

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**26th Meeting of the Standing Committee,
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001**

DOC. SC26-7

Agenda item 11

Progress in the implementation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Action requested. The Standing Committee is invited to note the progress in the development of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention, and in particular to consider the issues raised in paragraph 11 of this document.

1. The 25th meeting of the Standing Committee received a report on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and endorsed the Bureau's participation in the development and implementation of the MA; moreover, it expressed the willingness of Standing Committee members to assist the MA Board by nominating suitable experts and suggesting likely pilot sites for local assessment.
2. Since the 25th meeting of the Standing Committee, the MA has made significant progress in developing its procedures, the appointment of Dr Walter Reid as Executive Director of the MA and the establishment in November 2001 of a formal MA secretariat based in Penang, Malaysia, the appointment of Co-chairs of its four Working Groups, the design of its global and sub-global assessments, and the selection of demonstration assessments at local, national and regional scales.
3. The four Working Groups which will make the assessments are: 1. Sub-global assessments; 2. Ecosystem Conditions and Trends; 3. Scenarios; and 4. Response options.
4. Two Technical Design Workshops have been held (in the Netherlands, April 2001, and South Africa, October 2001), bringing together a wide range of ecological, environmental, and socio-economic expertise. Significant progress was made in the design of the work that will be undertaken by the four Working Groups.
5. The Deputy Secretary General and Dr Max Finlayson (Scientific and Technical Review Panel member for Oceania) participated in both Workshops, and Dr Douglas Taylor (Wetlands International) in the second workshop, representing the Ramsar Convention.
6. STRP10 further reviewed the user needs of the Ramsar Convention in relation to the planned outputs of the MA, and also determined that, in order to ensure strong and continuing interaction between the STRP and the MA process, it should appoint two MA focal points for STRP with responsibilities on behalf of Ramsar to assist in guiding the design and work of the assessment, and to report back to the STRP and Ramsar Parties. STRP10 requested Max Finlayson and Douglas Taylor to act as its MA focal points. Terms

of reference for the MA STRP Focal Points, agreed by the Bureau, MA secretariat and the focal points on behalf of STRP, are attached.

7. As part of its work on wetland assessment and monitoring, the STRP expert Working Group on Ecological Character reviewed the MA design and reported to STRP10 that the MA's overall conceptual framework was wholly consistent with the approach under the Ramsar Convention to the definition of ecological character and assessing and addressing change, and likely change, in ecological character. As a consequence, the STRP has proposed (see DOC. SC26/COP8-8) to develop an overall Wetland Ecosystem Assessment Framework, based on the MA conceptual framework, for consideration by the Standing Committee and COP8.
8. It is significant, therefore, that the design and accompanying guidance being developed by the MA for its sub-global assessments will also be based on this conceptual framework that is consistent with the Ramsar approach. It is anticipated that the MA design and guidelines for sub-global assessments will provide an important new tool for Ramsar Parties in undertaking wetland ecosystem assessments at local, provincial and national scales.
9. The MA design will be finalized at the upcoming MA Board meeting in January 2002, and implementation of the work of the working groups will begin shortly after that.
10. In November 2001, the MA issued a call for nominations of lead authors and contributing lead authors for the different elements of its assessment work, and the Bureau has circulated this call to all Contracting Parties and their STRP National Focal Points. It is hoped that all Parties will respond to this call with nominations of wetland experts so as to ensure that wetland issues continue to receive high-quality attention in the work of the MA.
11. The Standing Committee may wish to note that to date much of the input on the user needs of the Ramsar wetlands community has focused, through the STRP, on the issues of wetland conditions and trends, as well as the goods and services that wetland ecosystems provide to support human well-being and poverty alleviation. Less input has been provided on the key issue for government decision-makers and policy developers of appropriate responses and response options for addressing the driving pressures that are affecting the wise use of wetland ecosystems, and will do so in the future. The Standing Committee may wish to advise on how best to ensure that Contracting Parties are fully aware of the major potential benefits and assistance the MA will provide on such matters, and how best to ensure input from Contracting Parties to the response options guidance that the MA will provide.
12. The Bureau has arranged with the MA secretariat a special presentation at COP8, so as to ensure that all Parties are fully aware of the work and significance of the MA to their future assessment and wise use of wetlands.

Annex

Terms of Reference for STRP Millennium Ecosystem Assessment focal points

1. Through Decision STRP10.1 of Ramsar's Scientific and Technical Review Panel, the Panel expressed its intention to contribute to the MA process through an *ad hoc* working group and designated two STRP focal points in order to establish a permanent relationship between the MA and the STRP, inviting STRP members to channel input to the MA through these two.
2. These focal points are: Max Finlayson (STRP Oceania member) and Douglas Taylor (Wetlands International).
3. The purpose of identifying STRP focal points for MA is in particular to ensure that the technical design and implementation of the MA meets the needs of the Ramsar Convention and its Parties and to provide a conduit for consultation and review of the MA process and products by the STRP and its network of National Focal Points.
4. Terms of Reference for the STRP's MA focal points are to:
 - a) provide input to the development of the technical design of the MA, ensuring that it meets the priority needs of Ramsar Parties in relation to inventory and assessment especially with respect to the maintenance of ecological character;
 - b) review and report to STRP and Ramsar Parties on the technical design, and in particular that of the sub-global assessments, and its relevance to Ramsar implementation;
 - c) as part of the MA Board-approved peer review process, undertake, and help identify others to undertake, peer review of the technical outputs and reports of the MA;
 - d) regularly report on MA progress to the STRP (and, as necessary, identify others involved in the MA to provide briefings);
 - e) coordinate the substantive guidance to the MA from the STRP, working with the MA staff to ensure that guidance from Ramsar regarding the "user needs" is conveyed to the MA; and
 - f) work with the MA staff to develop the 'procedures' for peer review by Ramsar's STRP and Parties.
5. For other issues relating to the links between Ramsar and MA, including coordination of communication of MA mechanisms and products to the Convention, responsibility lies with the Ramsar Bureau. Focal point is Nick Davidson (Deputy Secretary General).
6. Concerning MA governance, Secretary General Delmar Blasco represents the Ramsar Convention on the MA's Executive Committee, and he and Jorge Jimenez (current STRP Chair) sit on the MA Board.