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Item 6.2 (b) 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

The Conference of the Parties has invited 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.

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 working group has specifically addressed the needs identified by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, including, *inter alia*, the elaboration of guidelines 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. Each of these needs has been addressed by either enhancing guidelines for how they can be met by applying existing criteria, or by the proposed modification of one criterion and the creation of a new one. The Ramsar STRP is proposing the revised set of criteria and an enhanced Strategic Framework (which provides guidelines on how the criteria should be applied and interpreted) to Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting, in November 2005. A draft of

* UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/11/1.

that Strategic Framework has been made available to SBSTTA focal points in order for them to provide inputs into this process prior to the ninth meeting of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention. A summary of the technical rationale for the proposal is provided here together with the draft revised criteria. The proposal addresses fully all of the needs identified in the relevant decision of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. An update of developments at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention will be presented orally to SBSTTA at its eleventh meeting. The Ramsar Convention and its STRP continue to consider the development of additional criteria and the needs for further elaboration of the guidelines on an on-going basis, and in particular in response to feed-back on experiences with the new proposals. The present document also explores the subject of the geographical scale at which the criteria should be applied, including at the national and regional levels, concluding that 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.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice may wish to consider adopting a recommendation along the following lines:

“The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice

1. *Welcomes with appreciation* the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel 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, extends 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, and supports the technical basis for the proposed changes;

2. *Notes* that there is opportunity for improved clarity regarding criteria, and guidelines for their application, for site designation based upon: scientific importance; importance for research into the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity including indicators of ecosystem health and integrity; conservation and sustainable use of wild relatives of domesticated species; and, genes (or genomes), bearing in mind the meaning of the term “population” within the context of the existing and proposed criteria; and *invites* the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention to consider, in due course, expanding the explanation of these points in the Strategic Framework taking into account, *inter alia*, the relevant technical rationale presented in the note by the Executive Secretary on 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 (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/11/13);

3. *Recommends* that the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its eighth meeting:

(a) *Welcomes* with appreciation the work of the Ramsar Convention on the development of revised criteria for Ramsar site identification and designation and the further elaboration of the Strategic Framework for site identification and designation; and

(b) Considers any further action required in relation to site designation criteria following the outcome of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting;

4. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to provide, in an appropriate form, to the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, copies of relevant resolutions adopted at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, regarding site-designation criteria and related matters.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. In response to these decisions the Executive Secretary has continued collaboration with the Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Ramsar Convention.

4. The present document reports on the progress and current situation regarding these matters. Section II provides an overview of the considerations made by the STRP and what it has recommended to the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting. Section III provides an analysis of the extents to which paragraphs 29 and 30 of decision VII/4 are addressed by the STRP guidance to the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, if adopted in its current form by that body.

II. DELIBERATIONS UNDER THE RAMSAR CONVENTION AND ITS SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL

5. Resolution VIII.10 of the eighth meeting the Conference of the 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 COP9, 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 Parties to the Ramsar Convention, in November, 2005.

8. Changes to the current Ramsar site designation criteria have been proposed (see the annex to the present note), together with the production 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 present note will be considered by SBSTTA subsequent to the consideration of the proposed revised criteria and draft Strategic Framework at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention. In order for SBSTTA to have opportunity to participate in this process (in line with decision VII/4, para. 29), the two secretariats have made arrangements for the draft Strategic Framework (and the background information document) to be made available to SBSTTA focal points and for comments relating to these matters to be relayed to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat prior to the meeting of the Conference of the Parties. These documents are available at http://www.ramsar.org/cop9_docs_index_e.htm#dr. The relevant documents are COP9 DR 1 and Annex B. Currently these are available only in English but versions in French and Spanish will be posted in due course. SBSTTA focal points will be notified of procedures for providing comments and accessing documents.

10. The proposed changes to the criteria, and Strategic Framework, are not limited to those relevant the CBD Decision VII/4 (para. 29 and 30). The Executive Secretary, in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, has therefore provided the following summary of the discussion, developments and proposed changes which are of most direct relevance to the CBD decisions in question, bearing in mind that the full text of the draft Strategic Framework has been made available to SBSTTA separately via the aforementioned process.

11. The STRP guidance has yet to be considered by the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention. Therefore, the details provided here are for information only and do not represent any formal position taken by the Ramsar Convention. An update on developments at Ramsar COP9 will be presented verbally at SBSTTA11 for the information of delegates.

**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 STRP GUIDANCE TO THE NINTH MEETING OF
THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR
CONVENTION**

12. The following section provides a summary of the extents to which the draft Strategic Framework, and where relevant the proposed 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 the 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))*

13. 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 proposed new criterion 9 (referring to wetlands supporting 1% of individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of animals listed in an appendix to the guidelines – as explained below).

14. As wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species are not excluded from such criteria, Parties can already identify and designate sites using these criteria.

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))*

15. This sub-paragraph 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

16. 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 current proposed list, as contained in the annex to the present note. For example, criterion 2 might be used, depending upon the definition or interpretation of “species”.

17. 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 genetic characteristics of a group of organisms. 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).

18. Therefore, “population” can be considered as a surrogate term for “genome” or “genes”.

19. Site identification and designation can already occur using the status of a population of plant and/or animal species or sub-species under criteria 3, 6 (for water birds), and 7 (for fish). In addition, the proposed new criterion 9 can also be used for any other taxa (see below and in the annex).

20. 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 for conserving genomes and genes.

Economic, social and cultural importance

21. 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). The following is a summary of the conclusions of STRP on this subject, within which the requirements for the subparagraph in question are addressed.

22. Site designation using economic, social or cultural criteria is already possible in the context of the application of criterion 1. The following is an explanation of this situation and how the Strategic Framework is proposed to be amended to better accommodate this consideration.

23. 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.”

24. 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.

25. Accordingly, STRP has advised that there is benefit from more explicitly highlighting 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 would better reflect (for some wetlands) the mutual dependencies between ecosystem components, ecological processes and ecosystem services (including cultural values and socio-economic activities) that occur at wetlands without the need to develop a new site selection criterion.

26. Expanded guidelines for the application of criterion 1 in this context is thus proposed in the revised draft Strategic Framework.

27. Some countries have highly modified landscapes as a result of historical anthropogenic impacts. In these situations, there may be few, or no, natural or near-natural wetlands. Given that some countries may have very limited potential to designate natural or near-natural wetlands, it is proposed accordingly to change the reference in criterion 1 from “near-natural” to “most-natural”. This emphasizes that criterion 1 may still be applied within modified landscapes, but that its application should still be such as to select the ‘best’ available sites within any national area, irrespective of the absolute degree of naturalness (in the sense of guideline 167.iii).

28. Accordingly, the following change to criterion 1 is proposed:

Criterion 1

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or ~~near-~~ most-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.

29. The use of the term “most” -natural (instead of “near” -natural) attempts to acknowledge that the ecological character of many wetlands is determined in part by anthropogenic activities and that such character, in appropriate cases, should be maintained, if sustainable. “Near” – natural, on the other hand, tends to suggest that the desired state of a wetland is that state which is not under the influence of anthropogenic activities. Although this is arguably a matter of semantics, the shift in emphasis attempts to acknowledge that humans are an integral part of many wetland ecosystems.

30. At its eighth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention requested “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”.

31. There are three types of obligations that have already been assumed by Contracting Parties relevant to the selection of Ramsar sites on grounds of their cultural and socio-economic values and functions:

- (a) A requirement to maintain the ecological character of Ramsar sites;
- (b) Reporting obligations; and
- (c) Management planning and wise-use obligations.

32. 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. If criterion 1 and the guidance for its application are amended, as proposed above, to encourage the selection of sites on the basis of their ecosystem services, and were a Contracting Party to highlight, in its application of criterion 1, specific internationally important cultural and/or sustainable socio-economic values and functions of a site, then there would be an obligation to maintain the ecological character of the site such that the specified ecosystem services were maintained.

33. However:

(a) 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; and

(b) 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 would be 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.

34. Reporting on issues of cultural and socio-economic importance for Ramsar sites already occurs in the context of:

(a) Triennial national reports (Ramsar resolution II.1 and subsequently); and

(b) Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) and their required updates (Resolutions V.3 and subsequently).

35. For the RIS, in principle, the obligation to report on issues of cultural and socio-economic importance already exists (RIS section 21). If criterion 1, and the guidance for its application, were amended as proposed to more clearly stress the possibilities for the selection of Ramsar sites on the basis of their provisioning, regulating, cultural and/or supporting services, no new reporting obligations would be created.

36. 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. If criterion 1, and the guidance for its application is amended, and where an area is cited as of importance for its provisioning, regulating, cultural and/or supporting services, there would be a firmer expectation that the management objectives for the site would need to support the maintenance of these specified services. Again, the assumption of this obligation lies with the Contracting Party choosing to designate the site in this way.

37. A Contracting Party would establish whether these management objectives are compatible with the objectives set for maintenance of ecological aspects of a site's importance, and to take appropriate action if they are not so compatible. Fundamentally, no new obligations would be created for the management of those Ramsar sites identified on the basis of their cultural or sustainable socio-economic values and functions.

38. 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).

39. 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.

40. 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 experience.

41. In summary:

(a) As part of its work to revise terminology used by the Ramsar Convention, the STRP proposed to adopt a revised definition of the term “ecological character” which aligns with other international practice and more clearly indicates that various “ecosystem services” are an integral part of ecological character;

(b) Ecosystem services include cultural values and other benefits derived from sustainable socio-economic activities in the sense of Ramsar resolution VIII.10;

(c) The application of criterion 1 of the Ramsar Convention already encompasses hydrological services (e.g., maintaining natural water flows) as an ecosystem service (both as a provisioning and regulating service) with specific guidelines given to that effect;

(d) It is accordingly logical, in the light of Ramsar resolution VIII.10 to expand the potential application of criterion 1 to include within its scope other provisioning services (sustainable socio-economic benefits) as well as cultural services (which are equivalent to cultural values in the sense of resolution VIII.10);

(e) Accordingly, STRP considers that criterion 1 can already be used to select sites of international importance for a broader range of their ecosystem services than has generally been the case so far;

(f) Regarding Contracting Party obligations for site management following the designation of a site under criterion 1, these relate only to the grounds for qualification stated on the Ramsar Information Sheet (and need not include economic, social or cultural qualifications unless Parties wish to do so);

(g) If a Contracting Party highlights that specific cultural values and sustainable socio-economic benefits are important ecosystem services when designating a Ramsar site (or revising a Ramsar Information Sheet for a designated site), then there would be an expectation that such ecosystem services would need to be maintained in order to maintain the ecological character of the site;

(h) Such an obligation would *not* exist for sites already designated under criterion 1 unless a Contracting Party had explicitly indicated that specified cultural values and sustainable socio-economic activities were included in the grounds for qualification under criterion 1; and

(g) The aforementioned minor modification of the wording of criterion 1 is suggested that would better allow its application in anthropogenically (culturally) modified landscapes.

Scientific importance

42. It would be reasonable to assume that the relative scientific importance of a wetland, or the biota it supports, in the context of sites of international importance, is not determined primarily by the science itself but by the uniqueness of the site or biota and/or the ecological setting. Therefore, Parties can already identify and designate using those criteria, and the motivations for doing so may include “scientific importance”, if appropriate.

43. 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.

44. In addition, STRP Working Group 6 (assessing the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention) has provided advice 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))*

45. 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.

46. This approach has already been taken under the Ramsar Convention. At its first meeting, the Conference of the 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 draft revised 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))*

47. Site identification and designation based upon important waterbird populations is possible under criterion 6.

48. 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 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.

49. The criterion works only for those waterbirds 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.

50. 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.

51. STRP's work has explored the feasibility of extending this concept to other taxa, probably in the first instance to large wetland animals. This follows from previous reviews of the potential for non-avian quantitative criteria at Ramsar's CoP3 in 1986, CoP4 in 1990 and CoP5 in 1993.

52. STRP's work has raised no fundamental reasons to suggest that the addition of a 1% criterion for certain non-avian taxa would not be a feasible and useful addition to the site selection criteria.

53. 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.

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

(a) Adoption at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention of **a new criterion 9**, which would establish the principle of the selection of wetlands of international importance on the basis of their importance for 1 per cent of the biogeographical population of certain non-avian taxa to be listed in a new appendix of the Strategic Framework; and

(b) For the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, the production (by the IUCN Specialist Groups and coordinated by the STRP) of the relevant appendix. The appendix would thus define the taxonomic scope of any new criterion. This appendix would be updated at each future meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, both in terms of revision of data on species already listed, as well as the addition of new species and populations for which new information has become available.

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

55. The STRP has considered this matter at great length and the history of the development of quantitative criteria has been reviewed.^{1/} The requirements for additional quantitative criteria have largely been covered by the proposed new criterion 9 (allowing site designation for all non-avian wetland dependant taxa). This delivers the additional quantitative elements requested in paragraph 29 (b) of decision VII/4.

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

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)

56. Ramsar site identification and designation, by virtue of the Convention itself, operates at the national level.

57. 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 proposed new 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.

58. In relation to criterion 1, STRP will be proposing some general additional guidelines to the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting, that the most appropriate regionalisation schemes to apply are generally at the “supra-national scale” (i.e., regional, continental or possibly global) and that national or subnational schemes are not the appropriate scale of choice (except perhaps for very large continental islands such as Australia).

59. STRP is also recommending that, at its ninth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention requests further work on this in the next triennium taking into account, *inter alia*, the ongoing work of WWF on freshwater eco-regions and its related work, in conjunction with partners, on coastal and nearshore marine eco-regionalization.

60. 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 Parties to the Ramsar Convention on guidelines for international cooperation, for example, to establish flyway-scale networks of designated sites for migratory waterbirds etc.

61. Consideration of the geographic scale of site designation is also relevant to the general principles of the Convention’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, 1/ ecological corridors, buffer zones and other related approaches in order to follow up the WSSD 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”.

Conclusions

62. The proposed criteria reproduced in the annex to the present note, together with the revised draft Strategic Framework, cover all potential criteria specifically listed in paragraph 29 of decision VII/4. The Ramsar Convention, and its STRP, continues to review the need for additional criteria. 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.

1/ 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.

Annex

PROPOSED AMENDED CRITERIA FOR THE DESIGNATION OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE (BY RAMSAR STRP AS OF APRIL 2005).

(This list is for information purposes and has no formal standing. The wording of criterion 1 is proposed to be changed (for reference the current wording is as shown), proposed criterion 9 is new, and no changes are proposed to the other criteria.)

		Proposed criteria for the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention
Group A of the criteria		<p>critterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or most-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.</p> <p><i>[Current wording pre Ramsar COP9: “A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region”]</i></p>
	Criteria based on species and ecological communities	<p>critterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.</p>
		<p>critterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.</p>
		<p>critterion 4: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.</p>
Group B of the criteria	Specific criteria based on waterbirds	<p>critterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.</p>
		<p>critterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.</p>
	Specific criteria based on fish	<p>critterion 7: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.</p>

		Proposed criteria for the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention
		<p>critterion 8: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.</p>
	Specific criterion based on other animal taxa	<p>critterion 9: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent species [to be listed in the appendix to the guidelines].</p>