

10. Final comments

General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan

The UK approach to the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan was outlined earlier in this report and was presented to the Pan-European meeting of Contracting Parties in Latvia in June 1998. The approach of setting specific achievable targets for required actions has attracted much attention both nationally and internationally. Indeed, the process of work to derive, and now to start to implement these targets has, and is, generating renewed interest in the aims of the Convention within the UK and to that end has been particularly valuable.

The targets derived cover only a proportion of the necessary actions to fully implement the Strategic Plan, so as part of the monitoring and review process further targets may be developed. All involved in the process felt, however, that it was more important to start with deriving some achievable targets for specific areas of work and then progressively building on these, rather than attempting to put in place a greatly ambitious and possibly bureaucratic process that might have run the risk of stagnation. Whatever the approach, monitoring of actions will be crucial. To this end the UK's close linkage of work to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan, and its Biodiversity Action Plan will be very important.

Observations concerning the functions and services of the various Ramsar bodies

The Bureau

The Bureau continues to grow in professionalism and expertise, and in the past triennium has provided leadership in promoting the aims of the Convention. We particularly commend the Bureau's staff for their dedication and commitment.

Scientific and Technical Review Panel

We have some doubts as to whether the STRP, as currently constituted, is able to draw adequately on the full breadth of relevant international scientific expertise in its considerations. Whilst the concept of each Contracting Party formally nominating a member would create an unwieldy structure, there seems to be strong merit in considering mechanisms that would facilitate the scope of expanding the network. In this regard we would strongly support current suggestions that each CP nominate a focal point that could feed relevant information and expertise into the work of the STRP.

To broaden the base of scientific expertise available to the STRP, we also consider that thought needs to be given as to how best to draw upon the considerable wealth of experience of the Specialist Groups of Wetlands International and IUCN. As key component sectors of these partners organisations there may well be elements of the work charged to STRP following CoP7 that they could contribute to, either through the provision of background reports or other assessments.

As in 1996, an early meeting of the STRP following CoP7 should occur so as to facilitate the project planning of the triennium's work plan linking to timetables of Partner Organisations and others.

10.3 General observations and recommendations for the future

There is a process in hand to derive additional guidance relating to the use of Ramsar site selection criteria. It is anticipated that this will again stress, as do the current guidelines, the desirability of regional guidelines for site selection, especially for certain wetland formations or other difficult geographical areas or species groups. We would strongly endorse the need for such additional guidance which in the UK view is urgently needed. It would be useful if any covering Decision mandated the development of draft guidance for particular interests. Perhaps this could be undertaken through the

establishment of small working groups drawing on expertise in relevant CPs, Wetlands International Specialist Groups and the STRP, reporting to STRP and thence to CoP8. Possible suitable interests on which additional guidance might be drawn up include temperate peatlands; habitats of Arctic waterfowl; mangrove systems; and subterranean karst wetlands.

The Convention is rightly diversifying the areas of its activity and is currently, and correctly, giving priority to issues of water resource management, and the role of wetlands in human health and development. Yet, the Convention derived from concerns for more traditional nature conservation aspects of wetland conservation, specifically for waterbird conservation. It is the UK's view that in diversifying the activity and scope of the Convention, it is important that traditional nature conservation aspects, especially for waterbirds, are not neglected. As well as their own importance, flagship or 'totemic' taxa such as waterbirds are frequently very valuable in wetland education and public awareness programmes, not just in developing countries. We would wish to see the current development of the Convention's activities to be alongside and as well as rather than instead of traditional consideration of nature conservation issues.

Listed Ramsar sites have the potential to play a key role in the conservation of globally threatened wetland species, and to this end we consider it as important that any revised guidance on the use of site selection criteria stresses such a role.

As noted in the main text of this report, the UK welcomes the growing co-ordination with the Convention of Biological Diversity. Steps to further integrate the work programmes of the two Conventions and to reduce duplication in the work of Secretariats and national focal points can only be helpful. We consider that both Conventions have a separate role and full integration of the subsuming of Ramsar under the CBD is unnecessary, however we would strongly encourage further such close co-ordination.