CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/WG.2/CRP.1
9 November 2011

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE
Fifteenth meeting
Montreal, 7-11 November
WORKING GROUP II
Agenda item 4.2

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OF INLAND WATER ECOSYSTEMS

Draft recommendation submitted by the Co-Chairs

The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice:

1. *Emphasizes* that the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets provide the overall framework of the Convention towards 2020, which should also guide the future work of all its cross-cutting issues and thematic areas;

2. *Notes with appreciation* the reports prepared by the Executive Secretary (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/8; UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/9; UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/10; and UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/11) and after considering these subjects concludes that:

(a) The implications of the water cycle, and freshwater resources, in the implementation of all of the thematic and cross-cutting programmes of work of the Convention and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2010–2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets are far reaching including, *inter alia*, that:

(i) The water cycle is a bio-physical process underpinned by ecosystems and that changes in water availability (and quality), including *inter alia* humidity, soil moisture and evapo-transpiration of plants, affect biodiversity, ecosystem functions and the delivery of ecosystem services;

(ii) There are many and varied implications in the way in which the water cycle functions necessitating that water be considered as a "cross-cutting" subject under the framework of the ecosystem approach;

(iii) The water cycle forges strong links between the various Aichi Biodiversity Targets and it remains important to adequately capture the relevant aspects of the water cycle through the monitoring framework for the Strategic Plan under further development (decision X/7);

(iv) Biodiversity supports "natural infrastructure" (or "natural assets", "green infrastructure") to meet human needs for water-related ecosystem services in a cost effective manner and that this presents significant opportunities for implementation the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020;

(v) Water issues and solutions can be very much case and locality specific, and it is not possible to be prescriptive or exhaustive regarding priorities but some key areas for additional attention can be identified, such as: the role of vegetation in sustaining local and regional rainfall and humidity; the importance of soil biodiversity with regards to soil moisture and water balances and therefore in sustaining land functionality; the importance of the water cycle in sustaining desirable levels of sediment transfer and deposition and the substantial ecosystem services this underpins (particularly in coastal areas); and the role of

/…

biodiversity/ecosystems in regulating the extremes of water availability (including both drought, through for example soil and land-cover restoration, and flooding, through for example wetland restoration); the importance of the water cycle in the exchange of organic matter, nutrients and energy between forests, soils and water, which, for example, occurs seasonally in particular ecosystems such as the Amazon; and

(vi) Groundwater and aquifers are important components of the water cycle and require more attention as they are suffering severe depletion in many regions, and groundwater and surface water resources are inter-linked, including through wetlands and the functionality of land cover including by facilitating soil water infiltration;

(b) Water use for different purposes affects downstream ecosystems (including in the coastal zone), and likewise for groundwater depletion and its impacts on terrestrial ecosystems;

(c) There are regional initiatives which establish a legally binding framework for integrated water management that can serve as models for other regions to strengthen much needed effective trans-national catchment management systems through further bilateral and multilateral agreements between/among the affected Parties; resources for the effective implementation of such agreements remain a constraint, and this poses a further threat to the already threatened water resources;

(d) Biodiversity plays an important role in sustaining water for human activities such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries;

(e) The findings, tools and methods that are already available should be applied at local, national or regional levels in order to address inland water ecosystems, their functions and services;

(f) The work within the framework of the study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) and the application of economic appraisal techniques to ecological resources presents new opportunities to influence policies, although economic valuations provide only a preliminary and limited approximation of the fiscal value of inland water ecosystems and they should not be taken as the definitive valuation of a given resource but serve only as a guide in the context of decision-making for developmental planning. Watersheds and associated inland water ecosystem services are important in developing States, and small island developing States amongst them, including with regards to their indigenous peoples and local communities, but they have limited technical capacity for such assessment of these resources and need technology transfer to enable them to evaluate their aquatic ecosystems in this context;

(g) Women as key stakeholders in sustaining family well-being and water-related ecosystem services, as well as the knowledge of indigenous women related to water, are key factors in the implementation of the programme of work on inland waters and indigenous peoples and local communities maintain a very close, holistic, cultural and spiritual relationship with essential elements in nature, particularly the water cycle, that is demonstrated in many indigenous languages, and based on their traditional knowledge, indigenous peoples and local communities maintain water management system rules that help to promote sustainability;

(h) Nutrient loading, including the impacts of agricultural production, is one of the main pressures on biological diversity, especially on inland water and coastal biodiversity, but has not yet been addressed as a specific issue within the Convention on Biological Diversity, despite being directly relevant to achieving targets 7, 8, 11 and 14, among others, of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, and more attention should be paid to eutrophication in freshwater as well as in coastal ecosystems world-wide;

(i) The ongoing scientific work on this topic (as described in the progress report on the work in addressing paragraphs 39-41 of decision X/28 on review of information, and the provision of key policy-relevant messages, on maintaining the ability of biodiversity to continue to support the water cycle, (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/15/11)) will be a useful resource for the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice to consider this topic further including in its future work in many subject areas;

(j) The 6th World Water Forum, to be held in Marseille, France, in March 2012, represents an opportunity to raise awareness of these topics.

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary, and *invites* the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to:

(a) Based on discussion with potential partners and stakeholders, include under the Joint Work Plan with the Ramsar Convention an assessment of opportunities for a strengthened alliance on natural solutions to water problems and to report on the options for the information of the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

(b) Make the report of the expert group available for the information of, and a summary report of its findings for the consideration of, the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

(c) Further streamline their activities in order to make best use of available resources and to further explore the scope for greater integration of the work of the two Conventions across all relevant, but somewhat disconnected, programmes of work of the Convention on Biological Diversity in order to achieve the greatest synergy and make best use of available resources, including the potential for joint meetings of relevant personnel (including experts and focal points), and to report on options for achieving this for the information of the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

4. *Recommends* that the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh meeting:

(a) *Notes* the importance of the water cycle to most areas of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011– 2020 and to achieving most of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and *consider* raising awareness of this, and thereby strengthening implementation of the Strategic Plan, through, *inter alia*, elevating biodiversity and water to a cross-cutting issue under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

(b) *Considers* the outcomes of the expert group on maintaining the ability of biodiversity to support the water cycle (as established in decision X/28, paragraph 39);

(c) *Notes* that the term “wetland” defined by the Ramsar Convention offers fluid and flexible scope for national interpretation for addressing biodiversity challenges in areas with inland-coastal interaction, and *invites* Parties and other Governments to enable wider adoption of the term in implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, particularly for achieving target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020;

(d) *Takes note* that the year 2013 will be the United Nations Year of Water Cooperation and that this provides, together with the current “International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015”, opportunities to bring water and biodiversity issues to broad public attention.
