

The Ramsar Convention

Stemming the loss of wetlands and ensuring their conservation.

What is it ?

The Ramsar Convention, or the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, is the first modern legal tool which provides a global framework for conserving wetland habitats. It covers a wide range of ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, coastal areas and coral reefs.

In the Convention, wetlands are defined as: "areas of marsh, fen, peat land or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static, or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water, the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters".

When?

The Convention was adopted in Iran in 1971. It came into force in 1975.

Obligations of the Parties

Parties to the Ramsar Convention should:

- consider wetland conservation when planning national land use;
- formulate and implement this planning;
- encourage research, exchange of data and publications on wetlands;
- train relevant conservation officers adequately;
- designate wetlands for inclusion in a "List of Wetlands of International Importance", (at least one site must be designated when becoming a Party to the Convention); and,
- promote the wise use of wetlands in their territory.

With more developing countries becoming Parties, more emphasis is now placed on this last obligation.

How does it work?

The Parties recently adopted revised *criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance*, and defined the concept of "wise use" for identifying wetlands as well as *guidelines* for interpreting this concept.

Selection Criteria

A wetland can be included on the List if it meets **any one** of these criteria.

1. When assessing the value of *representative or unique wetlands*, a wetland is **internationally important** if it is a *particularly good example of a specific type of wetland characteristic of its region*.
2. Where *plants or animals* are used to identify an **important wetland**, a wetland could be internationally important if:
 - (a) it supports a number of **rare, vulnerable or endangered species** of plants or animals, or a large number of individuals any of these species;
 - (b) it is important for maintaining the **genetic and ecological diversity** of a region because of the quality and peculiarities of its plants and animals;
 - (c) it has special value as the habitat of plants or animals at a **critical stage of their biological life cycles**;
 - (d) it is important for its **endemic plant or animal communities**.
3. When using *waterfowl* to identify wetland, it would be considered internationally important if:
 - (a) it regularly supports more than 20,000 waterfowl;
 - (b) it regularly supports substantial numbers of individuals from particular groups of waterfowl, indicating the values of the wetland's productivity or diversity; and,
 - (c) where data on populations are available, it regularly supports over 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterfowl.

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Guidelines for Applying the Criteria

Characteristics of wetland designated using criterion 1 are to:

- ☑ be a particularly good **representative example** of a wetland characteristic of the region;
- ☑ be a particularly good **representative of a common type of habitat**, where the site can be considered using criteria 2, 2 (b) and 2 (c).
- ☑ represent a habitat type because it is **part of a complex** of high quality wetlands habitats.
- ☑ *In a developing country*, it is a wetland which, because of its vital role in local water and natural resources has **important socio-economic and cultural value** for sustainable use and conserving habitats.

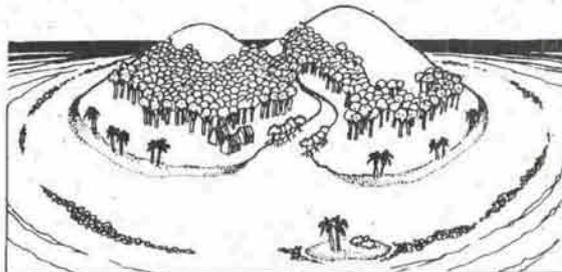
Defining "Wise Use"

Wise use of wetlands is *their sustainable use in a way that benefits humankind and maintains the natural properties of the ecosystem.*

Sustainable utilisation is the *human use of a wetland so that it yields 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 the *physical, biological or chemical components, such as soil, water, plants, animals and nutrients, and the interactions between them.*

Guidelines have been produced by the Contracting Parties to assist in implementing the "wise use" concept.



When Becoming a Party...

At least one site must be designated by each Contacting Party when ratifying the Convention.

Some Parties have applied the Ramsar criteria to a national wetlands inventory, drawn up a detailed national list of sites which meet these criteria, and publicised this list. They may then progressively designate these conservation sites as national legislation or other formalities are enacted.

Other obligations include co-operation between Parties for managing shared wetlands and species.

As of 30 July 1992, there were **70 Contracting Parties**, with designated sites covering **32 million hectares** worldwide. Representatives from the Contracting Parties meet every three years.

South Pacific Parties to the Convention

Two SPREP member countries are Parties to the Ramsar Convention:

Australia

New Zealand.

Other Pacific island countries are encouraged to become Parties to this important international convention.

For more information....

For more information on the **Ramsar Convention** and how to become a Party to the Convention, contact:

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