
Wetlands International Strategic Positioning

MISSION:

To sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations through research, information exchange and conservation activities worldwide

1. Background

1.1 Wetlands International adopted seven *Strategic Objectives*, (also called Organisational Objectives) as approved by the 1998 Board of Members meeting. These Objectives sit alongside the Mission Statement in providing focus for the work of the organisation and are shown below. However, successfully and effectively to deliver the organisation's Mission and Strategic Objectives it is important to define in more detail the scope and priority of the activities that Wetlands International should undertake, and also those that are outside its sphere of operation. This strategic positioning can then be used:

- A. internally to ensure that work included in regional and ICU Business Plans is consistent with the organisation's position in delivering wetland conservation; and
- B. externally as the basis of public statements and profiling of what Wetlands International does.

1.2 To develop this positioning, four concurrent workshops were held during the 1998 Board of Members meeting (Senegal) to develop the organisation's position in relation to different types of activity covered in the Strategic Objectives. The topics were:

- 1. Inventory, assessment & monitoring: providing sound baselines data & information;
- 2. Enhancing the wise use of wetlands & their resources through management & training;
- 3. Managing wetlands and their resources in the context of global environmental issues; and
- 4. Assisting conventions, governments and other decision-makers to manage their wetlands and wetland resources.

Importantly, for the first time the workshops brought together the whole range of Wetlands International's members (countries, Specialist Groups, international organisations) and observers, so that the resulting view of positioning reflects the view of the whole organisation. There was strong consensus from members that this was an important step in engaging the Advisory Council in guiding the work of the organisation.

A **summary** of the overall positioning is provided below, backed by **Annex 1** and a summary table in **Annex 2**, which provides more detail for each of the topics of the range, scope and priorities of the work that should and should not be undertaken. In general, the workshops reaffirmed the general direction set for the organisation at its founding in Kuala Lumpur in 1995.

The Strategic Positioning covers the organisation's role in: Baseline science; Training and capacity-building;

Supporting decision-makers; Involvement in global issues; and the Geographical scale of activity.

Note that the organisation’s positioning in relation to other organisations (notably other international NGOs) active in the field of wetland conservation and sustainable use was not addressed and this requires further evaluation. The development of joint work plans with the Ramsar Convention by its four International Organisation Partners (Wetlands International, IUCN, WWF and BirdLife International) will assist such evaluation.

1999-2001 Strategic Objectives
1. To maintain an overview of the status of wetlands and their resources by developing, promoting and co-ordinating inventory, assessment and monitoring standards and programmes, and their dissemination.
2. To ensure that high quality wetland scientific and technical knowledge is used to enable sound policy and management decisions.
3. To enhance the effectiveness of relevant international conventions, regional and national initiatives as policy tools for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources.
4. To enhance the sustainable use of wetlands and their resources, in particular to maintain and restore their natural functions and biodiversity, through the promotion and application of sound management.
5. To enhance the capacity of institutions and individuals responsible for the management of wetlands and their resources, by the provision of training and the exchange of know-how.
6. To raise awareness of policy developers, decision makers and the general public of the functions and values of wetlands and their resources.
7. To develop the organisation’s resources, networks and programmes efficiently, through sound governance and organisational management systems, and maximising synergy with other organisations.

2. Strategic Positioning summary

Baseline science

1. It is essential that Wetlands International continue to be an organisation based on sound science, and to disseminate information products and expertise derived from this.
2. If the base science work is stopped it is unlikely to be carried by any other organisation. Therefore Wetlands International should maintain (and further develop) global leadership on wetland inventory and assessment and waterbird monitoring, and must keep its focus. Substantively expanding its range of other activities risks failing to deliver this core work properly.
3. To improve its capacity to deliver baseline science, the role, scope and flexibility of Specialist Groups should be enhanced, notably through establishing task forces and working groups.
4. Wetlands International's science-based activities should support the wise use of wetlands, notably through
 - facilitating and supporting training and communication,
 - working directly with Conventions, and
 - indirectly with other partners to assist understanding and action.
5. The value of Wetlands International being a 'hybrid organisation' (i.e. with both NGO and governmental links) is high, and its governmental representatives provide key wetlands links within governments to conventions, between government ministries and through ministries to donor agencies.

Training and capacity building

Training activities should focus on:

- development of training courses and training the trainers, especially in science-based activities,
- supporting demonstration projects that increase the capacity of local communities, and
- developing demonstration and resource materials.

Supporting decision-makers

1. Wetlands International should provide data, information and expertise required for decision-making, advice based on scientific expertise, and the presentation of this in a non-confrontational manner.
2. However it should not be simply a science organisation but also an advocate of the sustainable use of wetlands.
3. Global campaigning and politics, as distinct from science-based activities, should be left to other groups.

Involvement in global issues

1. There are numerous big global issues of major relevance to Wetlands International (notably endangered species, invasive species, climatic change, competition for water, drainage, population growth, poverty, multijurisdictional problems and desertification).
2. Wetlands International will keep a distinctive role in relation to these issues, with its focus on wetlands as they relate to these issues.
3. To strengthen awareness of wetlands in global issues, Wetlands International will:

- providing scientific and technical information and support and
- act as an honest information broker, a facilitator and a convenor for networking organisations, expertise and information.

Geographical scale of activity

1. Much of Wetlands International's activity should be primarily focussed on the supra-national and global scale. Nevertheless in some areas of the world, notably where capacity is lacking, Wetlands International will engage in a wider scope of activities at the national and local level.
2. In such areas Wetlands International will be very careful in targeting the types of activities in which it will engage at the national and local levels. These will focus on:

- helping build national capacity where this is weak, and
- demonstration projects that have wider applicability.

Annex 1

Wetlands International's Strategic Positioning in relation to Strategic Objectives

Note. Concurrent with the Strategic Positioning workshops, the Board of Members revised the Strategic Objectives. The Strategic Objectives to which each workshop related are identified below. The 1999-2001 Strategic Objectives are listed in Annex 2.

1. Inventory, assessment & monitoring: providing sound baselines data & information

Strategic Objectives: 1 & 2

Wetlands International should continue to engage directly in this topic, which is fundamental to its unique work and its global profile. Developing and maintaining a sound science base is essential to the organisation's work as it underpins much of its other activity.

Wetlands International should:

1. Provide global leadership in inventory, assessment and monitoring of wetlands; and
2. Facilitate related activities by partner organisations.

It should continue to build and develop traditional strengths, and ensure catalytic working.

Wetlands International's focus and strength should continue to be the collection and compilation of data and information at a supra-national scale.

Generally, activities involving data collection at national and smaller scales are seen as outside the mission and Strategic Objectives or at most of low priority. There are, however, instances where national or sub-national activity will be appropriate, for example in facilitating national wetland inventory.

Appropriate types of work (all high priority), for which Wetlands International has acknowledged expertise and reputation, are to maintain and further develop global leadership in:

- Wetland inventory
- Wetland assessment
- Waterbird monitoring
- Population trends
- Flyway atlases
- Population estimates

This leadership will involve:

- Standards-setting (methodologies, software applications, etc.)
- Collation, management and maintenance of data
- Dissemination and facilitation of access to data
- Synthesis and interpretation of data (e.g. by Specialist Groups) and publication of results
- Targeted applications of data (e.g. to conventions)

High quality and appropriately targeted science products have big impact and influence on decision-makers. Such quality must be maintained in science products. Co-ordination across all parts of the organisation in its delivery of baseline science is essential for maintenance of quality.

Within Strategic Objective 1 the balance of activity should be 95% science-based work and 5% dissemination and awareness-raising. However, it is important to recognise that science-based activity is the fuel which drives most other awareness-generating activity undertaken by the organisation.

2. Enhancing the wise use of wetlands & their resources through management & training

Strategic Objectives: 4 & 5

Wetlands International should:

- Undertake & communicate science-based activities that support the wise use of wetlands; and
- Facilitate and support training and communication towards the wise use of Wetlands International aim at multi-level target groups and make use of relevant resource materials

Three broad steps should be used to deliver this:

- Link scientific investigation with local knowledge sources
- Report back to local contacts in plain language
- Communicate as a basis for local training

The following are outside the scope of the Mission and Strategic Objectives and should not be undertaken:

- Academic, specialised training – Wetlands International must support within-country institutes for these aspects
- Development of administrative approaches to (eco)system management

Types of work appropriate for Wetlands International are:

- Science-based activities

- Translation into plain language at the appropriate level
- Communication in a useful manner for local use
- Development of training courses
- Preparation of demonstration and resource materials
- Training at/for grass-root communities
- Training the trainers
- Integrating local knowledge with science-based activities
- Supporting pilot/demonstration projects which empower local communities
- Training the external 'experts' in humbleness so as to avoid 'eco-colonialism'

Priority issues and work should be:

- Monitoring activities
- Analysing data
- Developing communications & media strategies for presenting the data for appropriate use at local levels
- Developing guidelines for management plans
- Co-operation with other key groups (e.g. Ramsar, IUCN, WWF, CBD and local groups within countries) to produce training manuals

In undertaking this area of activity, Wetlands international should act to facilitate the links between scientists and communicators. Whilst communication is a key part of the process of the transfer of science into management and training, as a science-based group the organisation should be cautious about the extent to which it directly engages in broad education and public awareness activity.

To deliver this area of work the essential knowledge base required is:

- Development of an understanding of local values, uses, cultures, needs, distribution, and food securities is essential
- An integration of scientific knowledge with the socio-cultural knowledge bases should be developed

3. Managing wetlands and their resources in the context of global environmental issues

Strategic objectives: 6 (relevant also to 3 & 4)

Global environmental issues of relevance to Wetlands International are:

- Endangered species
- Climatic change
- Competition for water
- Drainage
- Population growth
- Poverty
- Multijurisdictional problems (e.g. transboundary river basin management)
- Desertification
- Invasive species

Appropriate types of work for Wetlands International in engaging in global issues should be restricted to ensuring the role, values and functions of wetlands are fully understood in the development by others of sustainable responses to these issues.

The bottom line is to continue doing what Wetlands International is already doing, and to avoid expanding into the

Particular areas of input are to:

1. provide technical support through the providing scientific information (basic wetland data and information and management information);
2. act as an honest information broker;
 - provide Know-how and management expertise on the ground;
 - provide training
3. act as a facilitator/convenor for bringing together cross-sectoral interests and promoting the role of wetlands in mitigating global issues;
 - making available its network of professionals, organisations, and data and information, and importantly utilising the expertise and availability of Specialist Groups, task forces and working groups
 - act as catalyst for joint actions to address global issues

The overall approach is to do what Wetlands International is doing now, but to refine this by:

- putting more emphasis on management
- Anticipating issues that will increase in their global importance (e.g. climate change), and
- Creating more flexibility in form of Specialist Groups and access to other expert networks

It is important that Wetlands International keeps a distinct role in its input to global issues, through enhancing focus on the role and importance wetlands.

4. Assisting conventions, governments and other decision-makers to manage their wetlands and wetland resources

Operational objectives: 3

Wetlands International should continue this role as a high priority, both:

- Directly with conventions, governments etc.; and
- Indirectly with partners to "assist" understanding and action (focus on conventions, government etc.)

Wetlands International should engage, intervene, advise, and get involved based on:

- Scientific and technical knowledge, experience, expertise and analysis
- Identification of problems and their solutions

Wetlands International should not only *advise* based on scientific expertise, but also:

- Provide expertise to conventions, governments etc.
- Carry out analyses on request
- Provide information and data required for decision-making
- Present information and issues to decision-makers in a non-confrontational manner
- Offer to help solve the issue

There is advantage to Wetlands International in being a hybrid organisation (i.e. NGO & government). This places a special responsibility on Wetlands International's governmental representatives to provide the wetlands link:

- From within government to convention(s)
- between other government ministries in their country, particularly between the focal points for different environmental conventions (Ramsar, CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD) since such links are often weak; and

- through senior ministries to multilateral and bilateral environmental donor agencies.

All members (especially within a country, region or international association) should support one another to advance the wetlands international agenda.

Wetlands International should take advantage of shared agendas with other NGOs, government departments, international conventions etc.

It is important to go beyond information sharing and co-operation in developing countries, especially into capacity development for decision-makers.

To achieve this it is necessary to:

- Broaden Wetlands International's range of expertise to match the importance of the resource (see the box in the Vision Statement);
- Empower, link and resource this expertise;
- Broaden and increase the visibility and knowledge of Wetlands International amongst decision-makers; and
- Tailor information products for ease of access and understanding by decision-makers

Annex 2

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