The Ramsar Convention and impact assessment

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Presentation structure:

- What is the Ramsar Convention?
- A short history of Ramsar and impact assessment
- Ramsar and CBD links
- How well is IA being applied to wetlands?
- Future collaboration and work
What is the Convention on Wetlands?

• Oldest of the global environmental conventions
• the only global convention focussing attention on an ecosystem (wetlands)
• covers very wide range of wetlands - from coral reefs to mountains

Why the “Ramsar” Convention?

• Ramsar, Iran - where Convention agreed 2 February 1971 by 18 countries
  XX so not an acronym (RAMSAR) XX
• Celebrated annually on World Wetlands Day - 2 February
Ramsar’s Mission

“The conservation and wise use of wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.”

(Strategic Plan 2003-2008)
What is the “wise use” of wetlands?

• “... “Wise use of wetlands is the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development.”

(Ramsar COP9, 2005) Resolution IX.1 Annex A
Ramsar covers:

- Natural and human-made wetlands
- inland/freshwater:
  - marshes, rivers, lakes, reservoirs etc.
- coastal/marine
  - Mangroves, lagoons, estuaries, coral reefs, seagrass beds etc.
- above ground and underground
  - karst and caves
- but not deep oceans
Ramsar Contracting Parties

Contracting Parties commit to delivering the Convention through 3 “pillars”:

• Wise use of all wetlands
• Wetlands of International Importance - designation and management
• International cooperation
The Ramsar Convention today

• 152 Contracting Parties
  - others in process of joining (accession)
  - from Africa, central Asia, Caribbean, Oceania

• Over 1600 Wetlands of International Importance – “Ramsar sites”
  - totaling >120 million hectares
  - size: from <1 ha to >6 million ha
Ramsar links with other organisations

Cooperation with:

- NGOs and expert networks
- regional environmental organisations
- UN agencies
- other environmental conventions
  - Joint Work Plan with CBD
  - joint activities developing with UNCCD, CMS, UNFCCC, UNESCO, MAB etc.
Some key features of the Ramsar Convention

- Not under the UN system - governed by its Parties
- Recognises wetlands (goods and services) as vital for human wellbeing (food and water security) and biodiversity conservation
- Supports practical wetland sustainable utilization by countries
- Open, collaborative and flexible mechanisms
  - Both ecosystems and species
  - Both sites and broad-based sustainable use
- Supports implementation - not a “compliance-based” convention
- Provides practical guidance on many topics - prepared by the STRP & its collaborators
The Ramsar "tool-kit" - wise use handbooks

- 14 Handbooks - published 2004
- bring together:
  - Guidelines: COP7 & earlier COPs
  - relevant COP Resolutions and Recommendations
  - case studies
- New 3rd edition in preparation
  - include COP9 guidance
  - Update and replace some Handbooks
A short history of Ramsar and impact assessment

• Key basis - Article 3 of Convention text

**Article 3.1:**
“Contracting Parties [countries] shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of wetlands, including those on the List [i.e. Ramsar sites], and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory.”

**Article 3.2:**
“CP shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any Ramsar site has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human intervention.”
A short history of Ramsar and impact assessment

- Implicit in Art. 3.2 is to use IA to predict likely change, and to respond to its findings to deliver Article 3.1 commitments

- This link only made explicit by Parties at COP8 (2002)
A short history of Ramsar and impact assessment

• Role of EIA recognised as early as COP1 (1981) - Recommendation 1.6

• Many EIA decisions since:
  - 1987 Recommendation 3.3
  - 1990 Recommendation 4.10
  - 1993 Resolution 5.6
  - 1999 Resolution VII.16
  - 2002 Resolution VIII.9
Ramsar’s Strategic Plan 1997-2002

Adopted 1996:

• stressed importance of IA
• requested expansion of wise use guidance - information on environmental assessment guidelines and good practice
• take particular account of EIA and SEA when assessing impacts
• reaffirmed IA as a key Convention tool
• recognised importance of including IA as cross-cutting issue in CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan (JWP)

2nd Strategic Plan (2003-2008) continues IA importance
Ramsar and CBD collaboration

- since 1996 (CBD COP3) Ramsar identified as lead implementation partner of CBD on wetlands
- delivered through Joint Work Plans
  - now implementing 3rd JWP (2002-2006)
  - covers thematic ecosystem themes and cross-cutting issues incl. IA
- Ramsar Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP) and COP8 (2002) recognised the CBD COP6 IA guidelines as fully applicable to wetlands
  - adopted and use urged - with annotations for the Ramsar context
- IAIA is the key expert link between Ramsar and CBD work
Ramsar and IAIA

- IAIA invited to contribute expertise to STRP’s work since 1999 & 2006-2008 work plan
- formalised through 2001 MoC between IAIA and Ramsar Bureau
- COP8 & COP9 (2005) formally appointed IAIA as STRP observer organisation
1999 expectations of IA implementation

Resolution VII.16: *The Ramsar Convention and impact assessment: strategic, environmental and social*

- Parties to strengthen efforts to make sure potentially damaging developments to wetlands are subject to rigorous IA procedures
- Parties to ensure IA process is transparent and participatory - including local stakeholders
How well are Ramsar Parties applying IA?

COP8 National implementation Reports (130 countries)

Globally:

- 75 countries (63%) - EIA required for any action which can potentially affect any wetland
- 33 countries (25%) - EIA required for some wetlands (e.g. Ramsar sites) only
- in total 91% - some wetland EIA activity required
How well are Ramsar Parties applying IA?

Regional differences:

- **Asia:** no EIAs for wetlands in 52% of countries
- **Neotropics:** 65% have legislation requiring EIA for all wetlands, but
  - only 40% have actually carried out EIAs for threats to Ramsar sites
- **Mediterranean Basin countries:** only 29% have undertaken EIAs for all cases for Ramsar sites
  - although 69% require it
- **Africa:** 82% countries EIAs required - but little information on extent of application
How well are Ramsar Parties applying IA?

- **Europe**
  - Only 48% countries require EIA for all cases of risk of change of ecological character of Ramsar sites

Ramsar Europe Regional Coordinator, noting no progress in the previous 3 years:

"It is difficult to understand why every Ramsar site where proposed developments are likely to affect its ecological character still does not benefit from an EIA.

In some cases, a lack of political will to implement existing legislation is detectable."

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How well are Ramsar Parties applying IA?

Conclusions?

• Legislative requirements widely in place

But

• not being widely or consistently applied
• Countries need support and urging to do more EIA
  - benefit to both wetlands and IA practitioners!
Latest decisions: Resolution VIII.9 (COP8, 2002)

Ramsar Parties to:

• make use of the CBD guidelines
• indicate their precise needs for further information, guidance and advice in IA relevant for wetlands
• provide relevant material
  - lessons learned, case studies, guidelines, advice sources etc.
• establish contact with relevant national focal points in IAIA networks
  - to identify sources of expertise and advice to assist in wetland IA
**Resolution VIII.9**

Further guidance work - STRP to:

- report a synthesis of lessons learned from case studies
- identify current wetland-related guidelines, and investigate ways of filling gaps
- review existing IA references in Ramsar material, and correct any inconsistencies in approach
- prepare advice on SEA in context of other Ramsar guidelines
Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 11
“Impact Assessment”

✓ Introduction to Impact assessment and Ramsar
✓ CBD 2002 guidelines for incorporating biodiversity into impact assessment
✓ Strategic Environmental Assessment
  - General approaches
✓ In English, French and Spanish
  ✓ available mid-2004
CBBIA project

- Will support enhanced capacity in countries to deliver Ramsar and CBD expectations for implementation
  - Through IAIA lead role supporting Ramsar on impact assessment
- Will also develop some of the additional guidance and case studies/lessons learned requested by Ramsar COP8
- Ramsar Handbook 11 provides a resource material for project implementation
Latest developments - 2005-2006

  - Explains inter-relationship between different types and purposes of assessments
- Supported by Information Paper describing types of assessment
- Wetland Rapid Assessment Guidelines
  - Jointly with CBD
  - Published March 2006 as CBD Technical Series 22 & Ramsar Technical Report 1
There is a wide range of different types and methods of wetland assessment relevant to different aspects of Convention implementation, with each suited to, and designed for, different purposes and situations. These include:

i) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
ii) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
iii) Risk Assessment (RA)
iv) Vulnerability Assessment (VA)
v) Change (status and trends) assessment
vi) Species-specific assessment
vii) Indicator assessment
viii) Resource (ecosystem benefits/services) assessment
ix) Assessment of values of wetland benefits/services
x) Environmental water requirement (environmental flows) assessment
IF-WIAM - how different assessments fit together

Assessments:
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Wetland Risk Assessment
- Vulnerability Assessment
- Rapid Assessment of biodiversity
- Wetland Valuation
- Policies, Plans, Programmes
- Projects
- Sites, Direct Drivers, Pressures
- Monitoring, incl. Early Warning Indicators

Assessment processes:
- Helps determine need and parameters for:
- Provides baseline, limits to feed into:
- Implemented by:
- Impact on:
Latest developments – 2006-2008

STRP finalising more assessment guidance:

- Vulnerability assessment
- Economic valuation of wetland services
- Environmental water requirements (environmental flows) assessment methods
Latest developments - 2005-2006

- CBD COP8 (March 2006) adopted expanded EIA & SEA guidance
  - Replaces the earlier EIA guidelines
  - Ramsar STRP will be asked to review the new guidelines for their relevance to wetlands
  - Take to Ramsar COP10 (2008) for endorsement
Thank you
**IAIA and STRP’s work 2003-2005**

STRP11 (April 2003): IAIA agreed to act as lead on elements of IA work

5 elements:

- some can be delivered through current timely project
- some may need additional resourcing
- discuss this week how to deliver this work
  - linked with CBD work
IAIA and STRP’s work 2003-2005

Task 1. Prepare advice for Parties on SEA

Product: Advice, including wetland case studies, on applying SEA in context of Ramsar guidelines

- IAIA lead

Task 2. Synthesis of lessons learned from IA case studies

Product: Report on experience of applying IA on wetlands

- IAIA lead
  - urge IAIA members to contribute experience
  - could seek additional case studies from Ramsar Parties
  - may need additional resourcing to set IAIA experience in Ramsar context

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IAIA and STRP’s work 2003-2005

Task 3: Review IA references in Ramsar materials, and identify how to correct inconsistencies

*Product*: Update of 1996 (COP6) review of impact assessment issues in Ramsar materials

- **Lead**: David Pritchard (BirdLife)

Task 4: Identify wetland-related elements of existing guidelines, identify gaps, and investigate ways of filling the gaps

- Taking into account CBD’s guidance on IA in relation to sacred and indigenous and local communities’ lands

*Product*: Proposal for filling any gaps in existing guidance

- **IAIA lead**
IAIA and STRP's work 2003-2005

Task 5: Incorporation of EIA and SEA into wetland risk assessment procedures

• Product:
  - identify linkages between risk assessment and EIA and SEA
  - prepare statement clarifying the relationships

• IAIA invited by STRP11 to take the lead
  - with assistance from David Pritchard, and risk assessment expert identified by STRP network

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