

Agenda item 12.2

Wetlands and human health

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to receive this progress report on STRP's work and to comment and advise on the further steps underway to take this topic to COP10.

Background

1. This note provides an update on progress, particularly by the STRP and the Secretariat, in the development of information, advice and guidance on issues concerning wetlands and human health, including on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Further progress on the STRP's work will be undertaken during the 14th meeting of the STRP (STRP14, late January 2008), and outcomes of that will be reported verbally to the 36th meeting of the Standing Committee.
2. In the last triennium the STRP identified the complex of issues surrounding wetlands and human health as a potentially important area of interest to the Convention in relation to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Work on this topic, and specifically the preparation of a review report on "Wetlands and Human Health", was approved as an Immediate Priority task (task 163) by Parties at COP9 (Resolution IX.2, Annex 1).
3. In providing this mandate, Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention have recognized that the multi-faceted issue of the inter-relationships between wetlands and human health have not previously been considered and addressed under the Convention, but that such issues have great significance for livelihoods, poverty reduction and human well-being.
4. Since COP9, this topic has assumed further significance and priority with the adoption by the Standing Committee of "Healthy wetlands, healthy people" as the theme of COP10. Furthermore, the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee also selected "Healthy wetlands, healthy people" to be the theme for 2008 of the Convention's annual World Wetlands Day, celebrated on 2 February.
5. World Wetlands Day 2008 will thus serve as a major preparatory step for COP10 in helping to raise public awareness of a range of wetlands and human health issues. Information materials to support WWD2008 celebrations (a poster and supporting fact-sheets, etc.) have been prepared by the Ramsar Secretariat and have been available since mid-October 2007 –these are available on CD-ROM and can be downloaded from the Ramsar Web site (http://www.ramsar.org/wwd/8/wwd2008_index.htm).
6. A second preparatory step in developing understanding of the COP10 theme was a three-day STRP intersessional scientific and technical workshop in Changwon city, venue of COP10, on "Healthy wetlands, healthy people", that was hosted by the Republic of Korea and the COP10 host province of Gyeongsangnam-do on 11-13 November 2007. This

brought together a group of STRP members, observers and invited international and Korean experts on health issues to:

- a) further review and develop issues and guidance on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) – the subject of COP9 Resolution IX.23;
 - b) review a first draft of the STRP's Wetlands and Human Health report; and
 - c) identify wetlands and human health issues and responses which could form the basis of a COP10 draft Resolution (or Resolutions) on these matters, for further preparation by STRP14.
7. The Secretariat and STRP are most grateful to our hosts in the Republic of Korea for their hosting and financial support for this workshop, and for their local organizing and hospitality during the meeting. A report of the meeting is currently being finalized.

STRP's review report on "Wetlands and Human Health"

8. The STRP plans that its review report will be finalized following STRP14 and published during 2008 as a *Ramsar Technical Report* prior to COP10.
9. The Secretariat has sufficient resources to publish most such *Ramsar Technical Reports* only in electronic (.pdf) format for download from the Ramsar Web site, and in English only. However, given the importance and relevance of this report to the COP10 theme, the November 2007 STRP intersessional workshops have encouraged the Secretariat to seek additional resources in order to make this particular *Ramsar Technical Report* available to delegates at COP10 in hard-copy printed form in each of the three Convention languages.
10. The STRP established the scope of its review report as follows. The review needs to address several aspects of the interaction between wetlands and human health, including issues on livelihoods.
11. The overall frame for the work is 'illness and wellness'. Thus the review will seek to cover:
 - i) the ways in which wetlands can and do maintain or enhance human health and well-being through provision of livelihoods;
 - ii) relationships between wetlands and human sanitation;
 - iii) how and which types of wetlands negatively affect human health and well-being; and
 - iv) how these effects can be ameliorated with minimized damage to wetland ecological character (but also including trade-offs between ecosystem maintenance and human disease risks).
12. Aspects of the issues affecting human health which are planned to be covered, as identified by the STRP, include *inter alia*:
 - i) declines in water quantity and quality;
 - ii) water-related diseases;
 - iii) waterborne pollutants (chemical and microbiological);
 - iv) disease emergence related to small and large dams;
 - v) increased land-use in marginal landscapes leading to closer disease contacts;
 - vi) implications of climate change for human health issues associated with wetlands (including drought and flood events);

- vii) economic costs of human health aspects associated with natural disasters affecting wetlands;
 - viii) human nutrition and wetlands;
 - ix) wetlands as sources of beneficial drugs (including for local communities); and
 - x) wetlands and social and psychological well-being.
13. The implications of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the MDG on water and sanitation, will also be covered, in the light of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's view that a sectoral focus on MDG delivery can run counter to maintaining wetland ecosystem services. The report will also include a brief review of the work and activities of the World Health Organization that are relevant to wetlands and human health, and of the opportunities for developing links between Ramsar and WHO on matters of common interest.
 14. The extent of coverage of each of these aspects is necessarily being defined by the available time, resources and expertise for the preparation of the report.
 15. Drafting of the report is being coordinated for STRP by Prof. Philip Weinstein (University of Western Australia) and Prof. Max Finlayson (STRP member), with input on specific aspects of the report from a number of additional expert authors with health-ecosystems background, including text on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) from David Stroud, STRP's lead expert on this issue (see also below).
 16. Following discussion of an early draft during the November intersessional workshops, it was agreed to significantly revise and simplify the report structure. The planned contents list is now as follows:
 - Foreword – Secretary General, Ramsar Convention
 - Executive summary – for wetland managers and policy makers
 1. Introduction
 2. Ecological character & ecosystem health
 3. Ecosystem services and benefits for human health
 4. Health effects of disrupted ecosystem services
 5. Economic values and incentives
 6. Global trends affecting human health
 7. Responses and interventions
 8. Conclusions and recommendations
 - References
 - Annexes
 1. Wetland types and distribution
 2. Glossary
 17. The report will be illustrated with a number of case studies on different aspects of wetlands and human health from around the world.
 18. The November 2007 STRP intersessional workshop recognized that, especially given the wording of the COP10 theme of “Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People”, the scope of the STRP's report needed to be revised to include issues of “wetland ecosystem health”. The workshop also recognized, however, that definition and description of what is meant by “ecosystem health” is complex and currently the subject of considerable scientific debate.

The workshop concluded that, whilst this issue will be included in the current report in relation to the Convention's approach to defining and maintaining the ecological character of wetlands, the topic of "wetland ecosystem health" is worthy of more in-depth attention, and it is anticipated that this may be proposed by STRP for priority work in the next triennium, perhaps through an expert symposium.

19. Following the November 2007 STRP workshops, a small writing workshop involving coordinating authors took place in early January 2008, and a further writing session of the authors' group will take place in Gland immediately prior to STRP14 in late January 2008 in order to further revise and develop the report for STRP14 consideration.
20. In addition, the November 2007 STRP intersessional workshop began identification of elements of a draft COP10 Resolution on "Wetlands and Human Health", also drawing upon the outcomes and recommendations of a Wetlands International one-day symposium on the COP10 theme held shortly before the STRP workshop. STRP14 will further develop this draft Resolution for consideration by the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Update on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) issues

21. A STRP task related to the broad issue of wetlands and human health concerns maintaining a watching brief on developments concerning responding to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in relation to wetlands and waterbirds (task 62 in STRP's 2006-2008 work plan).
22. One day of the November 2007 STRP intersessional workshops in Changwon was devoted to this task. The workshop concluded that, since the adoption by COP9 of Resolution IX.23, there have been significant developments in the understanding of HPAI issues and in guidance concerning handling HPAI in relation to wetlands and wild birds – it also concluded, however, that despite the wealth of HPAI-related guidance now available there is a gap in such guidance. This concerns availability of simple matrix-based guidance for Contracting Parties on preparing for, and responding to, different HPAI scenarios in relation to levels of risk.
23. The intersessional workshop prepared a draft of this risk-based guidance, which in turn is being designed to act as a simple guide to the range of more detailed specific guidance available on different aspects of HPAI preparedness and response.
24. A small STRP expert writing group will be meeting immediately before STRP14 to develop this material further for STRP14 review.
25. The intersessional workshop also considered that the HPAI-related developments since COP9 were sufficient to warrant bringing a further draft Resolution forwards for COP10 consideration, and it initiated the drafting of elements of such a draft Resolution.
26. It is anticipated that, following STRP14 review, these materials will be finalized for consideration by the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee for transmittal to COP10.