

Resolution VIII.19: Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites

**"Wetlands: water, life, and culture"
8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002**

1. ACKNOWLEDGING that the ancient and intimate links of traditional societies to wetlands and water have given rise to important cultural values relevant to wetland conservation and wise use, which have been recognized in the diverse cosmologies of different civilizations and cultures throughout history;
2. FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING that the specific physical features of wetlands have contributed to particular ways of managing traditional activities through structures, procedures, techniques and specially designed artefacts which are of great cultural significance;
3. RECOGNIZING that peoples' relations with wetlands have given rise to aspects of non-material culture, through folklore, music, mythology, oral traditions, customs, traditional knowledge and popular wisdom, and that their reflection can be found in social practices and the traditional forms of social organization for managing wetland resources, and especially water;
4. FURTHER RECOGNIZING that sustainable traditional uses of wetland resources have frequently created cultural landscapes of significant value to wetland conservation and wise use;
5. AWARE that the cultural values of wetlands have been and still are of great importance to societies living in wetlands and their surroundings, and constitute part of their identity; thus their loss may not only contribute to their alienation from wetlands, but also cause significant negative social and ecological impacts;
6. RECOGNIZING that cultural knowledge of wetlands constitutes a collective legacy for today's societies;
7. AWARE that most of the knowledge about practices, and practices themselves, of traditional wetland management in the diverse cultures have contributed to wetland conservation and wise use over millennia, and continue to contribute to it;

8. FURTHER AWARE that in addition to their spiritual dimension of this knowledge and other aspects of past wetland management, such values can be of considerable socio-economic importance, since they can be used as a resource for sustainable tourism and recreational activities and, through them, contribute to an increase of income and quality of life for the inhabitants;

9. CONSCIOUS of the fact that the adequate recognition of and support for cultural heritage, both material and non-material, is an indispensable component in any process for the sustainable use of wetland resources;

10. RECOGNIZING that there are important weaknesses and gaps in the procedures and methods for identifying, valuing and protecting the cultural heritage of wetlands, as well as in defining and implementing policies related to them;

11. NOTING that the profound and rapid social and economic transformations that have taken place during recent decades have increasingly threatened the adequate preservation of the cultural heritage that is typical of wetlands in many parts of the world;

12. RECOGNIZING that there are various multilateral agreements and organizations that work to recognize and protect cultural values and relationships with ecosystems including wetlands;

13. ACKNOWLEDGING that the Ramsar Convention needs to work in cooperation with multilateral and regional agreements and other bodies addressing the need for resolute action to preserve the cultural heritage, including among others:

- the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972);
- the Call of Granada (1975) of the Council of Europe on Rural architecture and its landscape;
- Recommendation 881 (1979) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Rural architecture heritage;
- UNESCO's activities in the promotion of the conservation of cultural heritage;
- the general principles for conservation proposed by the Vernacular Built Heritage Charter (Jerusalem, 1996), ratified by the XI General Assembly of the International Council of Monuments and Historical Sites (ICOMOS);
- the various recommendations of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) for the protection, conservation, legal status, economic exploitation, and international protection of folklore;
- the Convention on Biological Diversity, in particular concerning its Decision VI/10 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties on the *Outline of the composite report on the status and trends regarding the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity*, and the plan and timetable for its preparation; and on *Recommendations for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessment regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and*

waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities;

- the European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000);
- the Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (International Labour Organisation No. 169, 5 September 1991); and
- the Permanent Forum of Indigenous People.

14. RECALLING that *inter alia* the text of the Ramsar Convention already recognizes, in the third paragraph of its preamble, "that wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable" and FURTHER RECALLING that COP7 adopted Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous peoples' participation in the management of wetlands (Resolution VII.8); and

15. NOTING the background documentation and examples on the cultural aspects of wetlands from around the world presented during Technical Session 5 of this meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

16. TAKES NOTE WITH INTEREST of the list of *Guiding Principles* included in the Annex to this Resolution;

17. REQUESTS that the Ramsar Bureau seek inputs from Contracting Parties, experts and practitioners, and local communities and indigenous peoples from around the world to enhance the information paper on cultural aspects of wetlands (COP8 DOC. 15) and the detailed guidance prepared for consideration by this meeting of the Conference of the Parties, with a view to publishing it as a background document, and to inform COP9 of the progress made;

18. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to consider using the list of Guiding principles included in the Annex to this Resolution, but only in relation the conservation and enhancement of the cultural values of wetlands;

19. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, within their national and legal frameworks and available resources and capacity:

a) to consider the compilation and assessment of both material and non-material cultural elements related to wetlands and water, in particular when preparing the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for the designation of new Wetlands of International Importance or when updating the RIS of existing Ramsar sites, taking into account, as appropriate, intellectual property rights, customary law, and the principle of prior informed consent, in accordance with CBD and WIPO rules;

b) to promote the appreciation and revitalization, of these cultural values among populations close to wetlands, and in general among the wider public;

c) to include relevant aspects of cultural heritage in both the design and implementation of wetland management plans;

d) to make efforts to integrate cultural and social impact criteria into environmental assessments, which could include, *inter alia*, issues of particular cultural concern, such as beliefs and religions, customary practices, forms of social organization, systems of natural resources use, including patterns of land use, places of cultural significance, sacred sites and ritual ceremonies, languages, customary lore/law systems, political structures, roles and customs;

e) to carry out such efforts with the active participation of indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders, and to consider using the cultural values of wetlands as a tool to strengthen this involvement, particularly in wetland planning and management;

20. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to recognize cultural and heritage values relating to wetlands in their existing heritage protection, legal framework and policies;

21. INVITES Contracting Parties to consider conducting appropriate joint educational and training activities with regard to the cultural values of wetlands, as well as to consider developing pilot projects for testing on a local, regional and national scale with a view to further improving the application and/or integration of the *Guiding Principles* in wetland conservation and wise use;

22. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to establish appropriate consultation mechanisms at regional or national levels, in order to consider how the *Guiding Principles* might be applied in developing and promoting the cultural values of wetlands; and

23. URGES Contracting Parties and the Ramsar Bureau to develop synergies and to avoid duplication of efforts with the relevant multilateral agreements, such as those mentioned in paragraph 13 above.

Annex

Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites

General principles

1. This document proposes a number of general principles for identifying, preserving and reinforcing the cultural values of wetlands, which could be supplemented with additional ones at future meetings of the Conference of the

Parties as more knowledge and experience are obtained. Some of them may overlap, but this is only natural as cultural values are often related and require an integrative approach.

2. There is a strong link between wetland conservation and benefits to people. In addition, a positive correlation between conservation and the sustainable use of wetlands has been repeatedly demonstrated. Therefore, conservation requires the involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities and cultural values offer excellent opportunities for this.

Guiding principle 1 - To identify the cultural values and relevant associated partners.

Guiding principle 2 - To link the cultural aspects of wetlands with those of water.

Guiding Principle 3 - To safeguard the wetland-related cultural landscapes.

Guiding principle 4 - To learn from traditional approaches.

Guiding principle 5 - To maintain traditional sustainable self-management practices.

Guiding principle 6 - To incorporate cultural aspects in educational and interpretive activities in wetlands.

Guiding principle 7 - To take into account culturally appropriate treatment of gender, age and social role issues.

Guiding principle 8 - To bridge the differences of approach between natural and social sciences.

Guiding principle 9- To mobilise international cooperation in matter of culture issues related to wetlands.

Guiding principle 10 - To encourage research on palaeoenvironmental, palaeontological, anthropological and archaeological aspects of wetlands.

Guiding principle 11 - To safeguard wetland-related traditional production systems.

Guiding principle 12 - To protect historical structures in wetlands or closely associated with them.

Guiding principle 13 - To protect and preserve wetland-related artefacts (mobile material heritage).

Guiding principle 14 - To preserve collective water and land use management systems associated with wetlands.

Guiding principle 15 - To maintain traditional sustainable practices used in and around wetlands, and value the products resulting from these practices.

Guiding principle 16 - To safeguard wetland-related oral traditions.

Guiding principle 17 - To keep traditional knowledge alive.

Guiding principle 18 - To respect wetland-related religious and spiritual beliefs and mythological aspects in the efforts to conserve wetlands.

Guiding principle 19 - To use the arts to promote wetland conservation and interpretation.

Guiding principle 20 - To incorporate cultural aspects, where available, in the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for the description of Wetlands of International Importance, whilst ensuring the protection of traditional rights and interests.

Guiding principle 21 - To incorporate the cultural aspects of wetlands in management planning.

Guiding principle 22 - To include cultural values in wetland monitoring processes.

Guiding principle 23 - To consider the use of institutional and legal instruments for conservation and protection of cultural values in wetlands.

Guiding principle 24 - To integrate cultural and social criteria into environmental impact assessments.

Guiding principle 25 - To improve wetland-related communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) in the matter of the cultural aspects of wetlands.

Guiding principle 26 - To consider the possibility of using quality labeling of sustainable traditional wetland products in a voluntary and non-discriminatory manner.

Guiding principle 27 - To encourage cross-sectoral cooperation.