

Ecological character and change in character tasks for STRP 2013-2015

Discussion Note for STRP17 from the Deputy Secretary General

1. Following discussions in preparation for STRP17 with several STRP members and invited experts, we have recognized that there are a number of related or similar tasks on describing ecological character, and monitoring for, identifying, and reporting change in ecological character under different Resolution XI.17 themes.
2. These come from the operative paragraphs of three different COP11 Resolutions:
 - XI.4 (Ramsar Site status), (task 2013-15/20 – Top Priority)
 - XI.8 (Ramsar Information Sheet) (task 2013-15/25 – Lower Priority, but urgent) and
 - XI.14 (climate change) (task 2013-15/41 - Top Priority).
3. Aspects of the task on “Economics of wetland ecosystem services/benefits” (2013-15/59 - Top Priority) may also be relevant to this package of work.
4. At STRP17, rather than seeking to undertake separate streams of work on these issues under different themes of STRP’s 2013-2015 Work Plan, consideration should be given to bringing these tasks aspects together as one combined package of work, and to consider establishing a ‘cross-cutting’ *ecological character working group* to progress this, so as to avoid risks of overlap and duplication.
5. The relevant task descriptions from Resolution XI.17 are provided as an annex to this note, with those aspects of tasks relevant to this issue highlighted as yellow text.
6. Here is a compilation of sub-tasks, grouped into similar sub- topics: tools for monitoring change; reporting change; and responding to change, in ecological character.
7. Note that the work requested on aspects of change in ecological character of wetlands should be character should be considered in the context of the guidance already adopted for such matters, notably Resolution XI.16 on *A framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character* (see Ramsar Handbook 19 (<http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-19.pdf>) and Resolution XI.9 on *An Integrated Framework for avoiding, mitigating, and compensating for wetland losses* (<http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/cop11/res/cop11-res09-e.pdf>).

Tools for monitoring for change in ecological character

- the determination of appropriate reference conditions for assessing change in ecological character, (2013-15/41)
- approaches to establishing the range of natural variability of wetland sites and defining Limits of Acceptable Change; (2013-15/20)
- determining specified limits of change, (2013-15/41)

- the need for and scope of guidance on determining confidence limits and degree of likelihood in cases of “likely” change in the context of Article 3.2; (2013-15/20);
- identification of thresholds of change in ecological character; (2013-15/25)
- monitoring indicators. (2013-15/25)

Reporting change in ecological character

Update and rationalize guidance on issues relating to Article 3.2 of the Convention (2013-15/20), including:

- the role and operation of the Montreux Record; (2013-15/20)
- Set up criteria for, and streamline the procedure for, reporting cases of human-induced negative changes in the ecological character of a Ramsar Site under Article 3.2; (2013-15/20)

Urgently consider scope for minor modifications to the RIS – 2012 revision to support monitoring at Ramsar Sites through:

- possible inclusion of sub-fields related to: change at the site, for example in fields 12a, 12c, and 16 relating to species composition and wetland type; (2013-15/25)
- the reporting of change in ecological character at Ramsar Sites, and how this can be reflected in Ramsar Information Sheets, (2013-15/41)

Responding to change in ecological character

Continue to prepare advice on the implications of climate change for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands, including *inter alia* :

- strategies for dealing with the emergence of novel¹ or hybrid ecosystems as a consequence of climate change, (2013-15/41)
- the need for and scope of guidance on the application of a precautionary approach in the Ramsar Convention; (2013-15/20)

¹ New assemblages of species that have not co-occurred historically, that largely result from direct and indirect human activity, and that occupy new ecological spaces in the world’s landscapes and seascapes.

Annex

<p>Detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character - further guidance (2013-15/20)</p>	<p>Top</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>A) STRP B) & C) Secretariat & STRP</p>	<p>A) Update and rationalize guidance on issues relating to Article 3.2 of the Convention, including the role and operation of the Montreux Record; approaches to establishing the range of natural variability of wetland sites and defining Limits of Acceptable Change; the need for and scope of guidance on determining confidence limits and degree of likelihood in cases of “likely” change in the context of Article 3.2; and the need for and scope of guidance on the application of a precautionary approach in the Ramsar Convention;</p> <p>B) Set up criteria for, and streamline the procedure for, reporting cases of human-induced negative changes in the ecological character of a Ramsar Site under Article 3.2; and</p> <p>C) Streamline the lists of Article 3.2 cases and Sites on the Montreux Record, resulting in one single list of Ramsar Sites with human-induced negative changes in ecological character.</p> <p>A) carried over from 2009-2012. B) & C) from Resolution XI.4, paragraphs 21 & 22</p> <p>Outcomes/outputs: further guidance for Parties on these issues; streamlined Article 3.2 and Montreux Record reporting to Standing Committee & COP.</p>
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<p>RIS and guidance – further development (2013-15/25)</p>	<p>Lower</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>i. STRP, with input from CPs ii. & iii. STRP</p>	<p>i) Develop further practical guidance on the issue of defining Ramsar Site boundaries, reflecting that approaches used may depend inter alia of scale of site, the presence of ecological, national and other boundary situations, landscape type, land tenure, and national spatial planning laws and policies (CPs to be invited to provide information and case studies);</p> <p>ii) urgently consider scope for minor modifications to the RIS – 2012 revision to support monitoring at Ramsar Sites through possible inclusion of sub-fields related to: change at the site, for example in fields 12a, 12c, and 16 relating to species composition and wetland type; identification of thresholds of change in ecological character; and monitoring indicators.</p> <p>Any minor modifications proposed to be provided to the Secretariat to provide to the Standing Committee for final endorsement of remaining minor details enabling them to be incorporated within the finalized RIS – 2012 revision format by January 2015; and</p>
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<p>Implications of, and advice on, climate change for Convention implementation (2013-15/41)</p>	<p>Top</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>STRP, with input from STRP NFPs and Parties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Continue to prepare advice on the implications of climate change for maintaining the ecological character of wetlands, including <i>inter alia</i> strategies for dealing with the emergence of novel² or hybrid ecosystems as a consequence of climate change, the determination of appropriate reference conditions for assessing change in ecological character, determining specified limits of change, and the reporting of change in ecological character at Ramsar Sites, and how this can be reflected in Ramsar Information Sheets, and to collate information from such assessments for future meetings of the Conference of the Parties; ii) Collate and assess case studies and other information generated in response to Resolution XI.14 paragraph 32; iii) Working with interested Contracting Parties and international organizations, to prepare advice on sustainable management of carbon stocks which enhances wetland biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services, thereby contributing to human well-being, with special attention to indigenous peoples and local communities;
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² New assemblages of species that have not co-occurred historically, that largely result from direct and indirect human activity, and that occupy new ecological spaces in the world’s landscapes and seascapes.

				<p>iv) In conjunction with the Secretariat and Ramsar Regional Initiative Networks and Centres, collaborate with relevant international organizations and conventions, within their respective mandates, to further investigate the potential contribution of wetland ecosystems to climate change mitigation and adaptation through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) preparing advice on assessing social resilience and vulnerability of wetlands to climate change, to complement the existing advice on assessing the biophysical vulnerability of a wetlands to climate change (Ramsar Technical Report No. 5/CBD Technical Series No. 57); b) preparing advice on ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change for coastal and inland wetlands; and c) reviewing any relevant advice provide by other MEAs, in particular the outcomes of CBD COP-11; without pre-empting any future decisions of the UNFCCC; <p>Revised; partly carried over from 2009-2012 & Resolution XI.14 paragraph 35</p> <p>Outcomes/outputs: guidance/advice for Contracting Parties</p>
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<p>Economics of wetland ecosystem services/benefits (2013-15/59)</p>	<p>Top</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>STRP, with the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), IOPs, UNECE water convention, UNEP and others</p>	<p>Building on the work of TEEB and others (& the TEEB water and wetland synthesis report):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Conduct a user needs analysis for Ramsar Parties & wetland (site) managers) on tools, knowledge, methodology and data required to support integration of ecosystem service values in planning and decision making; b) Conduct a scoping review of the advancements in ecosystem services (description / recognition, valuation, capture) to support wise use of wetlands, in particular cross sectoral integration; c) Develop a guide to guidance on best practices for integrating ecosystem services values within the response options for wetland management;
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				<p>d) Conduct a scoping review of technical aspects of relevance to the Ramsar Convention in the finance, banking, investment, insurance and other economic sectors;</p> <p>e) Develop an assessment mechanism for the contribution of wetland services/benefits to national GDPs.</p> <p>Carried forward and further developed from 2009-2012.</p> <p>Outcomes/outputs:</p> <p>i) Information Paper + communication product on synthesis of ecosystem service values related to water and wetlands (building from TEEB and linked to SOWW)</p> <p>ii) Needs assessment of tools, knowledge, methodology and data required to support integration of ecosystem service values in planning and decision making;</p> <p>iii) Guide to guidance/guidance/ Information Paper(s) on:</p> <p>a) Recognizing wetland ecosystem services: linking ecosystem services to inventory, assessment and monitoring framework; management planning; risk and vulnerability assessments, etc.;</p> <p>b) Valuing wetland ecosystem services: best practices on economic valuation; participatory valuation techniques;</p> <p>c) Case studies on application of ecosystem services values for promoting wise use of wetlands.</p>
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