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### SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE

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Item 4.2 of the provisional agenda\*

### BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF INLAND WATER ECOSYSTEMS

*Consideration of matters relating to paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4 on criteria for the designation of Ramsar sites, and guidelines for their application, in the context of Annex I to the Convention on Biological Diversity*

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In paragraphs 29 and 30 of its decision VII/4, the Conference of the Parties invited the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention and its Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), in collaboration with the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to elaborate the guidelines for the designation of Ramsar sites with a view to achieving a more comprehensive coverage and to provide guidance on the geographical scale for the application of criteria, including at the national and regional levels. This document explains how the criteria and guidance for their application address the needs of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel has worked extensively on this subject, including through the establishment of a working group, in which the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity participated. The ninth meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, November 2005, adopted enhanced guidance for the application of the criteria and adopted one new criterion. These now collectively address most of the needs identified by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, including, *inter alia*, the elaboration of guidelines, or additional criteria, for wetlands which support: wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species; species or communities and genomes or genes of economic, social, scientific or cultural importance; species or communities that are important for research into the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity including indicators of ecosystem health and integrity; important populations of taxonomic groups with wetland-dependent species including, *inter alia*, amphibians; and further quantitative criteria. Regarding the geographical scale at which the criteria should be applied, including at the national and regional levels, although the Ramsar Convention operates at the national level, there are already existing resolutions mechanisms and/or guidelines for the application of criteria in order to meet necessary supra-national level considerations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its eleventh meeting, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), in recommendation XI/9, paragraph 1, welcomed with appreciation the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Ramsar Convention on the development of revised and additional criteria for Ramsar site identification and designation and the further elaboration of the Strategic Framework providing guidelines for site identification and designation, and extended its gratitude to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention for the opportunity for the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to contribute to this process. In paragraph 3 of the same recommendation, SBSTTA requested the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, to provide a synthesis of progress in relation to decision VII/4, paragraphs 29 and 30, of the Convention on Biological Diversity to be considered by the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice at a meeting prior to the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

2. In paragraph 29 of its decision VII/4, the Conference of the Parties invited the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention, in collaboration with the Executive Secretary and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, respectively, and in line with paragraph 30 of resolution VIII.10 of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, and with a view to achieving a more comprehensive coverage of components of biological diversity through the designation of Ramsar sites:

- (a) To further elaborate the guidelines on existing criteria for the following features:
  - (i) Wetlands supporting wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species;
  - (ii) Wetlands that support species or communities and genomes or genes of economic, social, scientific or cultural importance;
  - (iii) Wetlands supporting species or communities that are important for research into the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity including indicators of ecosystem health and integrity; and
  - (iv) Wetlands that support important populations of taxonomic groups with wetland-dependent species, including, *inter alia*, amphibians;
- (b) To consider the development of additional criteria, including, as appropriate, quantitative criteria; and
- (c) To develop guidelines on the geographical scale at which criteria should be applied.

3. In paragraph 30 of the same decision, the Conference of the Parties further invited the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, in collaboration with the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to provide guidance, based on experiences, for the interpretation and application of the Ramsar criteria at the national and regional levels.

4. The present document reports on the current situation regarding these matters. Section II provides an overview of the considerations made by the STRP and relevant resolutions adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting. Section III provides an analysis of the extent to which paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4 are addressed by the revised criteria and guidance adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting.

## **II. CONSIDERATIONS BY THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL AND RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS AND GUIDANCE ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION AT ITS NINTH MEETING**

5. Resolution VIII.10 of the eighth meeting the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention “instructs the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), with the assistance of the Ramsar Bureau, interested Contracting Parties, and other relevant organizations, to develop, for consideration at COP-9, additional criteria and guidelines for the identification and designation of Ramsar sites concerning socio-economic and cultural values and functions that are relevant to biological diversity, as listed in Annex I of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which would be applied on each occasion in conjunction with one or more existing criteria for the identification and designation of Ramsar sites; and to include in this work a full analysis of the implications for Contracting Parties of the implementation of such criteria for the management of Ramsar sites, including Contracting Party obligations and responsibilities”.

6. In response to this resolution, STRP established Working Group 4 (Ramsar Site Designation) to consider this matter further during the triennium (2002-2005). This process operated mainly through an electronic discussion forum. Progress on outputs was discussed at a workshop held in Wageningen, Netherlands, from 18 to 25 July 2004. The Working Group is composed of a flexible number of specialists from a wide range of academic, technical, scientific, non-governmental organization and international-organization backgrounds. A member of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity participated in the working group and attended the workshop, drawing specific attention to paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4. The Working Group considered relevant issues in significant detail. A number of informal comprehensive discussion documents were produced through this process.

7. The technical advice from Working Group 4 was presented to the twelfth meeting of STRP, held in Gland, Switzerland, from 31 January to 5 February, 2005, which deliberated on the matters further and prepared draft advice to be submitted to the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, in November, 2005.

8. Changes to the previous Ramsar site designation criteria were adopted at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention (see below) together with the adoption of an enhanced draft Strategic Framework text. The Strategic Framework provides, *inter alia*, guidance to Parties on the application of Ramsar site designation criteria.

9. The adopted changes to the criteria, and Strategic Framework, are not limited to those relevant to paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4. The Executive Secretary, in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, has therefore provided the following summary of the discussion, developments and changes which are of most direct relevance to that decision.

## **III. CROSS-REFERENCING PARAGRAPHS 29 AND 30 OF DECISION VII/4 OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY WITH CURRENT RAMSAR CRITERIA AND GUIDANCE FOR THEIR APPLICATION**

10. The following section provides a summary of the extents to which the Strategic Framework, and where relevant the new Ramsar site designation criteria, accommodate the requirements for each of the various sub-sections or topics of paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4, following the sequence as listed in that decision.

**A. *Further elaboration of the guidelines on existing criteria for various features (decision VII/4, para 29(a))***

**1. *Criteria for the identification and designation of wetlands supporting wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species (decision VII/4, para. 29 (a) (i))***

11. The identification and designation of sites for reasons of supporting wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species can already occur using the existing Criteria 2 (referring to vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities), 3 (referring to populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region), 7 (if the species is a fish) and newly adopted Criterion 9 (“A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or sub-species of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species” (see Ramsar resolution IX.1, annex B)).

12. As wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species are not excluded from such criteria, Parties can identify and designate sites using these criteria. Wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species of plants can be included under Criteria 2 and 3, whereas these and Criteria 7 and 9 apply to animals.

**2. *Criteria for the identification and designation of wetlands that support species or communities and genomes or genes of economic, social, scientific or cultural importance (decision VII/4, para. 29 (a) (ii))***

13. Subparagraph 29 (a) (ii) of decision VII/4 includes several different subjects which, for ease of discussion, have been grouped below into the following issues: first, consideration of criteria using “genomes or genes”, irrespective of the nature of their importance (as opposed to “species” or “communities”); second, issues relating to the economic, social and cultural importance (discussed together) of any species, communities and genomes or genes; and, third, the issue of “scientific importance” of any species, communities and genomes or genes.

*Genomes or genes*

14. The options for site identification and designation using genetic criteria, at below the species level, are not clear. However, such criteria are not specifically excluded from the currently proposed list. For example, Criterion 2 might be used, depending upon the definition or interpretation of “species”.

15. A more technically robust argument relates to the use of the term “population” within the criteria. When used in biology, the term generally refers to the specific genetic characteristics of a group of organisms within the species. A “population” being generally regarded as a group of organisms that are distinct (genetically) from other groups (or the main group) of a species. “Populations” are, generally, reproductively isolated from other groups within the species (which is how the genetic distinction is sustained). Therefore, “population” can be considered as a surrogate term for “genome” or “genes”.

16. Site identification and designation can occur using the status of a population of plant and/or animal species or sub-species under Criteria 3, 6 (for water birds), 7 (for fish) and 9 (other non-avian animal species).

17. Wetland ecosystems are characterized by a high degree of genetic diversity (particularly when considering genetic variability between populations within and between river basins, and lakes). This is an important component of biodiversity under increasing threat (particularly through the impacts of invasive alien genes). Therefore, consideration might be given to alerting Parties to the advisability and urgency for site identification and designation, using the existing criteria, for conserving genomes and genes.

*Economic, social and cultural importance*

18. Discussion of site designation using criteria referring to an aspect of “economic, social or cultural importance” warrants broader discussion since the Ramsar Convention has been considering this subject in detail due to the long-standing issue of whether or not a site can be designated based upon criteria

referring to benefits derived from it for people (as opposed to conservation objectives for biota in a more narrow sense).

19. Site designation using economic, social or cultural criteria is already feasible in the context of the application of Criterion 1. The following is an explanation of this situation and how the Strategic Framework has been amended to better accommodate this consideration.

20. Existing management guidelines (resolution V.7 and subsequently as related to Article 3.1 of the Ramsar Convention) already strongly stresses the importance of cultural and socio-economic considerations in the context of working with local stakeholders. Resolution VIII.19 established '*Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites*' which gave explicit guidance to Contracting Parties.

21. Issues of cultural values and socio-economic activities are implicitly recognized in Ramsar's existing site selection guideline 168 (related to Criterion 1), particularly as it relates to the ecological role of wetlands:

"168. Objective 1 and, in particular 1.2 (paragraph 10 above [in the existing guidelines for site designation]), indicates that another consideration under this criterion [1] is to give priority to those wetlands which play a substantial **hydrological, biological or ecological** role in the natural functioning of a major river basin or coastal system."

22. In this context, the hydrological, biological, or ecological role referred to includes ecosystem services amongst which are sustainable socio-economic benefits and cultural values. That is, the "ecological role" of a wetland includes the services it provides. This is consistent with the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment on the services provided by biodiversity, which includes those socio-economic and cultural services provided to humans.

23. The ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention has more explicitly highlighted the existing possibilities for the selection of Ramsar sites for ecosystem services (including cultural values and sustainable socio-economic activities) through the application of Criterion 1. This centres on the concept of maintaining ecological character. Contracting Parties have assumed obligations (under resolutions V.2, VI.1 and VIII.8, and the 2003-2008 Strategic Plan, all as related to Article 3 of the Convention) to strive to maintain, as far as is possible, the ecological character of Ramsar sites using management planning and other policy tools.

24. Expanded guidance for the application of Criterion 1 in this context are provided in Annex A to Ramsar resolution IX.1 (A conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of ecological character). A summary of relevant points is:

(a) Applying the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's terms and concepts, under which services form an integral part of ecosystems, an updated definition of "ecological character" is: "the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time" (resolution IX.1 annex A; paragraph 15); and

(b) Within this context, ecosystem benefits are defined in accordance with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment definition of ecosystem services as "the benefits that people receive"; included amongst these services are provisioning, regulating and cultural services that directly affect people (resolution IX.1 Annex A, paragraph 7).

25. In effect, therefore, Criterion 1 (a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland) can be used to designate a site based upon economic, cultural or social criteria because an obligation on site designation is to maintain the ecological character of the site (at the time of designation) and that character is now defined (or clarified) as including socioeconomic and/or cultural services provided.

26. Resolution IX.1, annex B, paragraph A2. also provides additional guidance, stating:

**“Sites of importance for the interactions between the ecosystem structure and functioning and their benefits.** Wetlands exist within landscapes in which people’s activities are influenced by the wetlands and their delivery of ecosystem benefits/services, and in which the wetlands themselves are influenced by the use of such benefits/services by dependent local communities (e.g., by forms of traditional management). There are many examples where the ecosystem structure and functioning of the wetland has developed as a result of cultural features or legacies. There are also many examples where the maintenance of the ecosystem structure and functioning of wetlands depends upon the interaction between human activities and the wetland’s biological, chemical and physical components.”

27. The obligation to maintain any cultural and socio-economic values and functions would apply only to those sites where these were specifically highlighted as grounds for site qualification under Criterion 1. This would not apply to those sites, previously designated using Criterion 1, where these ecosystem services were not specifically highlighted by the Contracting Party. Thus, this maintenance obligation lies at the discretion of the Contracting Party. Such maintenance of ecological character to sustain the features of a Ramsar site’s international importance is no different, in principle or practice, to obligations that already exist for these sites. The only substantive change is that, through highlighting the role of specific provisioning, regulating, cultural and/or supporting services as grounds for selection of a Ramsar site under Criterion 1, a Contracting Party would give clearer expression to the need for appropriate management actions to sustain the specified ecosystem services as part of the ecological character of the site, and thus promote its wise-use.

28. Reporting on issues of cultural and socio-economic importance for Ramsar sites already occurs in the context of triennial national reports (Ramsar resolution II.1 and subsequent resolution) and Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) and their required updates (resolution V.3 and subsequent resolutions). For the RIS, in principle, the obligation to report on issues of cultural and socio-economic importance already exists (RIS, section 21). The guidance for application of Criterion 1 therefore creates no new reporting obligations. A Contracting Party would determine whether these management objectives are compatible with the objectives set for maintenance of ecological aspects of a site’s importance, and take appropriate action if they are not so compatible. Fundamentally, no new obligations are created for the management of those Ramsar reporting sites identified on the basis of their cultural or sustainable socio-economic values and functions.

29. A key issue in the application of Criterion 1 and its revised guidance is how to define levels of *international* importance (in contrast to other levels of importance such as national or local importance). Precise definitions are problematic given the global scope of the Ramsar Convention and thus of its selection criteria and associated guidance. To this end, the proposed new guidance associated with Criterion 1 highlights the need for proportionality in the application of Criterion 1. Ultimately, it will be for a Contracting Party to assess whether the extent or degree of provisioning, regulating, cultural and/or supporting services provided to maintain the ecological character of any particular wetland is sufficient to justify its designation as a wetland of *international* importance under Criterion 1. It may be possible that more detailed guidance can be elaborated in the future on the basis of experience gained from the application of the revised Criterion 1. Accordingly, STRP is suggesting that it would be valuable for Contracting Parties, choosing to apply Criterion 1 in this way, to provide information on their experiences.

30. Resolution IX.21 refers specifically to taking into account the cultural values of wetlands. This elaborates on the information above and notes that local communities and indigenous people have developed strong cultural connections and sustainable use practices and that these groups must have a decisive voice in matters concerning their cultural heritage. Paragraph 12 of that resolution agrees that in the application of existing criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance, a wetland may also be considered of international importance when, in addition to relevant ecological values, it holds examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning. Paragraph 15 identifies the following cultural characteristics as relevant in the designation of Ramsar sites:

- "i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland;
- "ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland;
- "iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples; and
- "iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland."

31. Resolution IX.21, paragraph 17, requests the Ramsar Secretariat to establish a multi-disciplinary working group on the cultural values of wetlands, with a balanced geographic representation, under the supervision of the Standing Committee, with appropriate input from the STRP, to co-ordinate the activities listed in the resolution. Paragraph 18 further requests the Ramsar Secretariat to analyse the activities carried out to incorporate cultural values in the work of the Ramsar Convention during the triennium 2006-2008 and the experience gained, and to report to the Standing Committee and to the tenth Conference of the Contracting Parties.

#### *Scientific importance*

32. The relative scientific importance of a wetland, or the biota it supports, in the context of sites of international importance, is not determined directly by the science itself but by the uniqueness (or international importance) of the site or biota and/or the ecological character upon which scientific interest lies. Therefore, Parties can already identify and designate using those criteria, and the motivations for doing so may include "scientific importance", if appropriate. Although Parties can already identify and designate accordingly, there may be a need to alert Parties to the facility to do this if they wish.

33. In addition, resolution IX.1, annex E, provides further guidance that will highlight the scientific aspects of all Ramsar sites in that, in terms of reporting to several of the proposed indicators on the status of their ecological character, trends and threats, enhanced scientific research will be required for each.

- 3. *Criteria for the identification and designation of wetlands supporting species or communities that are important for research into the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity including indicators of ecosystem health and integrity (decision VII/4, para. 29 (a) (iii))*

34. Logically, the status of a potential site as "important for research" (in the context of sites of international importance) is determined not primarily by the research itself but by the criteria for the uniqueness of the species (or community and genomes or genes) that is/are supported, including both the status as a species (or community and genomes or genes) and the ecological setting. Therefore, Parties can already identify and designate using those criteria, and the motivations for doing so may include "research", if appropriate.

35. This approach has already been taken under the Ramsar Convention. At its first meeting, the Conference of the Contracting Parties to that Convention noted that site designation based upon importance for research, as a stand-alone criterion, is beyond the scope of Article 2.2 of the Convention, although agreeing that the existence of research and educational programmes and facilities may greatly enhance the value of a wetland. The guidelines in the revised draft Strategic Framework state that a wetland would first have to satisfy one of the criteria in order to establish its international importance. The educational and research interests would then come as an additional consideration to be taken into account in deciding whether the wetland should be designated.



4. *Criteria for the identification and designation of wetlands that support important populations of taxonomic groups with wetland-dependent species, including, inter alia, amphibians (decision VII/4, para. 29 (a) (iv))*

36. Criterion 9 adopted at ninth meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention states that: “A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or sub-species of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species” (Ramsar resolution IX.1 annex B). This effectively includes relevant considerations for all animals, including amphibians, but not plants.

37. The Ramsar Convention’s “1%” criterion has been an effective means of identifying wetlands of international importance since its adoption early in the life of the Convention. There is no fundamental biological reason to take 1% of a population as the threshold level for establishing the international importance of a site. However, this percentage has been found by long experience and evaluation to give an appropriate degree of protection to waterbird populations (see. Criterion 6) and to assist in the definition of ecologically sensitive sites. As well as formal adoption by Ramsar’s Contracting Parties, the criterion has gained wide acceptance throughout the world and in a range of other contexts.

38. For waterbirds, the criterion works only for those birds that tend to concentrate. This is also a desirable feature because those that congregate will, by definition, be those dependent on a relatively small proportion of the total territory and therefore be vulnerable to changes in that limited area. Aggregating species tend to be those with specialised ecological requirements which will usually be met at a limited number of locations that are regularly used. Its application depends both on having data on numbers of waterbirds using a particular site, and on being able to calculate the proportion that this comprises of an overall biogeographic (international) population. Similar constraints will apply to a quantitative criterion for non-avian taxa. Such a criterion will work effectively in some circumstances (for some species) and be ineffective in others (certainly for similar reasons, but probably others as well). The lack of complete efficiency is not a fundamental problem, just as Criterion 6 is not effective for all waterbirds.

39. A key element to the success of Criterion 6 has been the availability of peer-reviewed assessment of the size of biogeographic populations. Data for waterbirds vary but are relatively robust compared to many other taxa.

40. A two step approach for catering for the need for criteria based upon population size for non-avian taxa was recommended by the STRP:

(a) Adoption of Criterion 9 which establishes the principle of the selection of wetlands of international importance on the basis of their importance for 1% of the biogeographical population of certain non-avian taxa to be listed in a new appendix of the Strategic Framework; and

(b) Only species or sub-species for which reliable population estimates have been provided and published should be included in the justification for the application of Criterion 9. Where no such information exists, Contracting Parties should give consideration to designation for important non-avian animal species under Criterion 4. For better application of Criterion 9, Contracting Parties should assist, where possible, in the supply of such data to the IUCN-Species Survival Commission and its Specialist Groups in support of the future updating and revision of international population numbers (see Ramsar resolution IX.1, annex B, paragraph A23).

***B. Consideration of the development of additional criteria, including, as appropriate, quantitative criteria (decision VII/4, para. 29 (b))***

41. The STRP has considered this matter at great length and the history of the development of quantitative criteria has been reviewed.<sup>1/</sup> The requirements for additional quantitative criteria have largely been covered by the newly proposed Criterion 9 (allowing site designation for all non-avian

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<sup>1/</sup> Stroud, D. A. In press. Selecting Ramsar sites: the development of quantitative criteria – 1971-2005. Ramsar Research Report.

wetland dependant taxa). This delivers the additional quantitative elements requested in paragraph 29 (b) of decision VII/4.

**C. *Guidelines on the geographical scale at which criteria should be applied (decision VII/4, para. 29,c) and the interpretation and application of the Ramsar criteria at the national and regional levels (decision VII/4, para. 30)***

42. Ramsar site identification and designation, by virtue of the Convention itself, operates at the national level. The geographical scale at which criteria are applied is generally implicit within the criteria themselves. For example:

(a) The geographical scale for criteria that refer to biogeographic regions and/or populations of taxa (Criteria 1, 3, 6, 7 and 9) is the limit of that biogeographic region and/or population; and

(b) For other criteria, the geographical scale is the limits of the particular wetland itself.

43. In relation to Criterion 1, resolution IX.1 annex B, paragraph A3, contains amended guidance that when selecting a biogeographic regionalisation scheme to apply, it is generally most appropriate to use a continental, regional, or supra-national scheme rather than a national or subnational one.

44. STRP is also working on this in the next triennium taking into account, *inter alia*, the ongoing work of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on freshwater eco-regions and its related work, in conjunction with partners, on coastal and near-shore marine eco-regionalization.

45. Although Ramsar Site designation can only occur within a Party's sovereign territory, "regional" considerations can be accommodated, voluntarily, under the aforementioned biogeographic approach and are encouraged by resolution VII.19 (annex) of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on guidelines for international cooperation, for example, to establish flyway-scale networks of designated sites for migratory waterbirds, etc.

46. Consideration of the geographic scale of site designation is also relevant to the general principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity's programme of work on protected areas (decision VII/28, annex), including its application of the ecosystem approach, and in particular paragraph 13 of that decision which:

*"Invites Parties to consider options, in the context of implementing the programme of work, such as ecological networks, <sup>1/</sup> ecological corridors, buffer zones and other related approaches in order to follow up the World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation and the conclusions of Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2010".*

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

47. The current criteria for Ramsar Site designation, together with the Strategic Framework and guidance for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance, cover most of the features of biodiversity listed in paragraph 29 of decision VII/4: that is, wetlands that support (i) wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species; (ii) species or communities and genomes or genes of economic, social, scientific or cultural importance; (iii) species or communities that are important for research; and (iv) important populations of taxonomic groups with wetland-dependent species, including, *inter alia*, amphibians. An area where the criteria, and/or guidelines for their application may need to be elaborated might be the inclusion of plants in Criterion 9. However, plants can already be included under Criteria 2, 3 and 4, and the development of an additional criterion, or modification of Criterion 9, for

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<sup>1/</sup> In the context of this programme of work, a generic term used in some countries and regions, as appropriate, to encompass the application of the ecosystem approach that integrates protected areas into the broader land- and/or sea-scapes for effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use.

plants, should be based upon both demand (from the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention) and the availability of robust plant population data.

48. The Ramsar Convention, and its STRP, continue to further refine criteria, particularly for socioeconomic and cultural criteria, and to review additional criteria as the need arises. Guidelines on the scale of application (decision VII/4, paras. 29 (c) and 30) also exist as noted above, and are to be developed further.

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