

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT

RAMSAR CONVENTION MONITORING PROCEDURE -

REPORT NO. 14 ÅKERSVIKA NATURE RESERVE, NORWAY

General Introduction

1. Each Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention (“Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat” Ramsar, 1971) “shall designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in a List of Wetlands of International Importance” (Article 2.1 of the Convention). The Contracting Parties “shall designate at least one wetland to be included in the List” (Article 2.4) and “shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List”(Article 3.3). Furthermore, each Contracting Party “shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time-if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the list has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for continuing bureau duties” (Article 3.2).

2. These are the principal stipulations of the Convention concerning wetlands included in the Ramsar List. Successive meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (held in 1980 at Cagliari, Italy, in 1984 at Groningen, Netherlands and in 1987 at Regina, Canada) have devoted special attention to the conservation of listed wetlands and to the best ways of avoiding “change in ecological character”.

3. Conference Document C.3.6 of the Regina meeting (“Review of national reports submitted by Contracting Parties and Review of implementation of the Convention since the second meeting in Groningen, Netherlands in May 1984”) included a section (paragraphs 66 to 107) entitled “Changes in the ecological character of listed wetlands”. This section recalls that it is “essential that, after a wetland has been designated for the List, its conservation status should be maintained”, and that “the concept of preventing ‘change in the ecological character’ is fundamental to the Ramsar Convention”. Paragraphs 74 to 107 then review the various wetlands on the List where such changes have occurred, are occurring, ,or are likely to occur.

4. During the discussion of these paragraphs, several delegates emphasized the importance of avoiding changes of this kind in listed wetlands and the Conference approved a Recommendation (C.3.9) on this matter. The Recommendation (text attached to the present document) urges Contracting Parties to take swift and effective action to prevent any further degradation of sites and to restore, as far as possible the value of degraded sites; the Recommendation requests Contracting Parties in whose territory are located the sites identified in Conference Document C.3.6 as having incurred or being threatened by damage, to report to the Convention Bureau the actions undertake to safeguard these sites.

5. At the fourth Meeting of the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee, the members (Pakistan, Canada, Chile, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Tunisia and USA) and observers (United Kingdom, IUCN, IWRB and WWF) considered the best way of promoting the

implementation of Recommendation C.3.9. A “Monitoring Procedure” (the text of which is attached to the present document) was adopted by the Standing Committee as a procedure to monitor Ramsar sites, and has been used since February 1988 by the Convention Bureau.

Åkersvika - General

6. Norway was the third country to join the Ramsar Convention with its signature without reservation as to ratification on 9 July 1974. At the time of this signature, Norway designated one site: Åkersvika, for the Ramsar List. Norway added a further 13 sites on 24 July 1985, including 4 sites in Spitsbergen.

The Åkersvika site is situated on Lake Mjosa near the town of Hamar in Hedmark County, Norway, some 100 km from Oslo. Upon designation in 1974 the Ramsar site comprised 300 ha. The designation was extended in 1985 to 415 ha., 300 ha. of which is lake surface.

The Åkersvika site is protected under national law as a Nature Reserve. The man-made area of the reserve is privately owned by 32 landowners and a local municipality. Management of the area is subject to the local planning system which involves the county administration and two municipalities (Hamar and Stange).

7. The site is described in the Ramsar Directory as being a shallow bay on the eastern side of the freshwater Mjosa Lake, and includes the lower part of one of the two rivers entering the bay. It is surrounded by urban, industrial and agricultural land- The vegetation is strongly influenced by the regulation of water-levels in Lake Mjosa. The vegetation in the reserve is wet grassland, and alder *Alnus* sp. and willow *Salix* sp. scrub. Willow also occurs along the shore with broad zones of bladder sedge *Carex vesicaria*, *Carex juncella* and the grass *Calamagrostis purpurea* and several species of *Salix*. Near the shore the vegetation is dominated by the moss *Fontinalis hypnoides*.

The site is of special importance to migrating ducks and waders, being an important part of the eastern flyway for waterfowl in Norway. About 190 species have been observed here, of which 60-70 are wetland species.

Current Situation

8. The Ramsar Convention Bureau was contacted during the summer of 1989 by several local nature conservation organizations in Norway and provided with documentation about development threats to the site. These were all concerned with activities outside of, but contiguous to the Ramsar site and included:

plans for harbour developments;
road construction on the edge of the reserve;
plans for land-fill up to the border of the reserve;
development of an Åkersvika trade and industrial area on the land-fill site with expected increase in the area of traffic, noise and pollution;
cutting of conifers in the reserve; and
municipal developments by the neighbouring city of Stange on the other side of the reserve.

The conservation organizations were concerned that there was no coherent management plan for the region and that such a framework should be mandatory before individual projects in the vicinity of the reserve are undertaken.

9. On the basis of this information, the Ramsar Bureau contacted the National focal point for the Convention in Norway, the Directorate for Nature Management as well as the Royal Ministry for the Environment. It was arranged that a short visit to the site be organized upon the occasion of my visit to Norway on 28-30 August 1989 for discussions in Oslo on the work of the Ramsar Wise Use Committee and for discussions with the Norwegian Environment and Development Aid Ministries.

10. I was accompanied to Åkersvika by Mr Steinar Eldoy of the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. We met first with county administration and municipal officials and then in the company of these officials, toured the site with representatives of the non-governmental organizations which had contacted the Bureau. Representatives of the press were also present and the visit generated considerable local press coverage (a copy of one such article is attached).

11. The Åkersvika Ramsar site is a small reserve located adjacent to an urban concentration. The city of Hamar is poised to expand and due to local land-use restrictions there are few alternatives to increasing development up to the borders of the reserve. At the time I visited there were limited numbers of waterfowl present but it was evident that the site is of importance for migratory ducks and waders.

12. I was very favourably impressed by the interest and commitment of the local conservation bodies for the integrity of the site.

13. Similarly, I was delighted to see how well informed the county and municipal authorities were about the Ramsar Convention and their obligations under the Convention in regard to the Åkersvika site.

Actual Status

14. Happily, it appeared that most if not all of the problems raised by the non-governmental organizations have been resolved by the local authorities, or else had not arisen after all. In particular, the local authorities provided information to show that planning permission had been denied for several activities outside of, but contiguous to the site. Furthermore, work was well advanced for a comprehensive management and development plan for the entire region.

15. In some instances, e.g. road building near the reserve, we were able to see that the impact was likely to be minor, although with better planning even those impacts could have been avoided; in others, such as the tree felling, it was explained that this was in fact desirable for forest regeneration..

16. The biggest potential problem concerned the land-fill operation in Hamar. The filling in of mudbanks has been initiated. The area in question is outside of the Ramsar site. The plans I was shown for development on the land-fill did not seem to be deleterious to the Ramsar site, as a buffer zone with the planting of trees and bushes was being planned along the shoreline.

However, the nature of the land-fill was disturbing. The local authorities had mandated that the land-fill be done using "clean" materials. Unfortunately, it was all too evident during our brief inspection that some garbage (including auto wrecks) was present in the land-fill and that there was the potential for toxic waste impact upon the Ramsar site. The local authorities were very concerned about this and agreed to take action to stop this practice and clean up the site.

Conclusion

17. It does not seem as if the ecological character of the Åkersvika site is about to change. Indeed, I was most impressed to see the commitment of the local authorities to maintain the character of the area and safeguard the reserve in the face of development pressures.

18. During my short visit it was evident that some better control needs to be exercised over the Hamar land-fill. I have written to the Norwegian authorities on this matter.

19. An area management plan is most desirable and I have also written to encourage the completion of this work.

20. It was also clear that there needs to be better communication between private nature conservation bodies in Norway and concerned local administrators, as well as with the national nature conservation administration. It should not take the visit of a foreigner to bring these people together. We therefore discussed the desirability of forming regular channels of communication, national Ramsar meetings, etc. This needs to be pursued by the Norwegians themselves.

21. In this connection, I was told by the representatives of the NGOs that there were even more serious problems at other Ramsar sites in Norway. I encouraged them to bring these matters to the attention of the national authorities responsible for the Convention, but let them know that the Ramsar Bureau would, of course, remain available to receive such information.

22. I was most grateful for the kind hospitality of the local authorities and conservation bodies and am pleased to report that this matter should not require much follow-up action.

Daniel Navid
Secretary General
September 1989