



Proceedings of the

Wetlands International

Specialist Groups Workshop

With Birdlife International and IUCN-SSC

and Joint Ramsar Bureau Workshops

At the Wageningen International Conference Centre
Wageningen, the Netherlands, 4-5th November 2000

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Proceedings of the Specialist Group Workshop, 4-5 November 2000

Summary of plenary and breakout workshop discussions, key recommendations and priority actions

1 Introduction

The Workshop was held to renew working relationships with Specialist Groups and especially the International Partners of Wetlands International, Birdlife International, WWF International, and IUCN, over the issues of their shared relationship with Wetlands International over Specialist Groups and potential new ways of working.

A secondary, yet valuable purpose of the Workshop was to assist the Ramsar Convention Bureau with timely technical inputs, therefore synergy with this Workshop was tapped to assist the Ramsar Convention Bureau Scientific and Technical Review Panel with its work. Additional participants were invited from the Ramsar STRP panels. It was valuable because the parallel workshops provided practical work for members of Specialist Groups present, who otherwise would not have engaged in some purely scientific or technical discussions in this Workshop. Outcomes from the three Ramsar Workshops are presented in Appendix 1.



As part of the Workshop three parallel interactive sessions were also held on the second day (Sunday 5 November) dealing with Task-based working, Communications, and the Wetlands International-promoted Ramsar Training and Advisory Service. Little progress was made with task-based working, beyond acceptance of the principle. This topic is to be developed further as one of the actions listed in Section 5.

Background papers, and especially a Review paper, were supplied to Workshop participants. These papers should be referred to, therefore these Proceedings do not include details of the papers. Provided for reference in Appendix 3, is an Index to papers supplied and the timetabled session that referred to them. In addition, a draft of the 1996-1998 Triennial Reports from Specialist Groups was distributed to participants.

This summary of the Proceedings is presented to provide a record of the discussions, with a list of annotated end notes to identify key points and actions to bring forward. Finally, a table of prioritised actions is given, with lead responsibilities. Discussion time and informal meals in Wageningen were arranged for extra business to be done



1.1 Opening of Workshop (Saturday 4th November)

Welcome presentations were given by staff of Wetlands International:

Simon Nash, International Director
Douglas Taylor, International Science Coordinator
Gerard Boere, International Programme Coordinator
Evert Rougoor, Finance and Operations Manager
Nicolette Petri, Administration Assistant

Apologies were received from: Kevin Erwin (Wetland Restoration), Stefan Pihl (Seaduck), Alan Johnson (Flamingo), Alain Crivelli (Pelican), Malcolm Coulter (Storks, Ibises, Spoonbills), Chris Tydeman (WWF), Jeff Kirby (Ducks), Jon Kusler (Wetlands & Water Resources), Barry Taylor (Rail)

1.1.1 Introductory comments and aspirations

All participants (40) were invited to introduce themselves, and state key issues for the Workshop. The main comments made included: That there is poor e.g. Asian and gender balance representation¹ in Wetlands International across Specialist Groups. Therefore, take actions away from this meeting and implement better coverage and fairer representation.

Aim to build synergies between International Partners, Wetlands International and the shared expertise in the Specialist Groups

2 Comments on the opening review paper (from Plenary sessions)

Where a Specialist Group identifies a need to work in developing countries, that Specialist Group will need Wetlands International help to raise necessary funds. One reason for poor Specialist Group coordination and representation in developing countries is that there are no funds to get the network up and running in those countries.²

It was asserted that lots of funds are out there, but a strategic approach is required to obtain them, in order to build Specialist Group requests into this approach. However, Specialist Groups have in the recent past apparently not approached Wetlands International staff, especially country office coordinators, to seek support.³ However, an external group, the International Mire Conservation Group have approached Wetlands International to seek synergy in working. Coordination is the key to the way forward. Workplans are needed to clearly get this area visible in communications with Specialist Groups⁴

Beyond strategies and workplans, a catalyst is required, needing specific projects and targets to obtain funds. Current Specialist Group bias towards Europe and N America also distorts demands for support

Forward plans must be developed jointly by Wetlands International and Specialist Group. It is not good enough for staff to simply develop plans and then report these to Specialist Groups; Wetlands International consists of Specialist Groups and staff, therefore both must work together in a more integrated way. There is a need to start by reporting to Specialist Groups what is done NOW, before launching new plans, therefore send out existing Workplans now. Partner organisations should also be involved in this at the same time.⁵ There are at least two timescales of activity:

1. Cycle of activity – process driven by annual/triennial planning
2. Short term Project development areas

One single, annual, forward plan, incorporating both (or more) timescales is required from Wetlands International in communication with Specialist Groups and Partners.

In addition to inviting Specialist Groups to be involved with Wetlands International, should Wetlands International demand things of Specialist Groups? Rights and responsibilities are a key issue.⁶

Round up of some big issues missed in the Review Paper: Assistance of the expert network as a whole is required, not just the Specialist Group Coordinator.⁷ A risk of too many forward plans whizzing about. Globalising expert networks is the big challenge – expert register or list may be a way forward.⁸

IMCG were drawn in to cooperative working with Wetlands International not by financial support for the network, but for project activities. IMCG still has no funds. If Wetlands International wishes to use IMCG as a Specialist Group, then Wetlands International must fund or run this. Need to consider a professional basis for supporting Specialist Groups, not good enough to do this via projects alone.⁹

There is a need to deal with two separate sets of expert networks: Wetlands International's own Specialist Groups which are also involved in governance, and external groups, which are associated via MoUs. Both sets of relationships must continue in parallel.

Birdlife, summary of relationship with Specialist Groups:

The Specialist Group inheritance comes mainly from the former ICBP, IWRB, predecessors of Birdlife and Wetlands International respectively. Primary agenda is for work on globally threatened birds. Birdlife International acts as a "Specialist Group" for SSC. Documentation of globally threatened bird species, is its contribution towards the Red List. Birdlife International seeks all possible expertise: from individuals, part of groups, etc. IBA programme work also involves all appropriate experts. Monitoring of IBAs need to report at local national and global level, and involves the expert network. For the International Waterbird Census, Birdlife International intends to upgrade its relationship with Wetlands International and its Specialist Groups.¹⁰ Birdlife International values the inputs from good Specialist Groups, which can bring higher levels of attention to issues, than individuals may be able to do. Relationship is scale dependent, so at local and national level, a Specialist Group may not be relevant. Specialist Groups that exist by virtue of spontaneous working are the Specialist Groups most valued by Birdlife.



IUCN-SSC view:

120 Specialist Groups, for birds, share all waterbird groups with Wetlands International and Birdlife International. Quality of leadership and motivation are the key factors for IUCN. In the findings of a study of voluntarism across the SSC, the IUCN has divided Specialist Groups into four categories:

"Highly committed and very pro-active"

"Buried treasures", highly committed but not very visible or active

"Magnesium flares", suddenly very enthusiastic and active, then they fizzle out

"Ocean swell" – not committed and not active

3 General Discussions on Progress and outcomes

(Plenary, 4 November, 16.15-17.30 and final plenary 5 November 12.00-12.30)

After the briefing and discussion sessions held earlier, these final plenary sessions aimed to capture statements from Wetlands International staff, Partners and from Specialist Group Coordinators, in order to achieve understanding and insights concerning problems, opportunities, and the way forward over these group identities and relationships.

A briefing was given by DT on the aims for the session, followed by brief statements from the leaders of the parallel Ramsar Workshops, including any recommendations for future working with Specialist Groups. These are reflected in the separate reports of these meetings.

The following is a summary of the main issues, needs, and suggestions from this plenary session, made in particular by Specialist Group Coordinators

The report on the SWOT analysis conducted by Wetlands International was seen as appropriate to the situation experienced by the Tour du Valat, home to three Specialist Groups.¹¹ Overstretched staff, and poor communication in both directions were common problems, but the positive relationship with Wetlands International was also mentioned.

On another positive note, two project areas were identified for potential collaboration between Tour du Valat and Wetlands International (includes Specialist Groups) in collaborating on rice fields projects habitat in an Italian situation 5,000 square km, of which 1,500 sq. km rice fields, important for night herons, may be able to benefit from Wetlands International expertise, and for fundraising. Invasive species projects could also be the subject of cooperation.¹² These examples come from an institution which is also a Specialist Group coordinator.

Suggestions for improvement included the need for more direct involvement in project development and fund raising,¹³ as a contribution from Wetlands International to the functioning of the Specialist Groups, over thematic and species issues. The importance of artificial habitats and endangered species on the global level was also mentioned.

The Goose Specialist Group, for example, was formerly well resourced as a Research Group of the former IWRB. Since Wetlands International's formation, Specialist Groups did not appear to be regarded as scientific research groups, rather they were seen as specialist advisors only. Poor engagement of Wetlands International in research was cited, and in particular, the Group did not want administrative duties assigned to it, instead of being seen as a research platform.¹⁴ Suggestions for support included the website, proper integration of the databases, production and distribution of a paper-based Newsletter, and travelling expenses for coordination.¹⁵ The advice is "keep it simple, and stick to research".

IUCN-SSC asked if there was already too much communication overload with Groups (the response was that this was not the case), and commented that the change of name from Research Groups was to harmonise labels, but did not change the tasks for Specialist Groups.

In general the Diver/Loon Specialist Group was satisfied with communications, and stated that the volunteers in the network (ca. 2000) accepted the need to work freely.

The Swan Specialist Group was concerned about the bottlenecks experienced by Coordinators in servicing the membership, and in particular about the poor regional network development, especially in Asia.

In respect to the suspended Hunting Group, the Woodcock and Snipe Coordinator called for re-activation of the Group. IUCN-SSC commented that the Sustainable Use Specialist Group has a good regional representation and could be useful in addressing harvest issues. CAFF countries also recently identified the need for figures on global waterbird harvest. In respect to some functions of the Hunting Group it was stated that existing waterbird groups might act as data holders, or take on some of these tasks to collect data.¹⁶

The Education and Public Awareness Specialist Group were unclear about their function in their relationship with Wetlands International, because of the over-arching nature of the theme, and currently would prefer to work with the outreach agenda of the Ramsar Bureau. They also emphasised the need to look at new models to involve expertise from outside the organisation, and wanted task-based working, to reflect the changing demands upon Wetlands International and the Group, instead of continuing with the current Specialist Group system.¹⁷

The Wetlands Inventory and Monitoring Group stated that Wetlands International has not yet after 5 years been able to accommodate the Specialist Groups effectively. Specialist Groups are professionals in their fields and in their posts within institutes, need to have returns on their



investment over Specialist Group contributions.¹⁸ Wetlands International staff tended to go for project and programme money without inviting Specialist Group partnership. The result is that competition for funds was needlessly encouraged, and missed opportunities are the common result. Bring forward a projects development action plan for consideration, possible participation in and approval by Specialist Groups and other interested Partners.¹⁹

More fundamentally, Specialist Groups were left out of the merger between IWRB, Asian Wetlands Bureau and Wetlands for the Americas, to form Wetlands International, and the current leadership should thoroughly brief staff about the role of Specialist Groups. A passive approach is not good enough. Bring forward training for staff, as a first step.

Wetlands International does not provide enough feedback or technical assistance to participating country members.

The emphasis should be on catalysing more effective involvement of the available expertise. IUCN-SSC commented that “traditional” species-based Specialist Groups are increasingly distanced from the current priorities set by the ecosystem.

Birdlife International asked what is the incentive to be a member of a Wetlands International Specialist Group, and how do we find out about the rights and responsibilities of the relationship between Specialist Groups and Wetlands International? Use an experts register for organising relationships, defining availability.²⁰

Wetlands International's science base is located outside the organisation, therefore Wetlands International should ensure full engagement with Specialist Groups and other groups. Realistic capacity within volunteer networks to take on tasks is, however, in question.

A formal network of associates is desired: well-managed expert network based on skills, for all Specialist Groups. Associates network can be much more than a simple consultant's relationship with Wetlands International.²¹

Unresolved issues: Should Specialist Groups be treated differently from other groups? Perhaps only in governance. Develop joint work plans as the goal? No, perhaps we need more precise joint projects in forward plans.

Need more face to face plenary and break out sessions with Specialist Groups to get real work proposed agreed and done. Use needs as the key way forward, obtain means later.

Need more than just an Associates network, but need an active core membership with reciprocal rights, use letterhead and logos for this by developing a strong relationship with a smaller group of individuals

Give first call to Specialist Group Co-ordinators as a gateway, to find expertise, but use Associates network as a backup.

4 Conclusions

The discussions and recommendations arising from this Workshop call for many actions to be carried out in the short and long term by the governance and staff of Wetlands International, by Specialist Group coordinators and members, and by Partner organisations. Many of these actions are ongoing and essential part of normal working, however, they require explicit recognition and accountability when drawing up forward plans, or developing projects.



The discussion at the Workshop inevitably mixed *process* with *substance*. Ideally, relationships structures and procedures should serve substance, i.e. the technical and scientific work of Wetlands International. However, the Workshop provided a useful forum to Specialist Groups and Partners, which should provide a good basis for a renewal of the joint efforts of staff and experts around the world towards the common goals of wetlands conservation and wise use, based upon a sound science base.

In the endnotes shown below, the key points for action are listed. These are carried forward into the priority actions table which concludes this Proceedings. Some of the actions have deadline dates given or are marked ongoing, because they should be part of normal working. The proposed leader to carry out the action is also indicated. The International Coordination Unit is normally responsible for management of the relationship with Specialist Groups, and if in doubt, the ICU should be consulted.

4.1 End Notes: Summary of actions to be addressed

- ¹ Gender balance and much broadened cultural and regional representation is required
- ² Both the funding for work and for development of the organisation needs targeting at developing countries
- ³ Encourage Specialist Groups to actively seek support from staff
- ⁴ Encourage joint Workplans between Specialist Groups and Wetlands International staff
- ⁵ Existing Wetlands International forward plans should be sent out to all Specialist Groups now
- ⁶ Rights and responsibilities need much better definition and agreement, beyond TORs
- ⁷ Need to be clear who should be contacted and under what circumstances
- ⁸ Develop an Associates or Experts Register
- ⁹ Consider providing Secretariat services to facilitate Specialist Group work
- ¹⁰ An IWC global strategy will be drafted by the International Coordination Unit of Wetlands International. Birdlife presented its vision paper for the IWC Steering Committee, and has therefore completed its intended action
- ¹¹ The Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats approach should be extended
- ¹² Follow up possible project development with Tour du Valat
- ¹³ Specialist Groups require synergy with staff in project development
- ¹⁴ Specialist Groups prefer a relationship based on science not administration
- ¹⁵ Provide Specialist Groups with modern informatics tools – website, databases, and Newsletter
- ¹⁶ Re-establish the Hunting Specialist Group or its equivalent
- ¹⁷ Task-based working with species-based and thematic Specialist Groups is preferred
- ¹⁸ Incentive-based working must underpin Wetlands International's relationships with SGs
- ¹⁹ Develop forward plans that are open for further development by Specialist Groups and Partners
- ²⁰ Clear terms of reference (or MoUs) which place responsibilities on all parties are needed
- ²¹ Develop an Associates Database, modelled on existing Staff Skills Database

PHOTO GALLERY FROM THE WORKSHOPS



5 Priorities for action

Need or issue	Priority	Who to action?	Deadline
Strategic and governance			
Planning cycle of the WI need to harmonise SG networks, associate groups, research groups	HIGHEST	BOARD	Ongoing
Whole of WI needs a focussed strategic planning process with an outcome oriented approach that is object led, target driven	HIGHEST	BOARD	Ongoing
Send out existing forward plans of Wetlands International to all SG Coordinators	HIGHEST	All via ICU	January 2001
Provide longer lead times to work on Projects, but must enable fast track also	HIGHEST	All	Ongoing
Joint meeting with each SG /staff to produce three year joint forward plans for tasks, with targets; review annually	HIGH	SGs, ICU+focal points	October 2001
Coordination and management			
WI should restate its relationship with SGs and other groups using an MoU approach. Clear agreements which place responsibilities on parties are needed, especially between Wetlands International and Specialist Groups	HIGHEST	ICU	Drafts by February 2001
Staff and SG Coordinators should identify new African Asian, and Central.S. American SG contacts, aim to improve gender balance, and produce the necessary funding for network development	HIGHEST	All	Develop project by March 2001
WI staff require comprehensive and active briefing and direction on the role of SGs and their value to WI	HIGHEST	ICU, SGs	By February 2001
Communications improvements must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of focal points for clarity and accountability, including regional WI to regional SG contacts • Production of a WI communications plan for 2001 • Annual review of MoUs and annual feedback on needs and actions • Annual reporting against targets • Promote better network function and communication within Groups. 	HIGHEST	ICU+focal points	Ongoing
Specialist Groups require a renewed and continuing close partnership with Wetlands International staff to retain interest and to enable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better use of and access to skills in the network ▪ Synergy in project development ▪ Effective workplans to be developed for thematic and species issues 	HIGHEST	ICU+focal points	Ongoing
SGs need guaranteed weekly time commitment from the Science Coordinator	HIGHEST	ICU	Ongoing
WI should carry out a systematic needs identification of partners and others, culminating in the Advisory Council meeting in 2001	HIGH	ICU+focal points	Sept. 2001
Task-based working with <u>all</u> Specialist Groups should be developed: incorporate in MoUs and workplans	HIGH	All – ICU to lead	From February 2001
SGs need money for coordination, including related travel, and communications	HIGH	ICU+focal points	Ongoing
Ensure Specialist Groups are engaged on science, focus on tasks not administration.	MEDIUM	All	Ongoing

Re-instate Hunting Specialist Group or equivalent in co-operation with IUCN SSC	MEDIUM	ICU, IUCN	June 2001
Implement actions using a pro-active approach jointly by SG and WI staff	LOW	All	Ongoing
Programme and projects			
Need return on investment for SGs to wish to work with WI, identified in forward plans and in project proposals	HIGH	ICU, SG	Ongoing
SGs should present concise projects and ideas to staff for co-development, consistent with forward plans. Staff should identify focal points, in addition to ICU	HIGH	SG, ICU	Ongoing
Develop the Ramsar Training and Advisory Service for funding and cooperative working with Partners and other	HIGH	ICU	Ongoing
Re-activate the Hunting Specialist Group or equivalent, and check with IUCN-SSC about possible links to other Specialist Groups	HIGH	ICU, SG, IUCN	March 2001

The above Priorities Table contains many actions, the implementation of which are the primary responsibility of the International Coordination Unit. A Workplan and regularly (monthly) updated progress chart will be posted on the Wetlands International global website, to provide feedback on the progress achieved. Many other staff and members of Specialist Groups will also be asked to become more active and to take responsibility for actions and outcomes, as a result of which we are confident that not only communications, but also effective scientific programmes will be improved.

Supplementary information: outputs from parallel workshops on Communications and the Wetlands International Ramsar Training and Advisory Service

Communications workshop

Improved communication between SG, with WI and with the rest of the world is essential. This will need cultural and structural changes.

Communication could be facilitated by WI through the following means:

- Appoint staff focal points for programme activities
- Publish a guidance notes for working with SGs
- Stimulate use of e-mail, list servers, intranet and internet and write a guidance note on use of them
- Integrate SG contacts into the WI contact database
- Promote SG work through leaflets and hosting SG pages on our website
- Monitor updating and renewing of content of the website
- Post SG news on partners websites or in partners newsletters
- Dedicate 1 page for 1 specific SG and 1 page for general SG news in every Newsletter (3 issues/yr)
- Help to publish and disseminate hardcopy SG newsletters at least once/year
- Use WI corporate image in SG publications and help with publication dissemination
- Prepare a key listing of libraries to which WI/SG publications should be sent

Ramsar Training and Advisory Service Workshop

[refer to October 2000 concept proposal, available at

http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/Wetlands_ICU/SGroups/Workshop2000/RamTrain.htm]

Training Framework - stages in the process

[who should be involved is in square brackets]

1. Confirm governance support/endorsement for Training Framework
 - Ramsar Standing Committee #25 has endorsed, as part of Ramsar 2000

Work Plan

- Wetlands International governance endorsement needed as priority element of WI Work Plan [WI-ICU, WI-Board of Directors]

2. Ensure all parts of Wetlands International aware of/willing to support Framework implementation

- [WI-ICU lead; WI regional HQs & sub-regional/country offices]

3. Confirm partner organisations (esp. IOPs) willingness to contribute, esp. to implementation

- [WI-ICU lead; IUCN, WWF, BirdLife, others as appropriate]

4. Commitment to seek funding

- It was noted that in seeking funding and given the modular development of the initiative, there was a need to balance the urgent need for the various elements of the Framework with realism of what can be achieved

- [WI-ICU lead; Ramsar Bureau endorsement letters as needed]

5. Project development

- [WI staff: ICU & regions; Partners]
- Specialist Groups should be kept informed, especially as specific elements of implementation that might call on their services are identified and developed

6. Project delivery

- [WI-ICU lead; WI staff, Partners, SGs, Ramsar Bureau]
 - Needs assessment [WI, SGs, Partners]
 - Training opportunities [WI, SGs, Partners]
 - Database [WI-ICU, ?WI-AP]
 - Helpdesk [WI-ICU, ?WI-AP]

In relation to the potential involvement and roles of SGs and their members, it was considered that in general there was not a locus for strong SG involvement through stages 1-5, but noting that certain SGs (or certain members of certain SGs) should be involved in helping develop specific elements of the implementation, e.g. an inventory training module.

SGs, and perhaps more particularly members of SGs expert as trainers in particular topics (e.g. waterbird census techniques, wetland inventory & assessment, wetland restoration etc.), should be involved in elements of project delivery. For this to be effective, the proposed SG members register would be a key tool.

With respect to Phase 1 and phase 2 tasks (p4). The group felt that the development of a standard needs process and tools (ph 2 bullet 1) needed to come at the top of phase 1, bullet 1. Thus the sequence should be to:

- develop a standard process and tools; then
- do pilot needs assessment workshops, using this draft process and tools; and then
- on the basis of workshop experience to revise/refine process and tools (this stage could be a phase 2 activity) and make available as standard.

6 Appendix 1 Summary outcomes of the Ramsar Workshops

(Note that the following are drafts only, and require review by members of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel)

APPLICATION OF CRITERIA FOR RAMSAR LISTING OF SITES FOR THREATENED WATERBIRDS

A workshop to discuss and advance criteria for the designation of Ramsar sites for threatened waterbirds was held at the Wetlands International Specialist Groups Scientific and Technical meeting in Wageningen (4-5 November 2000). The workshop:



- Recommended a holistic approach, involving all continents and all of the 14 waterbird orders recognised by Ramsar as being wetland dependent;
- Identified the products required by Contracting Parties:
 - Species list;
 - Atlas (based on the AEWA Atlas of Anatidae Populations), incorporating:
 - Distribution map;
 - List of sites meeting Ramsar criteria;
 - List of sites currently designated;
 - Coverage targets (eg. most important sites in need of protection, proportion of sites which should be protected).
- Suggested that a small Ramsar Working Group be established to:
 - Suggest criteria which should be used to designate sites for threatened waterbirds (based on an amended version of the criteria used by the BirdLife IBA programme);

Conduct a gap analysis of the above products by region and waterbird family in order to identify products which can be provided to Ramsar Conferences of Parties in the short, medium, and long term.

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNATING WET GRASSLAND RAMSAR SITES

Definition of “Wet Grasslands”

Wet grasslands are natural and near-natural ecosystems with a vegetation characterised and dominated by lower growing perennial grasses, sedges, reeds, rushes and/or herbs. They appear under periodically flooded or waterlogged conditions and are maintained through mowing, burning, natural or man-induced grazing or a combination of these.

Wet grasslands include among others: floodplain grasslands, washlands, polders, water meadows, wet grasslands with (intensive) water level management, lakeside grasslands, vegetation dominated by relatively large, perennial, competitive herbs and ground-water dependent dune slacks. These grasslands occur on different soils: heavy clay, loam, sand, gravel, peat, etc. and can belong to fresh or brackish water systems.



Vegetation types that fall under this definition can appear in mosaic with one another or with other wetland types, such as peatland, reedbeds, water-dependent shrubs, forests and others.

Link with Ramsar wetland classification

Wet Grasslands are covered by the following wetland types of the Ramsar Classification System:

- (a) As a *floodplain component*, wet grasslands fall under category **Ts** (seasonal/intermittent freshwater marshes on inorganic soils, including **seasonally flooded meadows and sedge marshes**) and category **U** (non-forested peatlands, including **swamps and fens**).
- (b) Among the *human-made* wetland types, wet grasslands fall under category **3** (**irrigated land**, including irrigation channels and rice fields) and category **4** (**seasonally flooded agricultural land**, including intensively managed or grazed wet meadow or pasture). Irrigation channels with natural vegetation cutting through wet meadows fulfil substantial ecological functions; they are therefore considered part of wet grasslands.
- (c) *Wet grassland habitats* can also occur in a series of wetland types belonging to categories **E** (sand, shingle or pebble shores including dune systems and humid dune slacks) and **H** (intertidal salt meadows, raised salt marshes, tidal brackish and freshwater marshes), or can be found at the edges of wetlands of categories **J** (coastal brackish/saline lagoons), **N** (seasonal/intermittent/irregular rivers/streams/creeks), **P** (seasonal/intermittent floodplain lakes), **R** (seasonal/intermittent saline/brackish/alkaline lakes and flats), and **Ss** (seasonal/intermittent saline/brackish/alkaline marshes).

Values and function of wet grasslands

Wet grasslands support specific wildlife and biodiversity, comprising rare and threatened plant and animal species and communities, including internationally important bird populations, a range of mammals, invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians.

In recent years there has been increasing awareness about the value of wet grasslands to perform hydrological and chemical functions:

- (a) Flood alleviation – wet grasslands can contain floodwater.
- (b) Groundwater recharge – wet grasslands retain water within a watershed enabling groundwater to be replenished.

- (c) Water quality improvement – riparian wet grasslands retain nutrients, toxic substances and sediment, preventing them from entering watercourses.

Economic benefits accrue from these functions. When wet grasslands are destroyed, these functions are lost and have to be replaced at enormous financial cost. These benefits include:

- (a) Water supply – wet grasslands can influence both water quantity and quality.
- (b) Health of freshwater fisheries – backwaters, ditches and other open water habitats within wet grassland areas are important for river fisheries.
- (c) Agriculture – floodplains provide some of the most fertile agricultural land.
- (d) Recreation and tourism opportunities.

Threats to wet grasslands

From an early stage in human history, floodplains have been subject to modifications. Since the industrial revolution, pressures on rivers and floodplains increased significantly in many areas. As part of this process, wet grasslands have declined much in industrialized areas, but are also exposed to specific threats in other regions. This is being brought about by:

- (a) Changes in agricultural practices – increased drainage and use of fertilizer, change from hay-making to silage, re-seeding, herbicide use, conversion to arable, higher stocking densities, neglect or abandonment, use of aquatic herbicides.
- (b) Land drainage – modification of natural hydrological regimes, isolation of floodplains from river flows, rapid evacuation of winter floods and early fall of spring water tables, maintenance of low water levels in drainage channels.
- (c) Abstraction for drinking water and crop irrigation – leading to lowered river flows and in-channel water levels, lowered water tables, exacerbation of drought-related problems.
- (d) Eutrophication – leading to changes in grassland plant communities and increased sward vigour.
- (e) Sea-level rise and construction of flood defences are threatening coastal wet grasslands.
- (f) Development and mineral extraction – leading to a decline of routinely flooded area and increased frequency of flooding of the remaining washland.
- (g) Site fragmentation – leading to isolation of sites, threatening species restricted to wet grassland and vulnerable to extinction, and to problems with water level control and implementing agricultural management.

Application of the Ramsar selection criteria to wet grasslands

GROUP A of the criteria for sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types.

Criterion 1 (particular wet grassland ecosystems)

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare or unique example of wet grassland ecosystem of the appropriate biogeographic region. This holds particularly if the wet grassland ecosystem performs specific hydrological functions, is of particular socio-economic interest, and/or represents particular historical or cultural values.

GROUP B of the criteria for sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity.

Criteria based on species and ecological communities:

Criterion 2 (endangered species and communities of wet grasslands)

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species, or threatened ecological communities of wet grassland ecosystems.

Criterion 3 (biodiversity of wet grasslands)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

Criterion 4 (support of specific wet grassland-dependent species)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at critical stages in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

Specific criteria based on birds:

Criterion 5 (support of 20,000 waterbirds)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

Criterion 6 (support of 1% of a flyway population)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

Specific criteria based on fish:

Criterion 7 (support of fish biodiversity)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.

Criterion 8 (support of fisheries)

A wet grassland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

Particular issues to be taken into account

Wetlands are generally dynamic ecosystems. This is particularly true for wet grasslands. As part of river or coastal floodplains, they are maintained by periodical floods or waterlogged conditions, either natural or human-induced.

Additional ecological factors are crucial to prevent gradual vegetation succession transforming wet grasslands to tall reedbeds, peat bogs or forested wetlands. Natural or man-induced grazing, mowing, or burning, or a combination of them are the most common ones. In many cases, these factors need to be maintained through specific management measures or traditional forms of land and wetland resource uses to maintain the ecological character of wet grasslands.

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNATING PEATLAND RAMSAR SITES

The workshop, co-chaired by Jack Riely (IPS) and Doug Taylor, and attended by Richard Lindsay (IMCG), Henk Zingstra, Marcel Silviu, Scott Frazier (Wetlands International), Herbert Diemont (Alterra), Randy Milton (Canada), considered the *Draft guidelines for the identification and designation of peatlands as Ramsar Sites - initial review*, produced by Wetlands International for the Ramsar STRP meeting in June 2000.

Comments received on the draft had been produced by Richard Lindsay of the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) and by STRP member, Randy Milton, and were considered at the workshop.



Further work is necessary to draft a new version of the guidelines for consideration by the STRP at its next meeting in 2001. The latest version of the draft guidelines will be posted on the Wetlands International website as it becomes available.

7 Appendix 2 List of Participants

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8 Appendix 3 Index to Workshop Papers and related timetable

Date and time	Relevant papers	Topic
Saturday 4th November		Wetlands International Specialist Groups, Scientific and Technical Workshop, 4-5 November 2000
08.45 –11.00		Registration of participants
09.00		Welcome and introduction
09.15 - 10.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Paper • Papers 1-4 • Interim SG Report 1996-98 	Plenary, review of previous workshops and achievements to date Suggested targets for Workshop and next steps
10.45		<i>Coffee</i>
11.00 - 13.00		Workshops: (Jointly with the Ramsar Bureau
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOR Paper, • CoP7 draft 	1. Threatened Waterbirds
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOR Paper • STRP Working Group TOR • Peat Guidelines 	2. Peat guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOR Paper • RSPB WG Paper 	3. Wet Grasslands
13.00 - 14.00		<i>Buffet Lunch at WICC (provided by WI)</i>
14.00 - 16.00		Ramsar Workshops continue
14.00 - 16.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Paper • Papers 1-4 • Interim SG Report 1996-98 	Specialist Groups and Partners: sharing the effort Thematic programme of Wetlands International and relationship to Partner's programmes
16.00 - 16.15		<i>Tea</i>
16.15 - 17.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabled paper 	Plenary Session Review progress and outcomes
17.30		Break and informal sessions (includes <i>demonstration of the prototype online Atlas of Greater Flamingos</i>)
19.00		<i>Dinner (provided by WI)</i>

Date and time	Relevant papers	Topic
Sunday 5th November		
9.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabled paper 	Plenary Session Task-based working: Terms of reference SG-staff relationships
09.30 - 10.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 4 • Tabled paper • Tabled paper • Paper 5 	Workshops 1. Task-based working: Terms of reference and workplan 2. Communications 3. Training and Advisory Service
10.45 - 11.00		<i>Coffee</i>
11.00 - 12.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabled paper 	Plenary Closing Session Recommendations to Specialist Group members and to the Board of Directors
12.30		<i>Lunch, WICC (provided by WI) and close of Workshop</i>
14.00		Informal working sessions