

Agenda item 12.6

Wetlands and extractive industries

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to note the information provided, and to advise on how such matters should be considered by COP10.

Note by the Ramsar Secretariat

1. In the light of an increasing number of requests from Contracting Parties in Africa and the Neotropics for advice on issues concerning the impacts of mining exploration and exploitation in and around wetlands, including designated Ramsar sites, the Secretariat raised this matter both with the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee and with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at its mid-term workshops.
2. In Decision SC35-28, the Standing Committee asked the Secretariat to prepare an information paper on oil and gas exploitation in African Ramsar sites for consideration by SC36.
3. Following the STRP mid-term workshops, the Panel has continued to explore this issue and requested a briefing paper on "*Economic trends in the mining sector and the implications for protection and wise use of wetlands*" to assist its discussions. This briefing paper was also presented to and discussed during the Africa COP10 regional preparatory meeting (Yaounde, Cameroon, December 2007). The explanatory note prepared by the STRP Chair to accompany this briefing paper is provided below in Annex 1, and the requested list of African Ramsar sites currently reported to the Secretariat to be under threat from extractive industry developments is provided in Annex 2.
4. The STRP is further reviewing this matter, including the briefing paper, as an "emerging issue" through its Working Group 7 at its 14th meeting (January 2008), and a verbal update will be provided to SC36 by the STRP Chair.

Annex 1

Explanatory note: background and purpose of the paper “*Economic trends in the mining sector and the implications for protection and wise use of wetlands*”

Mr Abou Bamba, the Senior Regional Advisor for Africa, raised this issue at the mid-term workshops of the STRP in March 2007 and indicated that Latin American as well as African Contracting Parties were asking for scientific and technical guidance related to the impacts of mining in and around wetlands. The Scientific and Technical Review Panel understood from this that the Parties were (and are) primarily requesting “best-practice guidance” related to assessment, mitigation and minimisation of mining impacts on wetland ecosystems.

At that time, STRP’s discussion centered around oil and gas exploration and exploitation, but it is clear from the overview document that all sectors of the mining industry, including precious metals, base metals, industrial minerals and coal, are expected to continue on rapid growth paths, leading to increasing potential for impacts on wetland ecosystems.

Following the STRP mid-term workshops, we have continued the discussion through the STRP Support Service, and also requested a briefing paper. The briefing paper was intended to provide the STRP with an overview of current and future trends in the mining/extraction sector, in order to understand to some degree the primary economic and technical drivers of investment and activity in that sector and how this might affect wetlands in general, as well as specific Ramsar sites. This is in turn intended to help clarify the manner in which the STRP could potentially best provide scientific and technical support for Parties in addressing this sectoral issue.

The purpose of the briefing paper is to share with the Parties some of our recent discussion and the overview of economic trends in the mining sector. It is hoped that the technical information will be useful to the Parties, and feedback was requested on what specific scientific/technical guidance might be needed from the STRP to assist them in addressing this issue. Such feedback will be most helpful as we develop recommendations for what (if any) appropriate tasks or initiatives might be proposed by the STRP in the future in relation to mining/extraction activities.

In the context of wise use, managing the impacts of mining/extraction activities in or near wetlands requires that three inter-connected factors should be addressed together:

- 1) Governance (due process, independence, transparency, robust regulatory environment, capacity for compliance enforcement);
- 2) Corporate social responsibility (mining company or entity engages willingly and in good faith with governance process);
- 3) Adequate scientific/technical information and knowledge base to support decision-making and later implementation:
 - a) Information related to wetland ecosystems (function, sensitivity, resilience, ecological, socio-economic & cultural values);
 - b) Information related to specific mining activities (social/economic/ecological /cultural impacts; mitigation and restoration options);
 - c) Information and general guidance on best practices.

While we recognize the importance of treating these three factors as an interconnected package, an important short-term need is to improve the scientific and technical knowledge base in order

for wetland ecosystems to be considered adequately in all phases of mining/extraction projects, and for the full range of wetland ecosystem services to be considered explicitly in cost-benefit analyses as part of planning, permitting, decision-making and mine site management processes.

The briefing paper does not as yet represent officially adopted views of the STRP, the Secretariat, the Standing Committee or the Ramsar Convention as a whole.

Dr Heather MacKay
STRP Chair
November 2007

Annex 2

African Ramsar sites currently reported to the Secretariat as being under threat from extractive industry developments

1. Sudd Marshlands (oil, Sudan)
2. Lake Chad (oil, Chad)
3. Lake Albert (oil, Uganda)
4. Niger Mafou (iron, Guinea)
5. Chatt Tboul (oil, Mauritania)
6. Langebaan Ramsar site (ore, South Africa)
7. Lake Natron (soda ash, Tanzania)
8. Basse vallée de l'Ouémé (sand, Benin)
9. Petit Loango (oil, Gabon)
10. Conkouati-Douli (oil, Congo-Brazzaville)