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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:

Recent developments on Ramsar site designation criteria, streamlining of the work of, and harmonization of national reporting frameworks between, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention

Note by the Executive Secretary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This note covers five subjects. Section I explains the resolutions adopted at the ninth meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention regarding Ramsar site designation criteria and guidance for their application (paras. 29 and 30 of decision VII/4 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity). These now cover the needs under Annex I to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the criteria are being developed further based upon, *inter alia*, the experience of Contracting Parties.

Section II summarizes a review of the technical work required under decision VII/4 and that undertaken by the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (further to para. 5 (a) of decision VIII/20 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity). Ways and means to improve the joint work include: providing clear expressions of the respective roles of the two conventions, their secretariats and scientific bodies; emphasizing the advantages of funding joint work in order to achieve co-benefits from both conventions; and, improvements in the dissemination of information by and between the two conventions, including enhancing the web-sites of both conventions in order to explain more clearly the linkages between their work.

Section III provides an update on progress towards harmonized reporting between the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar Convention (decision VIII/20, para. 5 (b)). Work continues on this subject, and the reporting framework for the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention will be a major milestone. A key requirement is for outcome-oriented reporting which reduces reporting burdens and provides information relevant to informing future objectives.

Section IV refers to information and guidance on the allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological functions (activity 1.1.10 (a) of decision VII/4). Considerable guidance has been

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developed through the Ramsar Convention and its partners. Existing conventions on the management of transboundary water resources and water bodies have and will make a significant contribution to the implementation of relevant objectives and activities under the programme of work (decision VII/4). More universal accession to and/or ratification of these instruments should be encouraged as a means to, *inter alia*, promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in transboundary river basins and international lakes and a suggested recommendation to the Conference of the Parties reflects this need.

Finally, section V presents the new joint work programme (2007–2010) between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention for the information of SBSTTA.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice may wish to:

1. *Welcome 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; the progress in relation to technical work required in the programme of work on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems (decision VII/4) by the Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention; and *invite* the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel to continue to review the criteria, as appropriate, in the light of practical experience concerning their application;

2. *Note* the need for clear expressions of the roles of the two conventions and their scientific bodies in their collaboration and *request* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, to:

(a) Seek the resources, on a voluntary basis, to update the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar Convention websites so as to provide expanded information on, and explanation of, how the two conventions collaborate and complement each other in terms of their operations and outputs; and

(b) Further consider ways and means to make more streamlined and explicit the roles of the two conventions, and their respective scientific bodies and Secretariats, and present these as part of the in-depth review of the programme of work on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems scheduled to occur at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

3. *Welcome* the ongoing work of the Ramsar Convention and its international organization partners on the allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological functions; *note* the importance and relevance of existing international water related conventions to promote the critical need for enhanced transboundary cooperation on water allocation and related management issues as a contribution to the implementation of the programme of work on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems;

4. *Recommend* that the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting:

(a) *Welcomes with appreciation* the progress of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention in achieving a more comprehensive coverage of wetlands supporting a wider range of inland water biodiversity through the designation of Ramsar sites; *notes* the outcomes in this regard of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention including, *inter alia*, Resolutions IX.1, annex A (“A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character”), IX.1, annex B (“Revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for the

future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance”) and IX.21 (“Taking into account the cultural values of wetlands”); and *extends its gratitude* to the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention for addressing decision VII/4, paragraphs 29 and 30, of the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

(b) *Urges* Parties and other Governments that have not already done so to accede to and/or ratify, as appropriate: (i) the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 May 1997), as called for by the Secretary-General at the United Nations Treaty Event (held on 25-27 September and 1-2 October, 2007); and (ii) the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (held in Helsinki on 17 March 1992); as a means to, *inter alia*, promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in transboundary river basins and international lakes applying, *inter alia*, the ecosystem approach and as a contribution to the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” 2005-2015; and

(c) *Welcomes* the joint work plan (2007–2010) between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention as reproduced in the annex to the present note.

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 Contracting 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 paragraph 5 (a) of decision VIII/20, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to review the technical requirements under the programme of work on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems and compare them with the ongoing and planned activities of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Ramsar Convention in order to identify inconsistencies and propose ways and means to address them to the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA).

4. In paragraph 5 (b) of decision VIII/20, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to invite the Ramsar Convention to take the lead in developing a draft national reporting framework on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems, taking into consideration, *inter alia*: (i) the needs of both conventions, including their respective needs for reporting on other matters; (ii) additional guidance in, *inter alia*, decisions VIII/14, on national reporting, and VIII/8, on the outcomes of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Review of Implementation; (iii) the information available from outcome-oriented indicators of progress towards the 2010 target; (iv) the reporting activities of other stakeholders and processes; (v) the priority information needs, bearing in mind the capacity for national reporting; and (vi) as appropriate, the UNEP issue-based modules for coherent implementation of biodiversity-related conventions.

5. In activity 1.1.10 (a) of the programme of work, the Conference of the Parties requested SBSTTA to review existing information on the allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological

functions, including the relevant guidelines and technical papers on this topic, and to prepare advice for the Conference of the Parties.

6. Recalling that the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention states that their collaboration shall be expressed through a joint work plan, and noting that the joint work plan (2004-2006) expired at the end of December 2006, a new joint work plan (2007-2010) has been developed between the two secretariats and is brought to the attention of SBSTTA for its information.

7. In response to these decisions, the Executive Secretary has prepared this note. Section I reports on the progress and current situation regarding Ramsar site designation criteria in relation to Annex I to the Convention on Biological Diversity, providing an overview of the considerations made by the STRP of the Ramsar Convention and relevant resolutions of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention. Section II reports on proposals to streamline the technical work of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention in relation to decision VII/4. Section III reports on progress in harmonization of reporting between the two conventions. Section IV provides a review of existing information on the allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological functions, noting opportunities to promote improved implementation of relevant aspects of decision VII/4. Section V provides details of the revised joint work plan between the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar Convention.

8. The present note takes into consideration comments submitted by Governments and organizations from 5 to 19 October during which time the note was posted on the Convention website for peer-review (notification 2007-113).

I. 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

9. The Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat, has prepared an information document explaining the current situation in detail (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/INF/15). A summary of the relevant considerations follows.

10. The STRP undertook considerable work on this subject during its 2004-2006 work plan, upon which changes to the previous Ramsar site designation criteria were adopted at the ninth meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention together with an enhanced Strategic Framework. The Strategic Framework provides, *inter alia*, guidance to Parties on the application of Ramsar site designation criteria.

11. The current criteria for Ramsar site designation, together with the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar resolution IX.1 annex B), cover all of the features of biodiversity listed in paragraph 29 of decision VII/4, except for plants for certain criteria (especially 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 plants, should be based upon both demand (from the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention) and the availability of robust plant population data, specific details are provided below.

12. The Ramsar Convention, and its STRP, continue to refine the criteria, particularly for socioeconomic and cultural criteria, and review additional criteria as the need arises. Guidelines on the scale of application are also to be developed further.

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))*

13. Although not specifically mentioned, wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species are not excluded from any of the criteria. Parties can identify and designate sites to this end using 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 the newly adopted Criterion 9 (“A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1 percent of the individuals in a population of one species or sub-species of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species” – re. Ramsar resolution IX.1 Annex B). Wild relatives of domesticated or cultivated species of plants can be included under Criteria 2 and 3, whereas 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))*

14. The STRP in its guidance to the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to Ramsar determined that site designation using economic, social or cultural criteria is feasible in the context of the application of Criterion 1 (a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland). The crux of its interpretation rests on consideration that relevant ecosystem services provided by wetlands as a key determinant of site designation and amongst such services are those providing economic, social or cultural benefits. Although the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting did not adopt the explicit guidance recommended by the STRP, it did make significant changes in the directions proposed by amending relevant guidance, as below, enabling approaches to be further refined based upon the experience of Contracting Parties.

15. Issues of cultural values and socio-economic activities are implicitly recognized in Ramsar’s site selection guideline 168 (related to Criterion 1), particularly as it relates to the ecological role of wetlands. The STRP determined that the hydrological, biological, or ecological role includes the delivery of ecosystem services amongst which are sustainable socio-economic benefits and cultural values. Expanded guidance for the application of Criterion 1 along these lines was adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at its ninth meeting in resolution IX.1, annex A (“A conceptual framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of ecological character”). This expanded guidance applies the terms and concepts of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, together with an updated definition of ecological character (“Ecological character is the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterize the wetland at a given point in time”). These services include cultural services (resolution IX.1, annex A, paragraph 7). 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. The guidance for application of Criterion 1 creates no new reporting obligations.

16. A key issue in the application of Criterion 1 and its revised guidance is how to define levels of *international* importance which will ultimately be determined by a Contracting Party. 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.

17. Resolution IX.21 refers specifically to taking into account the cultural values of wetlands. This notes that local communities and indigenous peoples have developed strong cultural connections and sustainable use practices and that these groups must have a decisive voice in matters concerning their cultural heritage. In paragraph 12 of this resolution, the Contracting Parties agreed that 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.

18. Regarding site designation based on “scientific importance”, this 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 identify and designate using those criteria, and the motivations for doing so may include “scientific importance”, if appropriate. Resolution IX/1 Annex E has provided 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.

19. Options for site identification and designation using genetic criteria are not specifically excluded. For example, Criterion 2 might be used, depending upon the definition or interpretation of “species”. Criteria 3, 6 (for water birds), 7 (for fish) and 9 (other non-avian animal species) can be used since a “population” is a group of organisms that are distinct (genetically) from other groups of the species. 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).

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))*

20. At its first meeting, the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar 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 guidance in the revised Strategic Framework (Ramsar resolution IX.1, annex B) states 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))*

21. New Criterion 9 (see above) effectively includes relevant considerations for all animals, including amphibians, but not plants. A key element to the success of Criterion 6 (a similar criterion applying only to waterbirds) 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. The STRP has advised that 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 (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))

22. The STRP has considered this matter at great length and the history of the development of quantitative criteria has been reviewed. The requirements for additional quantitative criteria have largely been covered by the new Criterion 9 (allowing site designation for all non-avian wetland dependant animal taxa). This incorporates the quantitative element (based upon population size of a species) 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)

23. Ramsar site identification and designation, by virtue of the Convention itself, operate 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 limit of the particular wetland itself. In relation to Criterion 1, Resolution IX.1, Annex B, paragraph A3, has amended guidance that when selecting a biogeographic regionalization scheme to apply, it is generally most appropriate to use a continental, regional, or supra-national scheme rather than a national or sub-national one.

24. 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 or migration corridors for fish etc.

25. Consideration of the geographic scale of site designation is also relevant to activity 1.1.5 of the programme of work on protected areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity (decision VII/28, annex) which requires that Parties complete protected area system gap analyses at national and regional levels based on the requirements for representative systems of protected areas that adequately conserve terrestrial, marine and inland water biodiversity and ecosystems. Gap analyses should take into account Annex I of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant criteria such as irreplaceability of target biodiversity components, minimum effective size and viability requirements, species migration requirements, integrity, ecological processes and ecosystem services.

II. STREAMLINING THE TECHNICAL WORK OF THE CBD AND THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

26. In decision VIII/20, para. 5 (a), as above, the Conference of the Parties referred specifically to the relationship between the requirements for work in its decision VII/4 and that of the Ramsar STRP. In practice, working relationships between the two conventions are more intricate. For example, much of the work requested to be undertaken by the Executive Secretary, as appropriate, is normally undertaken in collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat and this normally might involve the STRP either formally or informally. Therefore, the Executive Secretary has undertaken a more comprehensive review of progress

in relation to decision VII/4 and listed this in relation to relevant activities to be undertaken by the Executive Secretary, SBSTTA, the Ramsar Secretariat and the STRP. The results are presented in an information document (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/INF/16), which reports on the status of activities to date, ongoing and proposed activities of the STRP, and identifies where improvements in working relations between the two Secretariats and scientific bodies can be made.

27. All activities with specified time-lines have been undertaken on schedule and mechanisms are already in place to address those with time-lines beyond the thirteenth meeting of SBSTTA. A number of activities are “ongoing” but these largely reflect the fact that the work of the STRP on such matters is, and should be, continuing. Quantifying this progress is difficult since the activities vary significantly in terms of complexity and effort required. For current purposes it is clear that the technical collaboration between the two conventions is functioning very well (as noted by the Conference of the Parties in the preamble to its decision VIII/20). Areas where collaboration can be improved even further are outlined below.

A. *Clearer expression of the respective roles of the two conventions, Secretariats and scientific bodies*

28. In its decision III/21, the Conference of the Parties recognised the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as the lead implementing partner on wetlands for the Convention on Biological Diversity. There is a common understanding of this at the levels of the Conferences of the Parties, the Secretariats and the scientific bodies. But the clarity of this decision is not always reflected in practice. For example, many activities in decision VII/4 are requested to be undertaken “jointly” by the two Secretariats (whether in conjunction with the STRP or not). In practice, the Ramsar Secretariat and/or STRP are generally far better resourced than the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity regarding the required scientific work and, in reality in most technical areas, undertake most of the work for “joint” activities. There could be greater recognition of this arrangement, where appropriate, in order to both acknowledge the Ramsar Convention’s role and clarify the role of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and SBSTTA.

29. Recently there has been a clear move in this direction by SBSTTA. For example, SBSTTA recommendation XI/9, paragraphs 5 and 6, requests the Executive Secretary to invite the Ramsar Convention to take the lead in various matters. Further moves in this direction, where appropriate, would help the practical implementation of the intention of decision III/21, thereby promoting a relationship based upon a clearer statement of respective roles and competencies and, importantly, enable the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to prioritise activities better. In appropriate and relevant areas it is also logical that the Ramsar Convention (or STRP) invite the Convention on Biological Diversity (or SBSTTA) to do the same. Naturally, such invitations should be based upon dialogue between the two conventions, their scientific bodies or secretariats, as appropriate.

30. The significant opportunity in this regard is to make a clear indication of the respective roles of the two conventions in the in-depth review of the programme of work scheduled to take place at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (decision VIII/10, annex II).

B. *Funding aspects of invitations from the Convention on Biological Diversity for Ramsar to undertake work*

31. Whereas the Conference of the Parties (e.g., decision VII/4 itself) and/or SBSTTA have often invited the Ramsar Convention to undertake significant work on their behalf, there has rarely been the allocation of resources for the Ramsar Convention to do so. Discretionary or voluntary funding to achieve implementation of joint activities has been made available, on an *ad-hoc* basis, and such is popular with some Parties. But the reality is that the extent to which Ramsar can respond to its role in relation to the

Convention on Biological Diversity depends upon the availability of its own independent resources. Therefore, the priority areas of work for Ramsar have tended, naturally, to take precedence.

32. More attention could be given in future deliberations to enhancing the ability of the Ramsar Convention to support the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity as and where appropriate. Whilst it is clearly inappropriate to consider the core funding of the Convention on Biological Diversity be allocated to the Ramsar Convention, there is an opportunity to further increase awareness amongst potential funding sources that investments in appropriate and relevant activities by the Ramsar Convention offer significant co-benefits through improved implementation of the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

C. Dissemination of information by and between the two conventions

33. A significant number of activities in the programme of work rely upon the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity or Ramsar Convention supplying relevant information to the Convention on Biological Diversity, either between the secretariats, scientific bodies or amongst Parties. Likewise, the Ramsar Convention needs to be informed about the activities and outputs of the Convention on Biological Diversity. No in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of this information flow has been undertaken. Nevertheless, there are identifiable weaknesses in the current system. Where requested, or relevant, information is exchanged (in either direction) between the Conferences of the Parties, or scientific bodies, the information flow can be monitored. However, information flow in other contexts can be less transparent. For example, decision VII/4 makes numerous invitations for the Ramsar Convention to make information “available to [CBD] Parties”, but the mechanisms for doing so are limited, and their effectiveness questionable. “Making available” is relatively easily achieved, but awareness amongst relevant stakeholders of its availability and relevance quite a different matter.

34. The Ramsar Convention possesses a great deal of information and guidance relevant to implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (and *vice-versa*), including in areas beyond the programme of work on inland waters. The value of this information warrants that measures be taken to maximize its impact on key stakeholders. A related opportunity is to improve how the two conventions collaborate in terms of communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities. Good opportunities have been seized by both secretariats, but on a rather *ad hoc* basis.

35. Much of the information flow can, and does, occur through the respective websites. However, neither provides particularly easily accessible information on the respective roles the two conventions play, how Ramsar information is relevant to the Convention on Biological Diversity (and *vice-versa*), how it is generated and can be used, and how it relates to the decisions or resolutions of either side. The problem is compounded by the two conventions using different terminology in many areas. The web-site of the Convention on Biological Diversity requires considerable improvement in these respects but this could be most effective if undertaken in conjunction with a review of information dissemination, harmonization of web-sites and a joint strategy for CEPA for both conventions with respect to their joint interests. In view of the value of the information held, the investment in its generation, and the importance of its utilization to effective implementation, such an activity justifies adequate resources be devoted to undertaking it. It would also be extremely relevant as a test-case for improving information flow, and awareness of linkages, between the Convention on Biological Diversity and other multi-lateral environment agreements.

III. PROGRESS ON HARMONIZED REPORTING FRAMEWORKS BETWEEN THE RAMSAR CONVENTION AND THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (DECISION VIII/20, PARA 5 (B))

36. Work exploring options for the style and approach for such a framework is currently being undertaken for the two conventions by the United Nations Environment Programme, Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (UNEP-DELC), and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), as part of a UNEP project further developing opportunities for the harmonization of reporting between the biodiversity related conventions, within the wider framework of knowledge management. This work, which will be initially reported in late 2007, is reviewing *inter alia* the relationships between the inland waters programme of work and its targets and the existing reporting mechanisms under the Ramsar Convention, in its role as a lead implementation partner of the Convention on Biological Diversity for wetlands. In particular, this work will establish the links and relationships between the objectives, actions, goals and targets, of the inland waters programme of work, the National Report Formats of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Ramsar Convention and the extent to which these may provide the basis for a reporting framework for inland waters. In addition, since Ramsar's wetland coverage also extends to coastal and near-shore marine wetlands, the work by UNEP DELC and UNEP-WCMC is also examining the extent to which Ramsar's national reporting can contribute to common reporting on the programme of work on marine and coastal biological diversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Since wetlands also occur in each of the other biomes, this work is relevant to aspects of common reporting for all applicable work programmes under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

37. The National Report Format for Ramsar Contracting Parties reporting to the tenth session of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to be held in Changwon, Republic of Korea, from 28 October to 4 November 2008 has recently been issued by the Ramsar Secretariat, and is available at: http://www.ramsar.org/cop10/cop10_nrform_e.doc. Following instructions from the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee, the COP-10 format has been substantially revised from the formats used for Ramsar COP-8 and COP-9. In particular, at its core are 66 process-oriented indicators of Convention implementation, covering aspects of each of the implementation strategies adopted in the Convention's Work Plan 2006-2008. As well as permitting Contracting Parties to report on key aspects of their implementation progress, these National Report process indicators will also play a key role in the assessment of a suite of "ecological outcome-oriented indicators" of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, which are currently under further development by the STRP for consideration by Ramsar COP-10. A number of these indicators are in turn closely linked to the 2010 biodiversity target indicators under the Convention on Biological Diversity, such that assessment and reporting on these, through the GEF-funded 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership project co-ordinated by UNEP-WCMC, will also contribute to the assessment of Ramsar implementation effectiveness. The latter activities are also, *inter-alia*, in response to decision VIII/15, para. 25, whereby the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity invited the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention to contribute to the implementation of the targets for inland water and marine and coastal biodiversity, to monitoring progress towards them and to further develop the targets for specific application to wetlands.

38. Other types of reporting through the Ramsar Convention, in addition to the triennial National Reporting, are also relevant. In particular, at its ninth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention instructed the STRP to develop a consolidated framework for detecting, reporting and responding to change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands (resolution IX.2, annex I). Proposals for this consolidated framework, which in turn will contribute to developing assessment of the status and trends in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands, will be available in 2008 (for the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention).

39. The two secretariats shall, of course, liaise further over this matter. Key requirements for the Convention on Biological Diversity remain a focus on outcome oriented reporting, rather than process (unless linked to outcomes), reducing reporting burdens and ensuring that reports remain relevant by informing future objectives. The new national reporting framework for Ramsar, as further discussed, developed and as approved by the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, will also provide useful information for the in-depth review of the programme of work scheduled to take place at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

IV. EXISTING INFORMATION ON THE ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT OF WATER FOR MAINTAINING ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS

40. The allocation and management of water is a critical need for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands. The unsustainable use of water, for example the excessive extraction of water from rivers, is a major driver of biodiversity loss from inland waters and is certainly the major threat to these ecosystems as demands made upon water rapidly increase and as climate change significantly changes the earth's hydrological cycle. Considerable technical work has been done of this subject by the STRP and its major international organization partners (which in this context include Wetlands International, the International Water Management Institute and the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme). Extensive guidance on this subject is available through the Ramsar Convention in particular through the Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands (3rd edition). Handbook 6 (Water-related guidance) explains in detail the importance of linkages between the allocation and management of water and the functioning of wetlands. Handbook 7 (River basin management) explains the role of water management in the context of river basin management. Handbook 8 (Water allocation and management) provides extensive background information and policy and management guidance for the allocation and management of water. Handbook 3 (Laws and institutions) provides guidance on reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This handbook incorporates further guidance from the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law in its Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 38 (Shine and de Klemm, 1999, *Wetlands, Water and the Law*). Handbook 17 (International cooperation) provides guidelines for contracting parties to urgently identify all their shared wetland systems (including those in the coastal zone) and cooperate in the management of these with the adjoining jurisdiction(s). This cooperation may extend to formal joint management arrangements or collaboration in the development and implementation of a management plan for the site. Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 55 (Iza (ed.), 2004, *International Water Governance: Conservation of Freshwater Ecosystems*. vol. 1, *International Agreements - Compilation and Analysis*) provides a review of existing national, regional and international legal frameworks for the allocation and management of water.

41. A related subject is the management of environmental flows, which is a methodological approach to achieving balanced water allocation. Two relevant technical reports are in preparation by the STRP: (i) methodologies for assessing the vulnerability of wetlands to change in their ecological character, and (ii) reviews of environmental flow methodologies for rivers, estuaries and near-shore environments, and non-riverine inland wetlands. The work plan of STRP (2006-2008) involves developing additional guidance including on implementation of environmental water requirements, the review of water and environmental law with respect to environmental flows, and the impacts of dams on wetlands and river systems. A report is being prepared for Ramsar COP-10 (October-November 2008) on good practice in water allocation and management for maintaining ecological functions of wetlands. The Executive Secretary will make this additional information available to SBSTTA and the Conference of the Parties as it is released.

42. Where rivers or lakes are shared between countries, transboundary water allocation and management issues remain a major challenge to the improved sustainability of inland water ecosystems. Addressing this challenge requires, *inter alia*, improved international cooperation using the ecosystem approach. The programme of work (decision VII/4, annex) refers to the need to address water allocation

issues under goal 1.1 (to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into all relevant sectors of water-resource and river-basin management, taking into account the ecosystem approach), and specifically in activities 1.1.2 (for Parties) and 1.1.10 (a) (for SBSTTA); and goal 2.3 (To provide the appropriate incentives and valuation measures to support the conservation and sustainable use of inland water biological diversity, and to remove, or reform appropriately, any perverse incentives opposing such conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, as it relates to biodiversity conservation), and specifically activity 2.3.1 (f) (for Parties).

43. Article 5 of both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention refer to cooperation between Parties (or Contracting Parties) on matters of mutual interest. The urgent need to improve the allocation and management of water within transboundary rivers and wetlands is noted in all of the above mentioned guidance. Two existing international conventions have significant relevance to the implementation of decision VII/4, especially in relation to water allocations and transboundary water management issues:

(a) The UN/ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Helsinki, 17 March 1992, which entered into force on 6 October 1996, and is currently open only to States within the UN/ECE (amendments opening the Convention to any United Nations Member State, adopted in November 2003, have yet to be ratified); and

(b) The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, adopted by an overwhelming majority by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 May 1997, which is not yet in force, requiring an additional 19 ratifications (as of September 2007), and which was highlighted alongside the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Secretary-General's invitation "towards universal participation and implementation, a comprehensive legal framework for peace, development and human rights" at the United Nations Treaty Event, held on 25-27 September and 1-2 October, 2007.

44. There is a clear and urgent opportunity to operationalize the provisions of decision VII/4 through expanded participation in these conventions. The two conventions, in both the legal context and their potential contribution to the implementation of decision VII/4, are very complementary. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes has an emphasis on the control of transboundary water pollution, an area in which it has already made a positive contribution, although it also covers most other aspects of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. The latter has an emphasis, although not exclusively so, on transboundary water allocation issues. The potential effectiveness of such conventions is also demonstrated by, for example, the leading role that the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes has played in the field of payments for ecosystem services in integrated water management. Although States will determine, as appropriate, the suitability of each convention for their specific needs and circumstances, a strong case can be made for States to support both conventions and good precedents for this already exist (for example, all Parties to the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats are also Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity).

V. THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY-RAMSAR JOINT WORK PLAN (2007-2010)

45. The joint work plan between the two conventions (2004-2006) expired at the close of 2006. The two secretariats prepared a new joint work plan (2007-2010) which was provisionally agreed in principle by the two secretariats on 15 December 2006. This is reproduced in the annex for the information of SBSTTA. The 2007-2010 joint work plan was endorsed by the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee on 14 February 2007 (decision SC/35-30).

*Annex***THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD) AND THE RAMSAR
CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (RAMSAR)*****Joint Work Programme (JWP)******2007-2010***Endorsed by decision SC/35-30 of the 35th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee, February
2007**Context**

The global environment is rapidly changing and this impacts on the capacity of ecosystems to deliver the services needed to sustain and improve human well-being. Policy development, planning and management based upon the Ecosystem Approach is essential to promote the continued delivery of ecosystem services. Among these services, water is the most valuable and the wise management of biodiversity and wetlands is thus critical in this context. Furthermore, while climate change is increasingly on the public and political agenda, the importance of the biodiversity of wetlands in moderating global change and its impacts remain under recognized.

Goal

The goal of this Joint Work Plan is the conservation and sustainable and wise use of biodiversity especially in wetlands, helping to assure the full achievement of the 2010 biodiversity target.

Rationale

The convention secretariats recognize that:

- (i) The ongoing collaboration between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is setting a good example in building synergies between conventions to deliver effectively the objectives of both conventions (CBD decision VIII/20; Ramsar resolution IX.5) and that we must build upon this success;
- (ii) The Ramsar Convention acts as the lead partner for wetlands in implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- (iii) The two conventions do not have the same composition of Parties but that the objectives and principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity are embodied in the Ramsar Convention, and *vice versa*, in a mutually supportive way;
- (iv) Article 1.1 of the Ramsar Convention states that “for the purpose of this Convention wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”;
- (v) Wetlands therefore occur in all biomes and are potentially influenced by all sector activities, and that appropriate management of land and water, using the ecosystem approach under the Convention on Biological Diversity, is required to achieve the goal – consequently, the JWP will work through all relevant thematic programmes and cross-cutting issues of the Convention on Biological Diversity and cover all relevant resolutions made under the Ramsar Convention;
- (vi) The biological diversity of wetlands is under the most severe threat and that threats are rapidly escalating – particularly through competing human demands for water;
- (vii) Continued biodiversity loss from wetlands will seriously undermine the delivery of important services provided by these ecosystems and will be a significant constraint to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and biodiversity target;

- (viii) Considerable technical knowledge has already been developed by the CBD, Ramsar, and many partners to manage land and water better in order to sustain their benefits for people; and
- (ix) Whilst the further development of technical tools is required in some areas, the key requirements for the achievement of the objectives of this JWP centre on public and political awareness, institutional weaknesses and capacity related issues.

Specific activities

The primary responsibility for implementation of this JWP rests with Parties and the Convention Bodies. The Secretariats play a supporting and facilitating role.

The following is an indicative list of activities. The flexible and innovative nature of this JWP is designed to lead to other key targeted actions aimed to maximize its contribution to the achievement of the goal of the JWP.

Parties may identify specific national actions, depending on the circumstances of each country. The national focal points of the two conventions should cooperate in a proactive and flexible way to implement this work programme.

In order to ensure the wise use of wetlands as well as the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in all ecosystems, and promote the contribution of biodiversity and wetlands to human well-being, key activities include:

- (i) Making use of the ecosystem approach in planning processes at national, regional and local levels by taking into account the ecosystem goods and services provided by wetlands and other ecosystems;
- (ii) Developing and implementing national biodiversity strategies and action plans and national wetland policies in a consistent and mutually supportive way;
- (iii) Identifying and implementing joint activities to promote the integration of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the wise use of wetlands into relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies, including poverty reduction strategies; and
- (iv) Promoting the synergistic implementation of both conventions – including the CBD programme of work on protected areas and the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Convention bodies. For the scientific bodies of the conventions, with the possible assistance of liaison groups, expert groups, specialist organizations or individual experts, key actions to support this JWP include, *inter alia*:

- (i) Prioritizing key activities to implement both conventions in a mutually supportive manner;
- (ii) Further harmonizing the ecosystem approach and Ramsar “wise use of wetlands”;
- (iii) Developing tools to measure the achievement of the 2010 target by elaborating and using wetlands and water-related indicators;
- (iv) Improving representativeness of wetland protected areas, including using Ramsar sites as catalysts for networks of protected areas between countries to conserve wetlands;
- (v) Promoting sustainable use of wetland biodiversity in the framework of wise use;
- (vi) Ensuring harmonized national reporting, including the role of national reports in measuring the implementation of this JWP;
- (vii) Collaborating to meet the goals of both conventions’ strategic plans, to best monitor and assess the respective achievements in the context of biodiversity and wetlands;

- (viii) Integrating wetland and water considerations into environmental impact assessments and procedures;
- (ix) Facilitating data accessibility and interoperability among the Ramsar databases and the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, including its national nodes;
- (x) Identifying strategic opportunities, and formulating plans, for coordinated action within the Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA); and
- (xi) Further identifying and promoting the importance of cultural diversity in understanding and managing biodiversity and wetlands.

The secretariats will promote or assist implementation of the joint work programme through, inter alia:

- (i) Any activities requested by their governing bodies relevant to the goals and objectives of this JWP, recognizing the differing resources available to, and the comparative advantage of, each secretariat; and
- (ii) Innovative approaches, within available resources, to implement this JWP, focusing in particular on:
 - (a) Engaging with major groups and partners in the full implementation of the provisions of both conventions as related to priority issues for the conservation, wise use and international cooperation around wetlands;
 - (b) Awareness-raising through strengthened and more effective CEPA activities which target major stakeholders that influence policy and management outcomes for biodiversity, wetlands and water; and
 - (c) Promoting, where necessary, capacity of Parties – including through enhanced South-South cooperation.

Reporting

This JWP shall be used as the basis of reporting to their respective bodies on activities and progress by each secretariat at the end of each calendar year.
