

**Global biodiversity mechanisms:
a thematic review of recent developments and future evidence needs**

Strand Palace Hotel, London 20th May 2009

MEA Briefing

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

May 2009

Visit: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/MEA-event>



Global biodiversity mechanisms: a thematic review of recent developments and future evidence needs

Strand Palace Hotel, London 20th May 2009

Briefing note: Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Ramsar Convention on wetlands is the only global environmental treaty concerned with a specific biotope. It is one of the oldest of the global biodiversity conventions (1971) and as the UK was an early signatory, there has been a long history of implementation within the UK (and its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies), and support for the activities of the Convention internationally.

The Convention has moved away from an early focus on the protection of wetlands solely for biodiversity conservation. Over the last decade it has developed a more holistic approach which sees wetland conservation as a central means of achieving sustainable development through the delivery of ecosystem services to human populations living, not only within wetlands, but also further afield. For the vast majority of countries, Ramsar provides the only international framework for the designation of important wetland sites.

The Convention is implemented around three 'pillars':

- ◆ the conservation and wise-use of designated sites;
- ◆ the wise-use of all wetlands; and
- ◆ international co-operation.

In 1998, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) determined that its programme of work on inland waters biodiversity would be delivered through the Ramsar Convention, and a joint work plan was developed to this end. This, and its subsequent updates, has proved an effective means of encouraging implementation of CBD-related activity in those Ramsar Contracting Parties that are not signatories to CBD.

The 10th Conference of the Parties (CoP 10) was convened in Changwon, Republic of Korea from 28 October - 4 November 2008¹. The Convention significantly extended its reach between CoP 9 in 2005 and CoP 10, growing in Convention membership from 146 to 158 Contracting Parties (currently 159), with the number of Ramsar sites increasing from 1,505 (126.5 million ha) to 1,758 (161.3 m ha) over the period. Currently there are 1,842 sites, totalling c. 180 m ha, in May 2009.

CoP 10 adopted 32 Resolutions² including those related to:

- ◆ the Changwon Declaration on human well-being and wetlands;
- ◆ principles for partnerships between the Ramsar Convention and the business sector;
- ◆ a framework for Ramsar data and information needs;
- ◆ a framework for processes of detecting, reporting and responding to change in wetland ecological character;

¹ A full report of the CoP is available at: http://ramsar.org/cop10/cop10_conf_rpt_e.htm, with analysis by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin at: <http://www.iisd.ca/ramsar/cop10>.

² http://ramsar.org/res/key_res_x_index_e.htm

- ◆ Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment: updated scientific and technical guidance;
- ◆ wetlands and river basin management - consolidated scientific and technical guidance;
- ◆ guidance on responding to the continued spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza;
- ◆ promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways;
- ◆ climate change and wetlands;
- ◆ wetlands and "biofuels";
- ◆ wetlands and extractive industries
- ◆ small island States and the Ramsar Convention.

The UK actively contributed to the drafting and negotiation of many of these. Particularly notable were:

- ◆ major debates on draft Resolutions regarding climate change (following two triennia where the issue had not been discussed by the CoP), and also regarding biofuels and wetlands;
- ◆ adoption of a substantive 'guide to guidance' related to highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, including new guidance for wetland site managers;
- ◆ a major Resolution regarding the conservation of international flyways for migratory waterbirds highlighting the particular importance of inter-tidal mudflats on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, and which calls for global exchange of good practise between different international flyway initiatives;
- ◆ initial discussion on the important and emerging issue of the impacts of extractive industries on wetlands worldwide; and
- ◆ agreement on a framework for assessing, monitoring and reporting the ecological character of both listed Ramsar sites and other wetlands.