the STRP early in the process. This has necessitated ensuring that such material is added back into those underlying chapters.

7. The 12th meeting of the STRP reviewed a near-final draft of the Ramsar Synthesis Report. The Panel endorsed the report (Decision STRP12-15), subject to certain amendments and retentions, notably concerning information on economic valuation of wetlands. The Panel also requested the preparation and inclusion of a one-page list of "key messages" for decision-makers, to head up the report's Summary for Decision-Makers. The Panel also urged that the MA prepare these "key messages" as a separate leaflet, to act as an outreach tool. A final draft of these "key messages" is included as an Annex to this paper.
8. The Panel warmly welcomed the Report and recognized the considerable incremental value the Report brings to the information and guidance available for the implementation of the Convention, notably in its presentation of response options. The Panel have indicated that it would be appropriate for COP9 to request it to further review the report, so as to make recommendations as to how to best utilise the MA information, especially regarding responses, as part of its work for the 2006-2008 triennium.
9. A final draft, taking into account the STRP's comments, will have been submitted to the MA Secretariat in mid-February 2005. This will be reviewed for final sign-off by the MA Review Panel and Board in late March 2005, after which the report will be prepared for publication.
10. The Synthesis Report and other MA work relevant to Ramsar Contracting Parties is scheduled to be profiled during COP9 through a special plenary statement (on Wednesday, 9 November 2005).

Annex

Key Messages about Wetlands from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

- Wetlands encompass a significant proportion of the human living area on the planet. The global area of wetlands is estimated at 1280 million hectares; this figure is recognized as an under-estimate.
- A cross-sectoral focus is urgently needed from policy- and decision-makers that emphasizes securing wetland ecosystem services in the context of achieving sustainable development and improving human well-being.
- Management of wetlands and water resources is most successfully addressed through integrated management at the river (or lake or aquifer) basin scale that is linked to coastal zone management for coastal and near-shore wetlands.
- Wetland ecosystems deliver a wide range of critical and important services (e.g. fish and fiber, water supply, water purification, coastal protection, educational and recreational opportunities, and increasingly, tourism) vital for human well-being and poverty alleviation. Maintaining the natural functioning of wetlands will enable them to continue to deliver these services to humans.
- The principal supply of renewable fresh water for human use comes from an array of inland wetland habitats, including lakes, rivers, swamps and shallow groundwater aquifers; an estimated 1.5 billion people dependent on groundwater as a source of drinking water.
- The services delivered by wetlands have been valued at US\$ 14 trillion annually. Economic valuation now provides a powerful tool for placing wetlands on the agenda of conservation and development decision-makers, to reverse past degradation and to help determine appropriate trade-offs.
- The degradation and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that for other ecosystems. Similarly, the status of both freshwater and coastal species is deteriorating faster than those of other ecosystems. Wetland-dependent biodiversity in many parts of the world is in continuing and accelerating decline.
- Wetland loss and degradation has primarily been driven by land conversion and infrastructure development (e.g. dams, urbanization and tourism), land conversion, water abstraction, eutrophication and pollution and over-exploitation. Losses tend to be more rapid where populations are increasing most, leading to demands for increased economic development. There are also a number of broad, interrelated economic reasons, including perverse subsidies, why wetlands continue to be lost and degraded.

- Global climate change is expected to further exacerbate the loss and degradation of wetland biodiversity including species that cannot relocate and migratory species that rely on a number of wetlands at different stages of their life cycle.
- The projected continued loss and degradation of wetlands will result in further reduction in human health and well-being, especially for vulnerable people in less developed countries where technological solutions and other alternatives are not as readily available.
- The priority when making choices about wetland management decisions is to ensure that the ecosystem services of the wetland are maintained. This can be achieved by application of the wise use principle of the Ramsar Convention.