

"Wetlands: water, life, and culture"

**8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002

Resolution VIII.8

Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention

1. RECOGNIZING that assessment of the status and trends of wetlands, and assessing and reporting on their ecological character and change in ecological character, provide an essential basis for improving understanding of the state of, and pressures on, wetland ecosystems at the global, regional and national scales in support of future policy development, decision-making and prioritisation under the Convention, and for management interventions on Ramsar sites and other wetlands;
2. RECALLING Article 3.1 of the Convention, whereby Contracting Parties have committed themselves to formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of wetlands included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory;
3. RECALLING ALSO that the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11) calls for the establishment of an international network of wetland sites built from coherent and comprehensive networks of Ramsar sites within the territory of each Contracting Party to the Convention, and that Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework* concerns the use of the Ramsar site network for monitoring the status and trends of wetlands, specifically “to use Ramsar sites as baseline and reference areas for national, supranational/regional, and international environmental monitoring to detect trends in the loss of biological diversity, climate change, and the processes of desertification”; and CONCERNED that national and international mechanisms for detecting and reporting such trends under the Convention should be improved;
4. FURTHER RECALLING that under Article 3.2 of the Convention, each Contracting Party has agreed that it will arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference, and to report any such change, without delay, to the Ramsar Bureau;
5. NOTING that Resolution VI.1 interpreted ‘change in the ecological character of a site’ as meaning adverse change, caused by human activities, and noted that this excludes the process of natural evolutionary change occurring in wetlands;
6. CONCERNED that, according to available information including the National Reports to COP8, many Contracting Parties do not have in place the mechanisms to comply with Article 3.2, or that these are not being implemented;

7. FURTHER RECALLING that in Recommendation 4.8 the Contracting Parties instructed the Ramsar Bureau to maintain the “Montreux Record” of listed sites where change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur; that in Resolution 5.4 they established guidelines for the operation of this Montreux Record and determined that its purpose should be, *inter alia*, to identify priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention; and that in Resolution VI.1 they adopted a revised procedure for its operation;
8. RECOGNIZING that many Ramsar sites have undergone or are undergoing change in their ecological character, or are likely to undergo such change, by virtue of the land use and other pressures affecting them, and NOTING that since its establishment 76 Ramsar sites have been included by Contracting Parties on the Montreux Record;
9. RECOGNIZING ALSO that the information fields contained in the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS), as revised by Resolution VIII.13, used for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance should also form a statement of the ecological character of these wetlands and the factors affecting their character; but ALSO RECOGNIZING that Resolution VIII.7 calls for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to review and prepare further guidance on harmonising statements of ecological character in the RIS for wetland inventory and other purposes;
10. AWARE of the substantial body of tools and guidance already adopted by the Conference of the Parties to assist in the identification, assessment, and maintenance of the ecological character of sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance and other wetlands, through inventory, assessment, monitoring and management, compiled and published as Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks 7 and 8; and ALSO AWARE that the tools and guidance for application of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List* (Resolution VII.11) are applicable to all wetlands; and
11. RECOGNIZING that further guidance on these matters has been adopted by this meeting of the Conference of the Parties, notably the *New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands* (Resolution VIII.14), which includes guidance on the assessment and monitoring of ecological character and the factors that affect it, the *Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Resolution VIII.6), and the *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* (Resolution VIII.16);

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12. URGES Contracting Parties, as a matter of high priority, to put in place mechanisms in order to be informed at the earliest possible time, including through reports by national authorities and local and indigenous communities and NGOs, if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory included in the Ramsar List has changed, is changing or is likely to change, and to report any such change without delay to the Ramsar Bureau so as to implement fully Article 3.2 of the Convention, and to report on these matters in the National Reports prepared on the occasion of each meeting of the Conference of the Parties;
13. CONFIRMS that Article 3.2 reports should be made for types and causes of adverse, human-induced change in ecological character in order *inter alia* to provide the basis for

analysis of status and trends in Ramsar sites in line with Objective 4.1 of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11);

14. REAFFIRMS that in accordance with Resolution 5.4 this information will be maintained as part of the Ramsar Sites Database reports by Contracting Parties in fulfillment of Article 3.2, and DIRECTS the Ramsar Bureau, in cooperation with Wetlands International, to prepare and circulate to all Contracting Parties a simple format for this reporting;
15. RECOGNIZES that reporting under Article 3.2 of the Convention does not substitute for the requirement as adopted by Resolution VI.13 for Contracting Parties to provide a fully updated Ramsar Information Sheet for each of their designated Ramsar sites at intervals of not more than six years, and URGES Contracting Parties to renew their efforts to provide such updated Ramsar Information Sheets in a timely manner;
16. REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), with the assistance of Wetlands International, the Ramsar Bureau, and other relevant organizations to prepare an analysis and report of the status and trends in the ecological character of sites in the Ramsar List for consideration by COP9 and each subsequent meeting of the Conference of the Parties, and to set, as far as possible, the status and trends of Ramsar sites within the wider context of the status and trends of marine, coastal and inland wetlands, drawing upon the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and other assessment initiatives as appropriate;
17. ALSO REQUESTS the STRP to prepare further consolidated guidance on the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character, including guidelines for determining when such a change is too trivial to require reporting, having regard to the reasons why a given site is important and to the conservation objectives which have been set for it, and ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties in the meantime to take a precautionary approach;
18. RECOGNIZES that the establishment of a management planning process, in line with the guidance on management planning adopted by this meeting of the COP, on all Ramsar sites greatly facilitates the identification, reporting and resolution of changes in ecological character, and that inclusion in each management plan of an objective of maintenance of the ecological character of the site provides a basis for implementation of Article 3.1 of the Convention;
19. FURTHER RECOGNIZES that several response options and mechanisms are available to the Contracting Party concerned to address and resolve identified negative changes, or likely changes, in the ecological character of sites on the List, including *inter alia*:
 - a) when resources permit, using an established management planning process, including undertaking an environmental impact assessment, to guide implementation of appropriate management action;
 - b) seeking the advice of the STRP, and its National Focal Points, on appropriate issues to take into account in addressing the matter, through the mechanism of requesting the Bureau to circulate the Article 3.2 pro-forma completed by the Contracting Party concerned to the STRP for comment;

- c) for developing countries and countries with economies in transition, requesting resources to implement management action through the emergency assistance category of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund or seeking such resources from other relevant sources; and
 - d) listing, if appropriate, on the Montreux Record and requesting a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) in order to bring international expertise to bear in providing advice on appropriate actions;
20. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to maintain or restore the ecological character of their Ramsar sites, including utilizing all appropriate mechanisms to address and resolve as soon as practicable the matters for which a site may have been the subject of a report pursuant to Article 3.2; and, once those matters have been resolved, to submit a further report, so that both positive influences at sites and changes in ecological character may be fully reflected in reporting under Article 3.2 and in the reporting to all meetings of the COP in order to establish a clear picture of the status and trends of the Ramsar site network at three-year intervals;
21. REAFFIRMS, in accordance with the *Guidelines for the operation of the Montreux Record* (Annex to Resolution VI.1), that the Montreux Record is the principal tool of the Convention for highlighting those sites where an adverse change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur and which are therefore in need of priority conservation action, and ACKNOWLEDGES that the voluntary inclusion of a particular site on the Montreux Record is a useful tool available to Contracting Parties in circumstances where:
- a) demonstrating national commitment to resolve the adverse changes would assist in their resolution;
 - b) highlighting particularly serious cases would be beneficial at national and/or international level;
 - c) positive national and international conservation attention would benefit the site; and/or
 - d) inclusion on the Record would provide guidance in the allocation of resources available under financial mechanisms;
22. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, when submitting a report in fulfillment of Article 3.2, to consider whether the site would benefit from listing on the Montreux Record, and to request such listing as appropriate; and
23. REQUESTS Contracting Parties with sites on the Montreux Record to regularly provide the Ramsar Bureau with an update on their progress in taking action to address the issues for which these Ramsar sites were listed on the Record, including reporting fully on these matters in their National Reports to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.