

## *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*

# Guidelines for the Implementation of the Wise Use Concept



First adopted as an annex to Recommendation 4.10 of the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (Montreux, Switzerland, 1990).

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**Note: The "wise use" principle inscribed in Article 3.1 of the Convention in 1971, and its definition and application by the Conference of the Contracting Parties, have been established and have evolved completely independently from the so-called "wise use movement" that has emerged in recent years in North America. The use of the same term does not necessarily indicate that there is a commonality of understanding and/or purpose.**

### Introduction

Article 3.1 of the Convention states that the Contracting Parties "shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory".

The 3rd Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Regina, Canada, from 27 May to 5 June 1987, adopted the following definition of wise use of wetlands:

"The wise use of wetlands is their sustainable utilization for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem".

Sustainable utilization is defined as "human use of a wetland so that it may yield the greatest continuous benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations".

Natural properties of the ecosystem are defined as "those physical, biological or chemical components, such as soil, water, plants, animals and nutrients, and the interactions between them".

The wise use provisions apply to all wetlands and their support systems within the territory of a Contracting Party, both those wetlands designated for the List, and all other wetlands. The concept of wise use seeks both the formulation and implementation of general wetland policies, and wise use of specific wetlands. These activities are integral parts of sustainable development.

It is desirable in the long term that all Contracting Parties should have comprehensive national wetland policies, formulated in whatever manner is appropriate to their national institutions. However as recognized by the report of the Workshop on Wise Use of the Regina Meeting, elaboration of national wetland policies will be a long term process, and immediate action should be taken to stimulate wise use. The guidelines presented below therefore include both elements for comprehensive national wetland policies and priority actions.

## **Establishment of national wetland policies**

National wetland policies should as far as possible address all problems and activities related to wetlands within a national context. These may be grouped in different sections:

### **1. Actions to improve institutional and organizational arrangements, including:**

- (a) establishment of institutional arrangements which will allow those concerned to identify how wetland conservation can be achieved, and how wetland priorities can be fully integrated into the planning process; and
- (b) establishment of mechanisms and procedures for incorporating an integrated multidisciplinary approach into planning and execution of projects concerning wetlands and their support systems, in order to secure wetland conservation and sustainable development.

### **2. Actions to address legislation and government policies, including:**

- (a) review of existing legislation and policies (including subsidies and incentives) which affect wetland conservation;
- (b) application, where appropriate, of existing legislation and policies of importance for the conservation of wetlands;
- (c) adoption, as required, of new legislation and policies; and
- (d) use of development funds for projects which permit conservation and sustainable utilization of wetland resources.

### **3. Actions to increase knowledge and awareness of wetlands and their values, including:**

- (a) interchange of experience and information on wetland policy, conservation and wise use between countries preparing and/or implementing national wetland policies, or pursuing wetland conservation;
- (b) increasing the awareness and understanding of decision-makers and the public of the full benefits and values, within the terms of wise use, of wetlands. Among these benefits and values, which can occur on or off the wetland itself, are:
  - sediment and erosion control
  - flood control maintenance of water quality and abatement of pollution,
  - maintenance of surface and underground water supply,
  - support for fisheries, grazing and agriculture,
  - outdoor recreation and education for human society,
  - provision of habitat for wildlife, especially waterfowl, and
  - contribution to climatic stability;
- (c) review of traditional techniques of wise use, and elaboration of pilot projects which demonstrate wise use of representative wetland types; and
- (d) training of appropriate staff in the disciplines which will assist in implementation of wetland conservation action and policies.

**4. Actions to review the status of, and identify priorities for, all wetlands in a national context, including:**

- (a) execution of a national inventory of wetlands including classification of the sites;
- (b) identification and evaluation of the benefits and values of each site (see 3b above);
- (c) definition of the conservation and management priorities for each site, in accordance with the needs and conditions of each Contracting Party.

**5. Actions to address problems at particular wetland sites, including:**

- (a) integration from the outset of environmental considerations in planning of projects which might affect the wetland (including full assessment of their environmental impact before approval, continuing evaluation during their execution, and full implementation of necessary environmental measures). The planning, assessment and evaluation should cover projects upstream of the wetland, those in the wetland itself, and other projects which may affect the wetland, and should pay particular attention to maintaining the benefits and values listed in 3b above;
- (b) regulated utilization of the natural elements of wetland systems such that they are not over-exploited;
- (c) establishment, implementation and, as necessary, periodic revision of management plans which involve local people and take account of their requirements;
- (d) designation for the Ramsar List of wetlands identified as being of international importance;
- (e) establishment of nature reserves at wetlands, whether or not they are included in the List; and
- (f) serious consideration of restoration of wetlands whose benefits and values have been diminished or degraded.

**Priority actions at national level**

Whether or not national wetland policies are being prepared, several actions should receive immediate attention at national level in order to facilitate the preparation of national wetland policies, and to avoid delay in practical implementation of wetland conservation and wise use.

Contracting Parties will naturally select actions, according to their own national priorities and requirements, from those listed above under 'Establishment of national wetland policies'. They may wish to carry on institutional, legislative or educational measures (such as those listed under sections 1, 2, 3 above) and at the same time initiate inventories or scientific work (such as those listed under section 4); in this way the institutional, legislative and educational instruments will be available in time to deal with scientific results.

Equally, Contracting Parties wishing to promote wise use of wetlands without waiting until national wetland policies have been developed, may, based on their situation and needs, wish to

- (i) identify the issues which require the most urgent attention ;

- (ii) take action on one or more of these issues;
- (iii) identify the wetland sites which require the most urgent action; and
- (iv) take action at one or more of these wetlands, along the lines set out under 'Priority actions at particular wetland sites' below.

### **Priority actions at particular wetland sites**

As at national level, immediate action may be required in order to avoid destruction or degradation of important wetland values at particular wetland sites. These actions will undoubtedly include some elements listed in section 5 above, and Contracting Parties will select those appropriate to their own national priorities and requirements.

Whenever planning is initiated for projects which might affect important wetlands, the following actions should be taken in order to promote wise use of the wetland:

- (i) integration from the outset of environmental considerations in planning of projects which might affect wetlands (including full assessment of their environmental impact before approval);
- (ii) continuing evaluation during their execution; and
- (iii) full implementation of necessary environmental measures.

The planning, assessment and evaluation should cover projects upstream of the wetland, those in the wetland itself, and other projects which may affect the wetland, and should pay particular attention to maintaining the benefits and values listed, in 3b above.

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**[Note: The Wise Use Guidelines were amplified by the Additional Guidance for the Implementation of the Wise Use Concept, adopted as an annex to Resolution 5.6 by the Kushiro COP (1993), included here as [a separate file](#).**

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