

UK SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group

1 February 2006

Additional Ramsar site selection guidance from CoP9

Background

Ramsar CoP9 agreed additional guidance related to the selection of Ramsar sites (Resolution IX.1, Annex B) which is appended. The final guidance is virtually unchanged from drafts which were circulated early in 2005 for consultation, and were considered in the development of UK positions prior to COP9. (The only substantive change was the rejection of a proposed wording change to Criterion 1 and also of proposals to highlight the use of Criterion 1 for the selection of sites of cultural importance, as well as new text on artificial wetlands).

Issues to note in particular

General guidance

- A general stress on the importance of the selection of Ramsar sites for aquatic fauna, notably fish. [Para A1]
- General guidance highlighting the importance of ecosystem benefits in the context of the selection of Ramsar sites. [Para A2]
- Guidance in relation to artificial wetlands - notably in relation to the (potential) scenario where the destruction of a natural wetland might be justified on the grounds that an resultant artificial wetland might still be of international importance for features that develop at the new site. [Section D]

Specific guidance

- **Criterion 2.** Removal from Para 172 of reference to species listed in Appendices II & III of CITES as grounds for justification for inclusion in Criterion 2.
- General stress on importance of karst and other subterranean wetlands in the selection of Ramsar sites under Criteria 2 & 3.
- **Criterion 5.** Emphasis that this applies to single species as well as multi-species congregations. Note this differs from the policy adopted by the UK 2001 SPA review which excluded sites holding >20,000 birds of a single species.
- A reminder that sites qualifying under both Criterion 5 and 6 should be listed under both.
- New guidance on turnover issues.
- **Criterion 6.** Guidance related to treatment of situations where there are mixed populations of the same species (and hence different 1% thresholds).
- **Criterion 9.** This new 1% threshold for non-avian taxa was warmly welcomed at CoP9. It is doubtful whether there will be application in the UK, but will have considerable applicability in tropical countries for large aquatic fauna e.g. hippos, crocodiles, etc. where estimates of both a site estimate and populations exist.

Given that aspects of Ramsar guidance have been taken into consideration in reviews of the SPA network, some aspects of the new guidance will be of significance for the next review of the SPA network.

David Stroud



9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Wetlands and water: supporting life, sustaining livelihoods”

Kampala, Uganda, 8-15 November 2005

Resolution IX.1 Annex B

Revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance

II. The vision, objectives and short-term target for the List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List)

Modify, as follows, the Vision for the List in the light of the updated definition of “ecological character” in Resolution IX.1, Annex A.

The vision

To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services¹.

Delete the “target for the Ramsar List to the year 2005” (box following current paragraph 21) and replace with 2010-related target adopted by COP8 Resolution VIII.26:

To ensure that the List of Wetlands of International Importance contains at least 2,500 sites covering 250 million hectares by 2010.

IV. Guidelines for adopting a systematic approach to identifying priority wetlands for designation under the Ramsar Convention

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 45:

- A1. Less visible interests should not be overlooked. Fish are not only an integral part of aquatic ecosystems, but are a vital source of food and income for people throughout the world. However, the production of fisheries in many parts of the world is declining as a consequence of unsustainable harvest regimes and the loss and degradation of habitats including spawning and nursery areas. Underwater species such as fish and other aquatic fauna and flora can often be overlooked in the development of cases for Ramsar site designation, unlike more visible animals and plants. Such aquatic interests should be carefully and systematically reviewed.

¹ Within this context, ecosystem benefits are defined in accordance with the MA definition of ecosystem services as “the benefits that people receive from ecosystems”.

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 51:

- A2. **Sites of importance for the interactions between the ecosystem structure and functioning and their benefits.** Wetlands exist within landscapes in which people's activities are influenced by the wetlands and their delivery of ecosystem benefits/services, and in which the wetlands themselves are influenced by the use of such benefits/services by dependent local communities (e.g., by forms of traditional management). There are many examples where the ecosystem structure and functioning of the wetland has developed as a result of cultural features or legacies. There are also many examples where the maintenance of the ecosystem structure and functioning of wetlands depends upon the interaction between human activities and the wetland's biological, chemical, and physical components.

Move section IV.I (Guidelines for identifying and designating specific wetlands types) to follow section V, to improve readability and use of the *Strategic Framework*. Add new section D as follows:

D. Guidance for identifying and designating artificial wetlands

- D1. Article 1.1 of the 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."
- D2. Many existing Ramsar sites are artificial (in whole or in part) in as much as they are human-made wetlands which have, in some parts of the world and especially in anthropogenic landscapes, developed international importance for biodiversity in the period following their creation.
- D3. However, within the legal context of the Convention, the fact that some artificial wetlands may eventually develop importance for biodiversity should never be used as justification for the destruction, substantial modification, or conversion of natural or near-natural wetlands at a location.

V. Criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance, guidelines for their application, and long-term targets

Guidance for the application of Criterion 1

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 167:

- A3. When selecting a biogeographic regionalisation scheme to apply, it is generally most appropriate to use a continental, regional, or supra-national scheme rather than a national or subnational one.

Amend current paragraph 168 as follows:

168. Objective 1 and, in particular 1.2 (paragraph 10 above), indicates that another consideration under this Criterion is to give priority to those wetlands whose ecological character plays a substantial role in the natural functioning of a major river basin or coastal system."

Guidance for the application of Criterion 2

Amend current paragraph 171 as follows:

171. Ramsar sites have an important role in the conservation of globally threatened species and ecological communities. Notwithstanding the small numbers of individuals or sites that may be involved, or poor quality of quantitative data or information that may sometimes be available, particular consideration should be given to listing wetlands that support globally threatened communities or species at any stage of their life cycle using Criterion 2 or 3.

Amend current paragraph 172 as follows, so as to remove reference to Appendices II and III of CITES (since these list those species potentially endangered by trade rather than those whose conservation may necessarily be effectively pursued by site-based conservation measures).

172. General Objective 2.2 within this Strategic Framework urges Contracting Parties to seek to include in the Ramsar List wetlands that include threatened ecological communities or are critical to the survival of species identified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered under national endangered species legislation/programmes or within international frameworks such as the IUCN Red Lists or Appendix I of CITES and the Appendices of CMS.

Amend current paragraph 174 as follows:

174. For identifying sites with threatened ecological communities, greatest conservation value will be achieved through the selection of sites with ecological communities that have one or more of the following characteristics. They:
- i) are globally threatened communities or communities at risk from direct or indirect drivers of change, particularly where these are of high quality or particularly typical of the biogeographic region; and/or
 - ii) are rare communities within a biogeographic region; and/or
 - iii) include ecotones, seral stages, and communities which exemplify particular processes; and/or
 - iv) can no longer develop under contemporary conditions (because of climate change or anthropogenic interference for example); and/or
 - v) are at the contemporary stage of a long developmental history and which support a well-preserved paleoenvironmental archive; and/or
 - vi) are functionally critical to the survival of other (perhaps rarer) communities or particular species; and/or
 - vii) have been the subject of significant decline in extent or occurrence.

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 174:

- A5. When selecting a biogeographic regionalisation scheme to apply under paragraph 174 (i) and/or (ii), it is generally most appropriate to use a continental, regional, or supra-national scheme rather than a national or subnational one.

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 175:

- A6. Be aware also of the biological importance of many karst and other subterranean hydrological systems (see specific guidance below).

Guidelines for the application of Criterion 3

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 177:

- A7. Be aware also of the biological importance of many karst and other subterranean hydrological systems (see specific guidance below).
- A8. When selecting a biogeographic regionalisation scheme to apply, it is generally most appropriate to use a continental, regional, or supra-national scheme rather than a national or subnational one.

Guidelines for the application of Criterion 5

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 183:

- A9. Criterion 5 should be applied not only to multi-species assemblages, but also to sites regularly holding more than 20,000 waterbirds of any one species.
- A10. For populations of waterbirds of more than 2,000,000 individuals, a 1% threshold of 20,000 is adopted on the basis that sites holding this number are of importance under Criterion 5. To reflect the importance of the site for the species concerned, it is also appropriate to list such a site under Criterion 6.

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 184:

- A11. Turnover of individuals, especially during migration periods, leads to more waterbirds using particular wetlands than are counted at any one point in time, such that the importance of such a wetland for supporting waterbird populations will often be greater than is apparent from simple census information.
- A12. However, accurate estimation of turnover and total number of individuals of a population or population using a wetland is difficult, and several methods (e.g. cohort marking and resighting, or summing increases in a count time-series) which have at times been applied do not yield statistically reliable or accurate estimates.
- A13. The only currently available method which is considered to provide reliable estimates of turnover is that of unique capture/markings and resighting/recapture of individually-marked birds in a population at a migratory staging site. But it is important to recognize that for this method to generate a reliable estimate of migration volume, its application usually requires significant capacity and resources, and for large and/or inaccessible staging areas (especially where birds in a population are widely dispersed) use of this method can present insuperable practical difficulties.
- A14. When turnover is known to occur in a wetland but it is not possible to acquire accurate information on migration volume, Parties should continue to consider recognizing the importance of the wetland as a migratory staging area through the application of Criterion 4, as the basis of ensuring that their management planning for the site fully recognizes this importance.

Guidelines for the application of Criterion 6

Add additional guidance after current paragraph 188:

- A15. At some sites, more than one biogeographical population of the same species can occur, especially during migration periods and/or where flyway systems of different populations intersect at major wetlands. Where such populations are indistinguishable in the field, as is usually the case, this can present practical problems as to which 1% threshold to apply. Where such mixed populations occur (and these are inseparable in the field) it is suggested that the larger 1% threshold be used in the evaluation of sites.
- A16. However, particularly where one of the populations concerned is of high conservation status, this guidance should be applied flexibly and Parties should consider recognizing the overall importance of the wetland for both populations through the application of Criterion 4, as the basis of ensuring that their management planning for the site fully recognizes this importance. This guidance should not be applied to the detriment of smaller, high conservation status populations.
- A17. Note that this guidance applies just during the period of population mixing (often, but not exclusively, this is during periods of migration). At other times, it is generally possible to assign a 1% threshold accurately to the single population that is present.
- A18. Turnover of individuals, especially during migration periods, leads to more waterbirds using particular wetlands than are counted at any one point in time, such that the importance of such a wetland for supporting waterbird populations will often be greater than is apparent from simple census information. For further guidance on estimation of turnover see the guidance under Criterion 5, paragraphs A12-A14.

Add new Criterion and guidelines:

Specific criterion based on other taxa

Criterion 9:

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

Long-term target for the Ramsar List:

- A19. To have included in the Ramsar List all wetlands which regularly support 1% or more of a biogeographical population of one non-avian animal species or subspecies.

Guidelines for the application of Criterion 9

- A20. When Contracting Parties are reviewing candidate sites for listing under this Criterion, greatest conservation value will be achieved through the selection of a suite of sites that hold populations of globally threatened species or subspecies. Refer also to paragraph [44] above, "Species presence in perspective", and paragraph [52] above, "Complementary international frameworks". Consideration may also be given to turnover of individuals of migratory animals at migration periods, so that a cumulative total is reached, if such data are

available (see guidance in paragraphs [A11-A14] related to waterbirds which is also applicable to Criterion 9 in relation to non-avian animals).

- A21. To ensure international comparability, where possible, Contracting Parties should use the most current international population estimates and 1% thresholds provided and regularly updated by IUCN's Specialist Groups through the IUCN Species Information Service (SIS) and published in the *Ramsar Technical Report* series, as the basis for evaluating sites for the List using this Criterion.
- A22. This Criterion can also be applied to nationally endemic species or populations, where reliable national population size estimates exist. When making such an application of the Criterion, information concerning the published source of the population size estimate should be included in the justification for the application of this Criterion. Such information can also contribute to expanding the taxonomic coverage of the information on population estimates and 1% thresholds published in the *Ramsar Technical Report* series.
- A23. It is anticipated that this Criterion will be applicable to populations and species in a range of non-avian taxa including, *inter alia*, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and aquatic macro-invertebrates. However, only species or subspecies for which reliable population estimates have been provided and published (paragraphs A21 and A22) should be included in the justification for the application of this Criterion. 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 this Criterion, 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 estimates.