

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**26th Meeting of the Standing Committee,
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001**

**DOC. SC26-21
INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

WWF's (Draft) Position Paper for Ramsar COP8

At the request of WWF International, in its capacity as an official International Organization Partner to the Convention, the Bureau is distributing to the Standing Committee the attached document.

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FINAL DRAFT 26.10.01

WWF's (Draft) Position Paper for Ramsar COP8

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1. Ramsar taking its place on the global stage at the beginning of the new millennium

WWF believes that Ramsar's 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties represents a crucial stage in the Convention's continuing growth and evolution as an instrument for promoting the sustainable development of freshwater and coastal resources.

- ❖ **Following soon after the Rio +10 World Summit on Sustainable Development, WWF believes it is vital for Ramsar COP8 to respond swiftly and prudently to the products of Rio+10 to both reinforce and demonstrate the central role it has to play in addressing the issues of poverty alleviation, food and water security and biodiversity conservation.**

It is very timely that COP8 has on its agenda a number of strategic issues which, if dealt with appropriately, can allow Ramsar to be the first of the global, intergovernmental environment treaties to act in response to the outputs of Rio+10. Indeed, the second Ramsar Strategic Plan now under development must reflect the key issues contained in Ramsar's own submission into the Rio+10 preparatory processes. The discussions in Valencia must be open to aligning the new Strategic Plan with the impetus emerging from the Rio+10 meeting.

- ❖ **WWF is concerned that to date neither the drafts of the new Strategic Plan, nor the programme for COP8 give sufficient recognition to the importance of Ramsar's response to Rio+10.**
- ❖ **In relation to Rio+10 WWF strongly supports the 'course corrections' proposed in the Ramsar submission, and urges all Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention to ensure their national preparations give them full consideration and promote these through their interventions and dialogue at Rio +10.**

A summary of the 'course corrections' proposed in the Ramsar submission to Rio+10 are attached.

2. Achieving the full potential of Ramsar's flagship – the List of Wetlands of International Importance

Conserving networks of representative freshwater ecosystems is an essential component of the overall battle for sustainable use of the Earth's freshwater resources. Consequently, WWF is calling upon COP8 to make ambitious commitments to extending the number, area and conservation effectiveness of Ramsar sites throughout the world.

Ramsar's Rio+10 submission (see above) sought to have global recognition of the Ramsar List 'tool' of the Convention as a plank toward achieving sustainable development. Within the Convention itself significant efforts have been made over the life of the Convention to see the List expand, and more recently, to see it expand in a more strategic way. Ramsar's COP7 adopted guidelines to assist these efforts, and set ambitious targets. The Convention has also placed increasing emphasis on the sound management of its Ramsar sites, and has formulated guidelines for management planning and risk assessment and even created the so-called Montreux Record for sites 'at risk'.

2.1 Ramsar site designations

WWF believes that Ramsar site designation represents an effective tool for promoting the protection and sustainable use of wetland resources. WWF's Living Waters Programme has worked closely with Contracting Parties and the Ramsar Bureau over the last two years to secure some major designations and

WWF is convinced that the potential of Ramsar's flagship has yet to be realised – as the following indicates.

At COP7, some 55 Government delegations made pledges that should result in nearly 400 new Ramsar sites being designated by COP8. As the table below shows only 10 of these countries have to date either met or surpassed their pledges.

- ❖ **WWF calls upon Contracting Parties to commit to a target of a 250 million hectares of wetlands under protection in the form of designated Ramsar Sites during the lifetime of the Convention's new Strategic Plan.**
- ❖ **As a first step toward meeting this challenge, WWF calls upon the 45 countries yet to honour the pledges they made at COP7, to act swiftly to secure the corresponding Ramsar site designations and/or extensions prior to COP8.**

Table showing the breakdown of the 398 new sites and 13 site extensions pledged at COP7 (either in National Reports or during the COP itself – as listed in Resolution VII.12), together with information on the sites actually designated or extended since May 1999:

Contracting Party	Number of designations pledged at COP7 (May 99)	Number of new designations since COP7 (to 26 October 2001)	
Albania	1	0	☹
Algeria	4	10	☺
Argentina	1	2	☺
Australia	4	8	☺
Austria	1	1	☺
Bangladesh	1	1	☺
Belgium	1	0	☹
Brazil	2	2	☺
Canada	3 (+ 2 site extensions)	0	☹
Costa Rica	2	1	☹
Ecuador	5 (+ 1 site extension)	3	☹
Estonia	10	0	☹
Finland	50	0	☹
France	3	0	☹
Gambia	2	0	☹
Germany	1	0	☹
Guatemala	3 (+ 1 site extension)	1	☹
Guinea-Bissau	2	0	☹
Honduras	7	1	☹
Hungary	4	2	☹
India	25	0	☹
Indonesia	3	0	☹
IR of Iran	2	0	☹
Israel	4	0	☹
Ireland	19	0	☹
Kenya	1	1	☺
Latvia	1	0	☹
Madagascar	1	0	☹
Malawi	2	0	☹
Mongolia	6	0	☹
Namibia	2	0	☹

Nepal	3	0	☹
Netherlands	27	0	☹
New Zealand	3	0	☹
Nicaragua	3	0	☹
Niger	1	3	😊
Norway	12	0	☹
Panama	2	0	☹
Papua New Guinea	2	0	☹
Philippines	3	3	😊
Poland	5	0	☹
Republic of Korea	1	0	☹
Romania	8	1	😊
Russian Federation	90	0	☹
Slovak Republic	2	1	😊
Slovenia	4	1	😊
Suriname	2	0	☹
Sweden	21 (+ 9 site extensions)	0	☹
Switzerland	2	0	☹
Trinidad & Tobago	1	0	☹
Uganda	3	0	☹
Ukraine	10	0	☹
United Kingdom	10	21	😊
Vietnam	3	0	☹
Zambia	7	0	☹
TOTAL	398	63	

😊 = 10 out of 55 Contracting Parties (18 %) have met or exceeded their COP7 site pledges.

😊 = 8 out of 55 Contracting Parties (15 %) have partly met their COP7 site pledges.

☹ = 37 out of 55 Contracting Parties (67 %) have so far failed to realize any of their COP7 site pledges.

50 Contracting Parties have neither pledged new sites at COP7 nor designated sites since (up to 26 October 2001):

Armenia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Belize, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Chile, China, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Gabon, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

2.2 Applying the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List

Ramsar COP7 expressed concern about the apparent lack of strategic thinking being applied to identifying future Ramsar sites. In response, the conference adopted a Strategic Framework for the future development of the List and requested the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to develop specialised guidance on the designation of specific wetland types currently under-represented in the List.

- ❖ **WWF welcomes the fact that further guidance with respect to the designation of certain wetland types is expected to be tabled and adopted at COP8, but remains concerned that the trend continues that relatively few of the under-represented wetland types (especially corals, seagrass communities, mangroves and peatlands) have been designated since COP7. This clearly signals that Parties are yet to take the Ramsar Strategic Framework seriously and apply it with rigour in order to build the “.....international network of wetland which are important for the conservation of**

global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions they perform.” which was adopted as the vision of the Convention’s Strategic Framework for the List. WWF urges that Parties do so with great urgency.

2.3 Advancing wetland inventory

Ramsar COP7 also identified that one major impediment of implementing the Convention and identifying priority sites for Ramsar designation was generally poor state of wetland inventory around the globe. In response the STRP has developed and present for consideration at COP8 a Ramsar wetland inventory ‘toolkit’.

- ❖ WWF supports the move to provide Parties with a wetland inventory ‘toolkit’ and urges all Parties to make strenuous efforts to ensure it is applied. Without this baseline data wetland resources will continue to ‘fall through the cracks’ of government policy making and management actions.

2.4 Management planning

Ramsar COP8 will have before it a range of decisions and issues relating to the management of listed sites. Of particular interest will be the progress made by Parties toward achieving the management planning target set by COP7. At that time, management plans or similar mechanisms were reported to be in place, or in preparation, for 44% of sites. It was also reported that “*some form of monitoring regime to guide management actions*” was in place for 37% of sites. Based on this encouraging information, COP7 urged Parties to aim to have developed management plans for at least three-quarters of their sites, and to have these being implemented in full, by the time of COP8. Progress toward achieving this target will be determined once National Reports are submitted and reviewed.

- ❖ WWF recognises the importance of management plans for Ramsar sites and other wetlands, and that these should form components of broader integrated river basin or coastal zone management planning frameworks. WWF applauds the progress made in this areas up to COP7, and hopes that the ambitious target set in San José will have been met by the time of COP8.

COP7 also requested that the STRP prepared further guidance in this area for consideration at COP8.

- ❖ WWF looks forward to seeing the updated and further elaborated advice on management planning come forward for consideration by COP8, as it will provide an important tool for Parties to apply in furthering their efforts to see Ramsar (and other) sites managed for long-term sustainability.

2.5 Proposed San José Record

COP7 also sought to give recognition to those sites where management plans are being implemented which “*...are models for demonstrating application of...*” Ramsar’s wise use concept through the creation of the so-called San José Record. The Terms of Reference and guidelines are expected to be under consideration at COP8.

- ❖ WWF is supportive in principle of the concept of there being a San José Record of Ramsar sites which are exemplars or demonstration sites of management action. It notes that such a Record will require carefully drafted Terms of Reference to ensure that eligible sites truly are the flagship sites of Ramsar’s flagship concept. WWF notes that in considering the creation of such Record there will be resource implications for the Bureau which COP8 cannot ignore.

2.6 Montreux Record

The Montreux Record, established at COP4 in 1990 is supposed to be the Convention's mechanism for drawing attention to sites that are in need of priority action because of an actual or potential change to their ecological character. Regrettably, few countries have chosen to take it seriously and apply it as a mechanism to draw attention to management problem and mobilise the necessary remedial actions. It is deeply concerning that as of 21 June 2001, there were 59 sites included in the Montreux Record, and approximately 90% of which had been Montreux Record-listed for longer than five years, with more than 50% having been on the Record for over a decade. At the 2000 Standing Committee meeting, the Secretary General pointed out that, since COP7, all alerts to site threats (i.e. notifications of actual or potential change in ecological character) received by the Bureau had come from NGOs. There had not been a single notification by a Contracting Party. This contrasts starkly with the National Reports submitted COP7 wherein 35 Parties advised of potential or actual changes in 'ecological character' at one or more of their sites.

- ❖ **WWF notes with deep concern that the Montreux Record mechanism, through Parties can meet their obligations under Article 3.2 of the Convention, is not working as hoped or intended and calls upon COP8 to undertake:**
 - a comprehensive review of all Montreux Record sites;
 - a comprehensive review of the Montreux Record mechanism itself, including the resource requirements for meeting all requests for Ramsar Advisory Missions, and
 - to consider options for placing a time limit on Montreux Record listing.

2.7 Amending Ramsar site boundaries, urgent national interest

At Ramsar COP7 two Resolutions referred to this matter. Resolution VII.23 requested the Standing Committee to propose to COP8 a procedure for reviewing boundaries for reasons other than "urgent national interest", and recognized that Australia would prepare two case studies to help inform these deliberations. It also requested that Standing Committee in consultation with the STRP and the Habitats Directive of the EU, and others, formulate guidance in relation to interpreting Articles 2.5 and 4.2. Resolution VII.12 noted "...that Australia will bring forward boundary redefinitions for Coongie Lakes and Western Shoreline of Port Phillip Bay sites and will use these as case study sites for the work on boundary definition identified in Resolution VII.23."

The 25th meeting of Standing Committee (October 2000) reviewed progress with these tasks having before it a paper on the matter of guidance with interpreting Articles 2.5 and 4.2 as prepared by the IUCN's Environmental Law Centre (ELC). While the ELC's draft guidance is comprehensive covering aspects such as "Urgent national interest" guidelines, "Public interest" guidelines, and "Compensation" guidelines, it is at present in a very rudimentary form. Importantly they speak of Governments being required to demonstrate and document the full environmental, social and economic costs and benefits for any consideration of altering boundaries under an "urgent national interest" scenario. Also, they would require Governments to identify all potentially affected interests, who would be the winners and losers and the length of time the benefits would be expected to be forthcoming. The public interest guidelines would require a comprehensive examination of the alternatives, that the full functions of the wetland in an environmental, social and economic sense were known, and that no loss of unique or irreplaceable wetlands would be allowed.

It is uncertain whether or not there will be further consideration of the issue of altering boundaries in cases other than 'urgent national interest' at COP8.

- ❖ **While WWF acknowledges that the lack of guidance with respect to Articles 2.5 and 4.2 of the Convention needs to be addressed, it continues to hold the views it did at COP7 in relation to these matters and will continue to be vigilant and seeks to oppose the introduction of any guidance which is not completely water tight.**

3. Wise use of wetlands - integrated management approaches

Changing the direction of conventional water resources management, to prevent and mitigate adverse impacts is critical to maintaining the ecological health of freshwater systems. Consequently WWF is calling on COP8 to commit to a range of specific targets, including implementation in full of the findings of the World Commission on Dams and a quantum leap forward in the use of integrated management for river basin and coastal zones.

3.1 River basins, water allocations and mountain ecosystems

Ramsar's COP7 took a major step forward in promoting more integrated approaches with the adoption of guidelines relating to river basin management. This important development within the framework of the Convention will be further advanced at COP8 through the (expected) adoption of guidelines for determining environmental allocations for freshwater wetlands ecosystems, and guidance in relation to the designation of mountain wetland ecosystems as Ramsar sites. The latter has been progressed by the joint Ramsar/WWF workshop held in March 2001 with the generous support of the Evian project).

- ❖ **WWF enthusiastically welcomes the expected adoption by COP8 of guidance on water allocation for freshwater wetlands, and urges Parties to seek the earliest opportunities to see this guidance integrated into national water resource planning and management.**
- ❖ **WWF also supports the development of guidance to assist Parties with the designation of Ramsar sites in mountain regions, and again urges Parties to apply this as 'tool' of the Convention as way to protect their 'water towers'.**
- ❖ **WWF notes with concern that the new Strategic Plan of the Convention gives but superficial consideration to these important issues of integrated management and calls upon COP8 to ensure these are strengthened and include suitable targets and timeframes for action.**

3.2 World Commission on Dams

Ramsar COP7 recognise the need for the Convention to consider at COP8 the outcomes from the World Commission on Dams (WCD), the report of which was released in November 2000. WWF understands that the Convention's STRP has reviewed this report and is preparing a draft Resolution for consideration at COP8 which will be supported by an explanation of the importance and relevance of the WCD recommendations for Parties and a digest of the key documents contained in the voluminous Report.

- ❖ **WWF has recommended the following as part of its policy position for the Rio+10 Conference, and also urges the Ramsar Parties at COP8 to calls upon all;**
 - **Governments and utilities to announce plans and funding to restore specific freshwater ecosystems, including decommissioning dams which do not function satisfactorily from an economic, social or ecological standpoint; and for**
 - **Governments and companies to commit to the criteria and good practice guidelines contained in report of the WCD.**

3.3 Transboundary river basins, and the EU Water Framework Directive

WWF notes that since COP7 there have been a number of significant transboundary initiatives taken to see integrated river basin management introduced, and that within the European Union the Water Framework Directive has come into force for all water bodies. It obliges the EU Member States to develop and implement river basin management plans, with wetlands recognised as a key element of such plans.

- ❖ WWF calls upon those countries which share river basins and wetland ecosystem, in accordance with Article 5 of the Ramsar Convention and its associated Guidelines on International Cooperation, to escalate their efforts to introduce appropriate management frameworks which can ensure Ramsar sites are protected, and all wetlands used wisely.
- ❖ WWF also urges the countries of the European Union to fulfil their obligations under the Water Framework Directive, and to ensure that Ramsar's River Basin Guidelines (and expected supplementary guidance on water allocations, mountain ecosystems and dams – see above) is duly applied within all river basin management plans.

3.4 Sustainable agriculture and freshwater resources

While agriculture is a major land user in all Ramsar regions and may therefore have significant impacts (both positive and negative) on wetland and river basin management planning, it is a subject that has never been directly addressed by the Convention to date. It is expected that at COP8 a draft Resolution on 'Agriculture, Wetlands and Water Resources, as drafted initially by IUCN and Wetlands International, will be brought forward for consideration. The working draft calls for, *inter alia*, the STRP to undertake a review of the information available on agriculture and wetlands, and to consider preparing guidance for minimizing adverse impacts (and maximizing positive impacts) of agriculture on wetland ecosystems. It also requests the Secretary General to explore a possible cooperative agreement between the Convention and FAO, and urges Contracting Parties to ensure that agriculture is addressed seriously in the framework of their site and river basin management plans.

- ❖ WWF strongly supports the introduction of agriculture and its impacts into the agenda of COP8 and, subject to viewing the final text, supports in principle the elements understood to be contained in the working draft. There can be little doubt that finding sustainable agricultural practices should be a very high priority for the Ramsar Convention, especially as the pressure to feed the world's growing population increases.

3.5 Integrated coastal zone management

Just as the Ramsar Convention adopted guidelines for integrating wetlands into river basin management, it will have before it for consideration at COP8 guidelines relating to integrated coastal zone management. The preparation of these guidelines by the STRP has been done in parallel with the development of additional guidance to assist Parties with the designation of under-represented coastal zone wetland types as Ramsar sites. This guidance relates to mangrove, coral reef and seagrass types. WWF notes that since COP7 there had been 105 sites designated (as at 8 October 2001) and of these 47 (44.7%) are coastal sites. Disappointingly, only a few of the sites contain these priority coastal wetland types.

- ❖ WWF applauds and welcomes the consideration by the Ramsar Convention of guidelines relating to integrated coastal zone management, and urges Parties to apply these at the earliest opportunity after COP8.
- ❖ WWF notes with disappointment the failure of most Parties to address calls from several previous COPs to designate under-represented coastal zone wetlands types (mangrove, coral reef, seagrass and intertidal wetland types) as Ramsar sites and urges urgent consideration of this by the relevant countries and suitable target setting by COP8.
- ❖ WWF also notes that in many countries there has been a failure to provide the links (both ecological and policy/administrative) between ICZ management plans and integrated river basin management plans, and urges the Ramsar STRP to identify models and exemplars of where this has occurred successfully for consideration at COP9.

- ❖ **WWF also supports a strengthening of the linkage between Ramsar site designation and CBD's Jakarta Mandate programme of work and recommends that the 3rd Joint Work Plan between the Conventions seeks to provide a framework whereby coastal zone Ramsar designation are a recognised priority under CBD's Jakarta Mandate programme of work.**
- ❖ **In the same way, WWF proposes that through its evolving partnership with the Climate Change Convention (see separate statement below), the Ramsar Convention seeks to have the designation and management of coastal Ramsar sites given special recognition by the UNFCCC on the basis of adaptive management to protect coastlines from sea level rise and tidal surges etc.**

4. Budget of the Ramsar Convention, its Bureau and Small Grants Fund

As the membership of the Ramsar Convention has grown (there have been 12 new Parties since COP7 to date) there have not been commensurate increases in the resources provided to the Bureau in order to service and needs and demands placed upon them by the Parties. The past decade has also seen the Convention forge working partnerships with a range of important collaborators, the establishment of the STRP with an expanding workload, and higher and higher expectations placed in the Bureau by the Member States. A comparison between the Ramsar Convention and other international environment conventions reveals that it continues to be 'poor cousin'. For example, CBD's annual budget is approximately 5 times greater than Ramsar's, that of the Desertification Convention is more 6 times higher and that of CITES 2.5 times higher. Few would argue that the Ramsar Bureau, for its size gives remarkable service and produces the highest quality products. Yet, at each COP the issue of an annual budget allocation has been a divisive one with many developed countries stoutly opposed to any increase and most developing countries keen to see the Bureau better resourced.

Over this same period the Convention's Small Grants Fund has operated, having been established in 1991 with the not overly ambitious target of distributing US\$1 million/per year. Regrettably, since 1991 more than 150 suitable projects have not been supported due to lack of resources and the funding target has been achieved in only one year.

As indicated in a number of COP7 Resolution and Recommendations, and as detailed here, it is apparent that due to the budget restrictions imposed by successive COPs, the Parties are denying themselves access and opportunity to gain from the expertise which the Bureau contains. These same budget constraints have limited the effectiveness of the SGF.

- ❖ **Mindful of these past Resolutions and Recommendations, and noting recent comments by the Secretary General at the 2000 Standing Committee meeting, WWF calls upon the Parties to come to COP8 recognising that it is interest of the all Parties and for advancing the mission of the Convention for the operating budget for the next triennium to be increased by US\$1.2 m per year, over and above the current allocation of US\$1.8m. This would make the annual allocation to the Bureau US\$3.0m; a level closer to that required to perform its core functions. WWF proposes that funds these be provided in that budget for the following:**
 - **Funds for a new post to support and guide the work of the STRP;**
 - **Funds for an additional Regional Coordinator for Africa – with the pressing issues in this region, and as memberships grows, this is vital;**

- Funds for a Regional Coordinator for Oceania and Small Island Developing States (see separate position statement) to energize the Bureau's work for these countries;
 - Funds to finance the holding of a COP in a developing country – this is not allowed for at present and means it is unlikely ever to occur ;
 - Funds for a permanent Outreach programme officer ;
 - Guaranteed funding of US \$500,000 per year to the SGF;
 - Reinstatement of the budget line for Ramsar Advisory Missions, which was removed at COP7.
- ❖ While WWF notes that this would represent a nearly 70% increase in the Convention's budget, given the growth of the Convention and failure to keep pace with this growth at the previous two COPs, it is overdue and would represent money well spent.

5. Other key issues which WWF supports

5.1 Private sector, market-based mechanisms and incentives

At Ramsar's COP7 incentives measures were the subject of some attention and as a result the STRP (in partnership with IUCN, CBD, CMS, OECD and IAIA) were asked to review existing guidelines in this area and develop an Internet-based resource kit to assist Parties. The STRP was also directed to prepare a report for COP8 which would offer guidance to Parties. WWF understands that due to lack of resources the STRP will not be able to deliver to COP8 that which was requested. Accordingly, this important issue, and the related aspects such as private sector support for wise use practices, market-based, economically-driven approaches to sustainable use of wetland resources, etc do not appear for consideration in the programme of COP8.

Likewise, these issues will also gain some consideration in the further formulation of the new *Strategic Plan 2003–2008*, under 'Thematic areas' 7 and 8. However the text relating to these issues in the current draft falls well short of taking forward the agenda which many Parties wished to see pursued by the Convention at COP7.

- ❖ WWF calls upon the Standing Committee to review the Technical Session programme for COP8 in order to make time and provide the opportunity for vital discussions on the issues of private sector involvement, market-based mechanisms and incentives. To ignore these subjects will marginalise the Convention at a time when globalisation impacts are beginning to have impact.

5.2 Invasive species

The problem of invasive species continues to grow and it is pleasing to see that the Ramsar Convention at COP7 (in particular) sought to have brought before it at COP8 further guidance on this matter. COP8 will be asked to endorse CBD's guiding principles on invasive species, annexed to which will be advice on how these can be adapted specifically for wetland ecosystems. Regrettably this does not go as far as Operational Objective 5.1 of the current Strategic Plan intended, and so further work will be required by the STRP to bring forward the expected guidance in time for COP9. The COP7 Resolution relating to invasive species also urges a range of actions by the Parties and it is hoped these urgings have not been overlooked.

- ❖ WWF welcomes the guiding principles relating to invasive species as previously endorsed by CBD, but expressed disappointment that due to resource constraints more detailed guidance will not be tabled for consideration at COP8.

- ❖ WWF also urges those Parties that have yet to adhere to the expectations raised in Resolution VII.14 of COP7 to pursue various actions at the national level do so as a matter of priority.

5.3 Toxics and wetland ecosystems

Due to strong leadership from WWF this issue gained prominence and consideration at Ramsar COP6 and featured in the current Strategic Plan through Action 5.1.6 which asked Parties to “identify the potential impact o the ecological character of Ramsar sites of global threats, including toxic chemicals....”. Regrettably, due to various circumstances and lack of resource the issue has been left idle since that time, while internationally concerns about the impacts of toxics has continued to grow.

- ❖ At present the programme for COP8 makes no provision for reactivating this issue which WWF believes is inappropriate. Accordingly, WWF is calling upon the Standing Committee of the Convention to provide the opportunity to revisit and revitalise this important issue at COP8 and for toxics to occupy a central place in the STRP workplan for 2003–2009 with a view to provision of concrete outputs for COP9.

5.4 Small Island Developing States

The matter of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and their participation in the Ramsar Convention is one that WWF has traditionally supported, from the perspectives of biodiversity conservation, marine and coastal resources, freshwater resources and climate change. To date, SIDS have had a low profile in the Convention, in spite of attempts at COP6, and especially at COP7, to highlight issues of concern that Ramsar Convention membership can help with. Since COP7, just one SIDS, Mauritius has joined the Convention.

- ❖ WWF welcomes the achievement of a Memorandum of Cooperation which was signed between the Ramsar Bureau and the Cartagena Convention in May 2000, and the advice that Environment Australia is to finance and facilitate the development of a Memorandum of Cooperation and Joint Work Plan between SPREP and the Ramsar Convention.
- ❖ WWF also notes that at COP8 the Standing Committee will bring forward its advice on how the Ramsar Convention can best respond and assist with implementation of the Barbados Programme of Work for SIDS.
- ❖ However, it remains of grave concern that juts one SIDS has joined the Convention since COP7, and WWF believes this reflects the severe lack of resources available to the Bureau to work with and encourage their membership. As requested by COP7 Recommendation 7.2 WWF again urges the Parties to ensure that within the budget of the Bureau (see section 4 above) there is allowance for “*a small island state internship programme and a specialist position on small island issues within the Ramsar Bureau as a permanent post;*”

5.5 Climate change

Previous Ramsar COPs have recognised the areas of common interest which exist with the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and COP7 adopted Resolution VII.4 (Synergies with other Conventions...), which urged that the Bureau to pursue the development of a Memorandum of Cooperation with this Convention. With significant input from IUCN, the STRP and the Bureau this impending relationship with UNFCCC has been steadily clarifying. COP8 will have before it a draft Resolution setting the basis for developing such a Memorandum of Cooperation.

- ❖ WWF supports the strengthening of ties between the Ramsar and UNFCCC Conventions but notes that the current text relating to this in the draft Strategic Plan 2003-2008

warrants further consideration to make it more specific and focussed on outcomes. WWF also urges the Parties to fully consider the resource implications which these very important, yet increasing number of Memoranda of Cooperation imposes on the Bureau.

5.6 Cultural importance of wetlands

The Ramsar Convention has long recognized that wetlands have cultural values and significance, but until very recently, little has been done to turn this general point into concrete activities. Technical Session 5 at COP8 has the title “Cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use”, and will propose “Guiding principles on the cultural aspects of wetlands”.

- ❖ WWF notes that at both COP6 and COP7 there have been efforts made to have the Convention consider so-called “human-use” criteria for the designation of Ramsar sites. On both occasions concern have been expressed about this move away from purely ‘ecological’ Ramsar site criteria. While WWF remains cautious about any such moves it welcomes this careful and thoughtful attempt to open up this dimension of the Convention’s ‘wise use’ concept which has been sought by the MedWet Parties. COP8 will need to consider these guidelines with great care and to appreciate their full implications.

Attachment: Ramsar's proposed 'course corrections' to the Agenda 21 programme

Decision making structures and institutions for sustainable development

1. **Continuing needed for policy and legal reforms** - While some progress is evident there remains a need for national policy and legal instrument to be align with the expectations of Agenda 21 in many countries.
2. **Fundamental reforms to governance structures** - The evidence suggests that in order to advance toward sustainable development Parties, if they have not already done so, need to consider some fundamental changes to their governance structures, such as:
 - i. the establishment within government of a primary driver of sustainable development, one that can accelerate the integration of social, economic and environmental factors. Such a driver could be a task force, high level council or Ministry established by, and reporting to the President or Prime Minister; and
 - ii. the de-centralization or delegation of decision making to the most appropriate management level. The 'ecosystem approach' developed under the Convention Biological Diversity advocates this through its Principle 2 and suggests that decentralized systems may lead to greater efficiency, effectiveness and equity.
 - iii. the application of the ecosystem approach for the decentralization of big global funds and setting up of more sustainable financial mechanisms at the field level, i.e. site-specific trust funds, theme-specific funds etc.

Role of major groups

3. **Reforms needed in the way the Major Groups are consulted** – The point has not yet been reached where all stakeholder interests are routinely represented around the table when matters of sustainable development and the use of natural resource are being discussed. Countries are urged to review their consultative processes to ensure they are permitting those representing the major groups to have their say in national and local, policy setting and planning for natural resource management.
4. **The poor quality of natural resource information is impeding Agenda 21** -Unless Parties have at their disposal high quality data upon which to base integrated planning, much of the product has to be based on guess work and speculation. While current initiatives such as the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment and the Global International Waters Assessment may help in this regard, the challenge will remain of getting this information into the hands of the people that need it, and ensuring they have the capacity to interpret and apply such information.

Education, public awareness and training

5. **Education remains a priority - and weakness** - There remains an urgent need for the World Summit to encourage a range of actions in the education areas. Little progress has been made with introducing the principles of sustainable development into formal and informal education streams and this warrants very high priority. As indicated under 1. above, part of the solution lies in improved transfer of experiences and information. A failure to engage the education sector in Agenda 21 would seem to be limiting progress

in this area, and steps need to be taken both nationally and internationally to address this problem.

6. **New approach to training and capacity building needed** - The delivery of training in many cases does not appear to be based on a sound understanding of needs or existing competencies. The World Summit should be urged to develop a major Agenda 21 training initiative - a 'one-stop-shop' for training in sustainable development - which will bring together the necessary expertise and resources to see these shortcomings addressed.

Oceans and Seas, Freshwater and Biodiversity Conservation

7. **The Ramsar Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance as a tool of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation** - The World Summit should be urged to recognize the importance of States protecting and using their freshwater and coastal wetland resources wisely, using the vehicle of the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Countries are encouraged to use their sovereign right of designating key wetland sites as Wetlands of International Importance as a 'tool' to assist sustainable development and biodiversity conservation aspirations. As advocated by the Ramsar Convention, these sites can become part of a global network of 'demonstration' sites for sustainable development, while at the same time providing a focus for national actions to implement Agenda 21 in very tangible and demonstrable ways. To date 123 [now 128] Parties to the Ramsar Convention have identified, and designated, 1045 [now 1095] Wetlands of International Importance. These can be found spread across inland water, marine and coastal, dryland, mountain and other ecosystems. In so doing these Parties have made a major contribution to their national obligations under CBD as part of their quest for sustainable development.
8. **Urgent action needed to protect global fisheries** - Allied to 7. above, States should be urged to use the mechanism of designating wetlands as Ramsar sites in order to establish national networks for protecting vital fish habitats. As the population pressure mounts around the world, fish resources are being more and more stressed. By taking the proactive step now of protecting vital fish nursery areas as Ramsar sites, Parties can gain some level of food security and of viable commercial fisheries.
9. **Ecosystem restoration a priority in order to regain services and benefits** - While it remains more cost-effective to conserve the natural ecosystems, the technology now exists to restore many areas which have been degraded or converted to other less productive uses. The Ramsar Convention advocates the restoration and rehabilitation of wetlands, especially in the cases where countries have specific water management objectives (improved water quality, water storage, flood mitigation etc) in mind. The World Summit should be urged to take the proactive step of agreeing to escalate the effort in ecosystem restoration.

The Ramsar Convention and UNCED-related Conventions

10. **Actions needed to see the Agenda 21 – related conventions working as a closely coordinated 'team' promoting sustainable development** - Major weaknesses continue to be identified in the manner by which the suite of conventions operating with an Agenda 21 mandate (either directly or indirectly) are coordinating their work. Without a strong move to achieve a more collaborative and integrated implementation of the UNCED and other relevant Conventions, then it is difficult to see national administrations, and even local stakeholders, being encouraged to think more holistically

about the management of natural resources. The following actions are recommended to address these concern from Parties:

- i. as a mechanism to engage the Major Groups more effectively, document and demonstrate the fundamental science behind the global ecosystem, how it is being broken down, and why. Within this context, articulate the specific role, or roles, of each of convention, how they link – in an ecosystem sense – and how they link operationally. (The following point (ii) considers some of the operational links in more detail.) As part of the same initiative, the World Summit is urged to support the concept of ‘demonstration’ sites to show how the various international conventions can be implemented in an integrated way – to deliver sustainable development. There remains a healthy skepticism among local communities that these high level instruments can be manifested into tangible outcomes for them. ‘Demonstration’ sites that show how this can be done would provide an enormous boost for the aspirations of Agenda 21.
- ii. despite more recent efforts, the general lack of coordination between the multilateral conventions in terms of policy development, science and technology, information management and administration is a major concern. Ramsar’s Joint Work Plan with CBD is considered the model for advancing inter-convention collaboration.

The process of creating a more integrated working ‘team’ of conventions requires acceleration, and the World Summit could, and should, be the catalyst for this. Ramsar proposes the following as significant first steps to achieving these more efficient and effective working arrangements between Conventions;

- a. taking the idea contained in Chapter 38 of Agenda 21 regarding a high-level inter-agency coordination mechanism (paragraphs 38.16-18), establish an international coordinating and information sharing mechanism between the Agenda 21-related conventions, which can assist with developing common programmes of work, harmonizing and cross-linking agendas, improved scheduling of conferences of the Parties, meetings of subsidiary scientific meetings etc;
- b. establish a ‘chairs of subsidiary scientific bodies working group’ for the Agenda-21 related conventions to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and the sharing of information and expertise;
- c. continue to move toward seamless and harmonized information management systems for all Agenda-21 related Conventions, as advocated by the 1999 World Conservation Monitoring Centre’s feasibility report for the biodiversity-related conventions;
- d. promote the further development of bilateral, trilateral or multilateral Memoranda of Cooperation, with associated Joint Work Plans, between conventions, and (as recommended above) include as part of these ‘demonstration’ projects showing integrated delivery of Agenda 21-related conventions;
- iii. the burden imposed by the independent reporting requirements under each Convention is also a major issue, especially for developing countries, and warrants attention by the World Summit. The WCMC Report on harmonizing information management between the biodiversity-related conventions referred

to above proposes measures to streamline national reporting and these require urgent attention.

- iv. the problem of ensuring that all Parties can participate fully in the workings and deliberations of the international conventions is not a new issue. Regrettably no solution has yet been found to this problem, which continues to see developing countries disadvantaged. Some of the actions recommended above, such as better coordination of meeting schedules, more integrated work programmes, simplified and streamlined national reporting etc, would serve to reduce the burden on developing countries and for this reason deserve high priority. Experience has also shown that participation by developing countries in Conferences of the Parties and subsidiary scientific bodies is generally constrained by lack of resources. If equity is to be ensured in these important international discussions then this matter needs to be addressed.

11. **The funding mechanisms in place for the implementation of the UNCED-related and other conventions need review** – While the Global Environment Facility and some national funds such as the Fond Francais pour l'Environnement Mondiale (FFEM) are proving to be useful instruments for the implementation of two of the UNCED-related Conventions, the World Summit should be urged:

- i. to review these mechanisms to make them more effective, more easily accessible to countries in need, and more integrated with other funding mechanisms for sustainable development; and
- ii. to identify tangible sources of additional funding to allow a more effective implementation of all conventions by developing countries and countries in transition.