

Information Note for the Ramsar Standing Committee

on the International Conference on Freshwater, Bonn, Germany, 3-7 December 2001

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1. | The International Conference on Freshwater was held in Bonn from 3-7 December 2001 and was attended by about 2000 participants including 46 ministers, representatives of 118 governments, 47 international organizations and delegates from 73 organisations from major groups and civil society.
2. The Conference included plenary sessions and working groups which considered a wide range of issues from capacity building, finance governance, water supply, sanitation, river basin management and ecosystem services.

Conference outputs

3. The main outputs included an overall Ministerial Declaration, a 14 page, 27 point set of Recommendations for Action, a special Declaration by African water ministers, and a broad range of other outputs related to workshops and side events.
4. The main thrust of the Declarations and Recommendation for Action were related to the need for urgent action to address the need for improved governance of water resources including integrated water resource and river basin management and protection of ecosystems and water quality; mobilizing financial resources; and building capacity and sharing knowledge.
5. Ecosystem and environment issues were highlighted in the ministerial statements and the Recommendations for Action with more than 10 separate references to ecosystems in the final version compared to only two references in the original draft. This reflected the interest in the issue from many delegates including many from the water sector.
6. Some of the major recommendations related to ecosystems include the following:

- 6.1 “Integrated water resources management should be sustainable and optimize water security and human benefit per unit of water while protecting the integrity of ecosystems.”
 - 6.2 “Water resource policies should be better linked with other international agreements and processes such as those concerned with climate change, desertification, biodiversity, wetlands, the marine environment.”
 - 6.3 “Water should be .. allocated firstly to basic human needs and then to the functioning of ecosystems...”
 - 6.4 “The value of ecosystems should be recognized in water allocation and river basin management. Allocations should at a minimum ensure flows through ecosystems at levels that maintain their integrity.”
 - 6.5 “Watersheds, river basins ... should be the primary frame of reference for water resources management.”
 - 6.6 Where scarce public funds are being allocated to water, priority should be given to meeting the basic needs of the poor and preserving the integrity of ecosystems.”
7. The Declarations and the Recommendations are intended to be an important input to the preparation process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, although they are not part of the formal negotiation process. They will be presented by the government of Germany to the WSSD preparatory meetings in January 2002. They will also be widely distributed to governments and international agencies as well as being conveyed to other processes such as the Third World Water Forum (to be held in Kyoto in March 2003) .

Other meetings and outputs

8. Other important meetings that were held during the week included:
- 8.1 Workshops related to the Third World Water Forum, and the associated Water Action Plan and Ministerial Conference. The Ramsar Convention will be invited to participate in all of these three activities.
 - 8.2 A Workshop and consultations related to the Ramsar-CBD River Basin Initiative. A significant number of additional agencies indicated interest in involvement and sharing information through this initiative.
 - 8.3 Workshops on other relevant activities such as The IUCN Water and nature Initiative; The Dialogue on Water Food and the Environment; The Dialogue on Water and Climate change. Activities under these frameworks will be carried out over the coming years and Ramsar parties and focal points may be of interested to become involved.
 - 8.4 A workshop related to the establishment of a World Lakes Alliance drawing together NGO and research networks to develop over the coming year a

world lake Vision to guide the sustainable use of lake ecosystems. The development of the Vision could be linked to the Ramsar Convention in a similar way to the development of the action plan for peatlands. The coordinators of this efforts (ILEC, LakeNet and Living Lakes) may be interested to organise a preparatory meeting at the time of Ramsar COP8.

- 8.5 The launch of the global water partnership Toolbox (a mechanism for sharing of case studies related to integrated water resource management).

Issues and follow up

9. Some of the issues arising from the conference include:
 - 9.1 The enhanced level of understanding of the water community on the importance of ecosystems and the need to allocate water resources to ecosystems and include ecosystems in the management of water and river basins is important but needs to be built upon to facilitate implementation.
 - 9.2. The increasing trend of establishment of cross-sectoral coalitions and partnerships to address key issues such as water allocation between agriculture and nature; water and climate change; etc
 - 9.3 The need to continue efforts to promote effective engagement and dialogue at the national and basin level between the wetland conservation community and the water resource, river basin management community through the River Basin Initiative and other channels.
 - 9.4 The need to enhance efforts to involve Ramsar Administrative Authorities, national committees and partners at international and national level in the preparations for the World Summit for Sustainable Development and the range of water related events and processes over the coming 18 months.
 - 9.5 It would appear appropriate to consider enhancing the consideration of water related issues at the Ramsar COP8 and associated preparatory meetings to take advantage of the interest in the water community of the linkage with ecosystem management.
 - 9.6 The conference organizers will make available hard and soft copies of the conference reports and recommendations for circulation to Ramsar parties and other relevant agencies.
 - 9.7 The Ramsar Convention Bureau and parties should develop a strategy for involvement in the Third World Water Forum and ministerial conference in 2003.
10. A more detailed report will be provided to the Ramsar Bureau.

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7 December 2001