



RAMSAR COP7 HIGHLIGHTS FRIDAY, 14 MAY 1999

Delegates at COP7 participated in Technical Sessions on National Planning for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use in the morning and on Involving People at All Levels in the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in the afternoon. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Ramsar and the World Heritage Convention.

NATIONAL PLANNING FOR WETLAND CONSERVATION AND WISE USE

Marie Odile Goth (France), Technical Session Chair, stressed the importance of reviewing national regulatory frameworks and using technical guidelines. She said that laws and administrative practices should curb further damage and encourage wetland rehabilitation. She called for the designation of under-represented and internationally important wetlands and the establishment of an international wetlands' network that is qualitatively different from the Ramsar List.

Sara Diop (Senegal), SC Representative for Africa, presented the draft resolution on the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance. He said the proposed strategic approach for designating these wetlands aims to establish an international network of wetlands, with a target of 2000 sites by COP9. It employs criteria for listing, including, *inter alia*, biogeographic representativeness and presence of endangered ecosystems, endemic species, and habitats for more than 20,000 waterbirds. On the international network of Ramsar sites, ALGERIA and PERU pointed to the potential risk of duplicating efforts. PERU urged delegates not to forget Ramsar's specificities despite the positive trend toward holistic understandings of wetlands, and called for clearer objectives for the Convention's international network.

David Stroud, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (UK), reported on the deliberations of a focus group on the Strategic Framework and guidelines for identifying and designating karst and other subterranean hydrological systems. The group stressed the importance of the resolution on enhancing conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and recommended strengthened links between these resolutions. They concluded that the guidelines for designation of karst systems should eventually be merged with the Strategic Framework.

Clayton Rubec, Canadian Wildlife Service, made a presentation on the Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies (NWP). He highlighted progress in the development and implementation of NWPs in Contracting Parties (CPs). He noted that few CPs have stand-alone wetland policies, although many are in preparation. He emphasized that there are many models and mechanisms to promote wetland conservation and wise use in different coun-

tries, including biodiversity strategies and environmental policies. He said the guidelines are intended to encourage CPs to develop NWPs, review the success of governments and partners in their development and implementation, and foster the sharing of experience.

Clare Shine, IUCN Environmental Law Center, presented the guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. She recalled that CPs are urged to conduct legal and institutional reviews to identify measures that undermine conservation and wise use and support the development of positive legal and institutional frameworks for wise use. Noting that few CPs have wetlands policies in place and that many policies relevant to wetland conservation have been implemented in a piecemeal fashion, she stressed the importance of mainstreaming wise use into all sectors of national legislation. She said the first step of a review is to collect information on existing wetland-related measures and sectoral measures that directly or indirectly affect wetlands. The review should assess the effectiveness of the former in promoting conservation and wise use, and analyze the means by which the latter impact wetlands. The review should then recommend legal and institutional changes necessary to support conservation and wise use, including the phase-out of measures that contribute to wetland loss, improvement of implementation of existing laws, and identification and prioritization of those laws and institutions that require reform.

Hans Skotte Moller, Danish National Forest and Nature Agency, discussed restoration as an element in national planning for wetland conservation and wise use. He noted that rehabilitation initiatives of modified and degraded wetlands were taking place in numerous Ramsar CPs. He said these efforts were scattered and rarely integrated into national legislation and planning schemes. He outlined elements essential to decisions on whether to restore wetlands, including, *inter alia*: the type of environmental benefits expected; biodiversity and hydro-ecological aspects; support from local land-owners and resources users; possibilities for ecotourism; and cultural history aspects. He proposed general guidelines for wetland rehabilitation, such as legislative obligations or options for multiple wetland restoration purposes, identification of all stakeholders, scientific consultations, and cost-effectiveness. He observed that wetlands may be the first major ecosystem rehabilitated by humankind on a global scale.

Anada Tiega, Ramsar Regional Coordinator for Africa, reported on the deliberations of a focus group on NWPs, which, *inter alia*, formulated additional proposals to establish funding mechanisms and conduct research and strengthen capacity to support implementation of the guidelines for NWPs.

Following these presentations, delegates met in regionally-based discussion groups to consider the draft resolutions relevant to this technical session. On national wetland planning, several delegates



called for inclusion of amendments proposed by the 13th Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF13) and the interlinkage between resolutions on EIA, restoration and incentive measures. On guidelines for NWP, issues raised included: the need for cultural sensitivity and consideration of traditional laws; conferring appropriate legal standing to wetlands; and whether EIA requirements should distinguish between major or all projects regardless of impact. On guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions, delegates stressed, *inter alia*, the need to promote traditional norms to enhance sustainable use of wetlands, and suggested adding procedures for implementing preventive and punitive measures and compensation for damages. On the Strategic Framework and guidelines for listing Wetlands of International Importance, the discussion groups noted shortcomings of the concept of biogeographic representativeness concerning migratory birds and quantitative as opposed to qualitative targets for Ramsar listing, and called for better definitions for wetlands and their boundaries. On wetland restoration, they raised issues of: benefits to be derived from degraded wetlands; the need for international cooperation to restore Wetlands of International Importance and enhance capacity to carry out restoration; the importance of inventories of wetland areas for potential restoration and of those lost to natural and human-induced factors; and whether the STRP should establish "working mechanisms" or a Ramsar task force to draw on global expertise on restoration.

INVOLVING PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS IN THE CONSERVATION AND WISE USE OF WETLANDS

Larry Mason (US), Technical Session Chair, introduced the Technical Session, highlighting the importance of communication, education and awareness in ensuring effective local community involvement.

Victor Pulido, National Wetland Programme (Peru), made a presentation on participatory processes to involve local communities and indigenous people in wetland management. He outlined methods for local community involvement, including: engaging elected representatives; consulting with local communities to review and revise management plans; and sharing and delegating wetland management tasks. He noted that effective participation requires, *inter alia*: developing and implementing incentives for wise use; building confidence and trust based on mutual respect and effective communication; ensuring flexibility and adaptability in responding to individual cases; and ensuring continuity through an iterative process. He noted the importance of funding, enabling legislative frameworks and high-level political support.

Esther Camac, Mesoamerican Indigenous Knowledge Programme, presented recommendations from the Indigenous Peoples' Regional Workshop held at Chiapas, including, *inter alia*: strengthening ties between Ramsar and the CBD; declaring wetland sites inhabited by indigenous people to be wetlands of international importance; placing control of these areas in indigenous peoples' hands; recognizing the crucial role of women in all aspects of wetland conservation; and encouraging cooperation between governments and indigenous peoples in conserving wetlands.

Louise Lakos, Hungarian Ministry for the Environment, discussed promotion of participatory wetland and river basin management through education and understanding. She provided an overview of the Outreach Programme 1999-2002 and noted that it refers to international and national education and public awareness (EPA) programmes aimed at changing practices that act against wetland conservation and wise use. She said the programme targets civil society, the business and education sectors, as well as regional and international bodies, and involves numerous actors, including CPs, the Secretariat, NGOs and donors. She outlined its rationale, tools and frameworks for action, and stressed that wetland conservation EPA programmes should correspond to local context and priorities.

Chris Richmond, New Zealand Department of Conservation, presented the draft resolution on Incentive measures to encourage the application of the Wise Use Principles. He drew attention to the work programme under the CBD and supported ongoing assessment of

incentive programmes. He emphasized the importance of motivating governments, local people and international organizations to conserve biological diversity, and stressed the need to assess local situations and structures in developing the most effective mix of incentive tools for each wetland site. He noted that the draft resolution calls on CPs to, *inter alia*, review existing policy, legal and institutional frameworks to identify and promote effective measures and remove perverse incentives, and share lessons learned. He added that the draft resolution also directs the STRP and Bureau to report to COP8 on progress in designing and implementing incentive measures.

Chair Mason reported on a focus group on Community Participation and the Outreach Programme. Its recommendations included: inserting reference to strengthening as well as establishing participatory processes; recognizing that in many contexts indigenous people and local communities are already managing and using wetlands sustainably; establishing appropriate legal and policy contexts that facilitate indigenous people's and local communities' direct involvement in national and local decision-making; creating a Ramsar focal point in addition to a clearinghouse for information on participatory approaches and indigenous knowledge systems; including reference to cultural sensitivity; supporting recovery and preservation of traditional knowledge and skills; and including local communities and indigenous people in a project to establish a global Ramsar e-mail network.

Following these presentations, delegates met in regionally-based discussion groups to consider draft resolutions relevant to this technical session. On the guidelines for establishing participatory processes, issues raised included: whether to refer to indigenous people's rights associated with their use of wetlands, as the term "rights" carries legal and political implications; and the applicability and implications of the terms "local communities," "indigenous people" and "stakeholders."

On the Outreach Programme 1999-2002, discussion groups: suggested deleting a recommendation to establish a Wetland Conservation Education and Public Awareness task force and formulate action plans; considered a more realistic deadline for its web site project; and added reference to ensuring that Outreach Programmes be extended beyond Ramsar sites.

On incentive measures to encourage wise use, discussion groups debated whether to: recognize the GBF13 findings; consider incentive measures when establishing national committees on wetlands; and replace "perverse incentives" with "incentives that undermine the conservation and wise use of wetlands."

IN THE CORRIDORS

A sense of relief and return to normalcy pervaded COP7 in the aftermath of Thursday's emotive debate over the regional categorization of Israel, as it returned to the more familiar business of the straightforward and largely non-controversial topics of the technical sessions. However, there were indications that this sense of calm may prove simply to be the eye of the storm. With the lunchtime deadline for submission of new draft resolutions for COP7 consideration rapidly approaching, rumors have been circulating that some delegates may table a draft resolution contesting Ramsar's recognition of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a Ramsar CP, as they consider it not to be the automatic successor to the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. It is suspected that other delegates will contest such a resolution and may table a different draft resolution condemning NATO actions in the Balkans, thus turning COP7 yet again into a stage for the enactment of political stand-offs that most agree have little to do with wetlands.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

TECHNICAL SESSIONS: The Technical Session on Tools for Assessing and Recognizing Wetland Values will take place from 9:00 am-1:00 pm and the Technical Session on the Framework for Regional and International Cooperation Regarding Wetlands from 3:00-7:00 pm in the Salones La Paz.