

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

25th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee  
Gland, Switzerland: 23-17 October 2000

DOC. SC25-11

## Agenda item 15

### The River Basin Initiative: status of implementation and prospects for the future

**Action requested:** The Standing Committee is requested to review the status of the Initiative and its proposed future development, and, as appropriate, recommend actions and priorities for its implementation.

#### Background

1. COP7 adopted Resolution VII.18 on *Guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management*, in recognition of the essential role that wetlands play in water resource management and the importance of seeing to it that the water management community ensure that water allocations and management provide for the wise use of wetlands.
2. The need to adopt an integrated watershed, catchment and river basin management strategy for biodiversity has also been recognised by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at its COP4 through COP4 Decisions IV/4 and V/2 on inland waters biodiversity.
3. In support of the implementation of Ramsar Resolution VII.18, two areas of activity are now underway. First, the STRP has established an Expert Working Group on Water Allocations and Management, which is preparing further water allocation guidelines, including case studies, for consideration by COP8 (see Agenda item 16 and DOC. SC25-12 for further details).
4. Second, under the 2<sup>nd</sup> CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan (see Agenda item 9.), the Bureau, in cooperation with the CBD Secretariat, is promoting the “River Basin Initiative”. The Initiative, being developed on behalf of the two conventions by the Global Environment Centre (Malaysia), is designed to assist Parties in their development and implementation of river basin management in a way that takes an ecosystem approach and incorporates good practice in providing for wetland and biodiversity conservation. Working with and through a number of partner organizations, the initiative aims at establishing a knowledge- and information-sharing network that links and supports activities and projects that follow these good practice principles and practices. A summary and project description of the River Basin Initiative are attached.
5. The core of the initiative is planned to be the promotion of, initially, around 30 good practice projects and activities from at least 20 countries that demonstrate incorporating different aspects of wetlands and biodiversity management in integrated management at

the river basin level, and to provide network access to these examples to assist others in implementing such management. A number of candidate sites/projects/river basins for possible inclusion as good practice demonstrations have been suggested by various interested organizations (see Annex 5 of the attached project proposal).

6. To complement this focused promotion of internationally recognised good practice activities, the Initiative will also provide a more open-ended listing of river basin-related projects and programmes through an Internet-based resource kit, providing all those active in wetland and biodiversity-related river basin management with the opportunity for listing and reporting on those activities. Internet-based information will be supplemented by newsletters, demonstration project profiles, and other awareness-raising materials.
7. The Initiative aims: to be country and user driven; to be cross-sectoral; to complement and promote understanding of other, existing initiatives; to be undertaken in a partnership manner; and to promote only those activities and information conforming to the guidance of CBD, Ramsar, and Agenda 21.
8. Through its activities the Initiative seeks to enhance partnerships between those working on integrated wetland, biodiversity and river basin management, raise awareness of the importance, and ways and means, of integrating wetlands and biodiversity objectives into river basin management, and assist governments and other stakeholders in implementing the provisions of CBD and Ramsar.
9. Preparatory meetings to promote the initiative were held at CBD SBSTTA5 (Montreal, February 2000) and the World Water Forum (Den Haag, March 2000), and the Initiative was launched by the Bureau and CBD Secretariat at the CBD COP5 in Nairobi in May 2000.
10. In the past year, discussions have been underway with a number of potential partner organizations (listed in Annex 2 of the attached project proposal) concerning how best they might contribute to the Initiative. These fall into two broad categories. One comprises organizations, including Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs) and others, who could contribute to identifying and preparing information on good practice activities through their networks and project portfolios, and whose networks would benefit from access to information on good practice river basin management. The second is multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and other organizations that may contribute financially to the development and implementation of the Initiative. Several of these organizations have also expressed interest in the opportunity the Initiative will provide for increasing access to information on past and current river basin projects in their portfolios.
11. Significantly, discussions with potential partners have established that there is interest in contributing to the Initiative not just from those organizations and networks concerned directly with wetlands and biodiversity conservation but also from the water management community.
12. The next steps in developing the Initiative will be:
  - a) issuing of formal letters from CBD Secretariat and Ramsar Bureau inviting partner organizations to join the Initiative, and to establish in what ways they can contribute;

- b) preparation and submission of funding proposals for implementation of the Initiative. These will include submissions to several bilateral donors who have expressed interest in the Initiative and to UNDP-GEF for an analysis of Ramsar sites and river basins at the global level;
  - c) subject to the success of funding submissions, the establishment of a Management Group (Convention secretariats and certain partner organizations) and Advisory Committee for the Initiative; and the undertaking of a needs and contributions analysis at national, regional and global level. This would seek contributions from CBD focal points and Ramsar Administrative Authorities, regional and international partner organizations, and river basin management agencies in different countries and regions.
13. It is anticipated that this will lead to the development of a prototype knowledge sharing system, and the selection (through the Advisory Committee) of initial demonstration sites/projects against an agreed set of criteria, followed by the inclusion in the Internet-based resource kit of information on these demonstration projects.

# RIVER BASIN INITIATIVE

## on integrating wetlands, biological diversity and river basin management

### THE NEED FOR INTEGRATED RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT

Rivers and their associated ecosystems and biological diversity provide life support for a high proportion of the world's population. Worldwide, poor management of land and water resources in many river basins has led to major floods, water shortages, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

Following intense debate over the past three years involving the UN family, the water resource sector and in the biodiversity related conventions, there is now an international consensus on the need for an integrated approach to river basin management, which incorporates ecosystem functions and values.

Guidelines and decisions recently adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands have set out a strategic approach to ensure the proper management and sustainability of ecosystems and associated biodiversity within river basins. However, practical experiences of these relatively new concepts are scattered worldwide and many agencies and countries are seeking guidance on how to move forward.

Given the above, there is a demand for a mechanism to promote sharing of best practices and issues relating to integrated management of river basins based on an ecosystem approach. This is the basis for the development of the **River Basin Initiative**.

### HOW DOES THE INITIATIVE OPERATE?

The Initiative was endorsed by the Conference of Parties of CBD (COP5) in May 2000. It operates under the framework of the Joint Work Plan between CBD and the Ramsar Convention, to support implementation of convention decisions related to better management of inland water ecosystems and associated biodiversity, water resources and wetlands.

The Initiative aims to work in partnership with many international, national and local organizations through their on-going and future activities.

#### **CBD Decision V/2 (May 2000)**

*The Conference of Parties ...Endorses the proposed joint work plan for the period 2000-2001 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance... which includes a River Basin Initiative, encourages Parties, other governments and relevant bodies to support and participate in the Initiative....*

#### **Operating Principles**

The Initiative will be:

- Country and user driven
- Complementary to existing activities
- Undertaken in a partnership manner
- In accordance with guidance of CBD, the Ramsar Convention and Agenda 21

### The River Basin Initiative

#### **Goal**

To establish a global network to share information and link and support activities where the principles of integrated management of biodiversity, wetlands and river basins are demonstrated.

#### **General Objectives**

- Promote integrated river basin management with an ecosystem approach, including wetland and biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.
- Strengthen cross sectoral dialogue and partnership between the water/land use sectors and biodiversity/wetland conservation sectors.
- Support implementation of recent decisions under the CBD, Ramsar Convention and The Hague Ministerial Conference on Water.

#### **Specific Objectives**

- Develop a cross sectoral partnership with participation at local, country and international levels to advance convention decisions.
- Establish a Knowledge Sharing Network to share experiences and good practices across sectors and between partners in a cost effective manner.
- Enhance awareness on integrated river basin management.
- Strengthen capacity in selected countries and agencies.

## Phases of the Initiative

- Preparatory Phase (May 1999-May 2000)
- Establishment Phase (June-December 2000)
- Initial Operational Phase (2001-2002)



## Establishment Phase

### *Main activities:*

- Further consultations with convention focal points, partner organizations and potential donors.
- Undertake assessment at country and international levels to identify specific needs and potential contributions.
- Development of network of partners.
- Development of prototype knowledge sharing system.
- Selection of initial demonstration sites.

## PARTNERS

The key partners are envisaged to be government agencies and NGOs working at the national or river basin level on promoting or implementing integrated management of wetland, biodiversity and river basins.

It is envisaged that a number of international partners including: UNEP, UNESCO, GEF, GWP, WWF, IUCN, Wetlands International, INBO, ICLARM

and IWMI, will share their experiences and offer support to country based activities.

## OPTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

Organisations operating at the local, country or international levels are encouraged to contact the secretariat if they would like to:

- receive further information on the Initiative
- sign up for the Knowledge Sharing Network
- promote or share information on their activities or experiences
- become partners in implementing the Initiative
- provide funds or technical assistance to support the Initiative

## For further information please contact:

**Mr Faizal Parish, Coordinator,**  
River Basin Initiative Secretariat,  
Global Environment Centre, 7A, Jalan 19/29,  
46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA.  
E-mail: fparish@genet.po.my  
Tel: +60 3 7957 2007; Fax: +60 3 7957 7003

**Dr Nick Davidson, Deputy Secretary General,**  
Ramsar Convention Bureau,  
Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland,  
SWITZERLAND  
E-mail: davidson@ramsar.org  
Tel: +41 22 999 0170; Fax: +41 22 999 0169

**Mr Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary,**  
CBD Secretariat,  
World Trade Centre, 393 Saint Jacques Street,  
Montreal, Quebec, CANADA.  
E-mail: secretariat@biodiv.org  
Tel: +1 514 288 2220; Fax: +1 514 288 6588

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biological diversity  
and river basin management



Convention  
on Biological  
Diversity



Convention  
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Wetlands  
(Ramsar, 1971)