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# Ramsar Convention on Wetlands 10th Conference of Parties

## THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (known as the 'Ramsar Convention') is an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. The Ramsar Convention was adopted in February 1971 and came into force in December 1975.

Contracting parties<sup>1</sup> to the Ramsar Convention meet every 3 years to progress wetland conservation and to make collective decisions to improve the management of wetlands. The 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) was held in Changwon, South Korea, from 28 October to 4 November 2008.

### **The mission statement of the Convention is:**

*Conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international co-operation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>*

### **For the purposes of the Ramsar Convention, wetlands are defined to include:**

*... areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres...<sup>3</sup>*



*Carex secta* swamp, Ashburton Basin. Photo: H. Robertson, DOC.

<sup>1</sup> Contracting parties are the countries who have signed the Ramsar Convention.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009–2015.

<sup>3</sup> Article 1.1 of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

**New Zealand signed and ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1976. As a signatory to the Convention, New Zealand has the following obligations and commitments<sup>4</sup>:**

- To designate at least one wetland of international importance
- To formulate and implement planning to promote the conservation of Ramsar sites and, as far as possible, the wise use of wetlands generally
- To report on changes, or likely changes, in the ecological character of Ramsar sites
- To establish nature reserves on wetlands
- To promote training in wetland research, management and wardening
- To co-operate and consult with other countries in relation to implementing the Convention
- To attend Conferences of the Parties to report on implementation and engage in decisions relating to the future focus and administration of the Convention

**At present, New Zealand has six ‘Ramsar sites’ listed under the convention, which cover around 566 square kilometres<sup>5</sup>. These include:**

- Whangamarino
- Kopuatai Peat Dome
- Firth of Thames
- Manawatu River Mouth and Estuary
- Farewell Spit
- Awarua Wetlands



Wetland plants, Awarua Bay, Southland. *Photo: DOC.*



Farewell Spit. *Photo: Simon Walls.*



Manawatu Estuary. *Photo: Vivienne McGlynn.*

<sup>4</sup> Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

<sup>5</sup> Based on data from the Ramsar Sites Information Service.

# COP10

The Department of Conservation (DOC), as the authority responsible for administering the Convention in New Zealand, attended the COP10 meeting to represent the New Zealand Government. A full report from the New Zealand delegation and priorities for resolution implementation will be available on the DOC website ([www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)) in early 2010.

## KEY OUTCOMES OF COP10

### *Administration of the Convention*

**Key documents for the administration of the Convention were adopted:**

- The Ramsar Strategic Plan—provides guidance on priority work within a framework of Goals, Strategies and Key Results Areas for 2009–2015
- The Programme on Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA Programme)—establishes Goals, Strategies and Key Results Areas for 2009–2015
- The Workplan for the Convention’s Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP Workplan)—identifies 30 high-priority tasks to be undertaken during 2009–2012<sup>6</sup>

**Resolutions were made in relation to the operation of the Convention and its implementation (including maintenance of the Ramsar List of sites). Key resolutions included:**

- Confirming working arrangements for the Ramsar Secretariat
- Improving co-ordination with other Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Updating the ‘modus operandi’ of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel
- Establishing partnership principles to guide the Ramsar Secretariat in working with the business sector
- Clarifying the functions and responsibilities of national Ramsar positions and roles

These resolutions focus on improving the effectiveness of the Convention. Contracting Parties are encouraged to review and improve their implementation of the Convention.

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<sup>6</sup> This includes supporting documents prepared by the CEPA Oversight Panel to clarify terms and roles, establish a monitoring framework, and identify target groups.



## *Ramsar sites*

A resolution was adopted at the COP that reported on the Status of Sites on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. The Ramsar List contained 1822 sites at 4 November 2008 and the List had increased by around 25% since COP9. The efforts of Contracting Parties were recognised, and future targets were set on the basis of predicted site nominations and/or extensions.

Specific concerns identified were the slow rate of progress in meeting Ramsar targets for site number, coverage (area) and representation (by wetland type). Concerns were also identified about the lack of available information on the condition of Ramsar sites, and Contracting Parties were reminded of the need to monitor, report upon and manage Ramsar sites in order to maintain their ecological character.

Along with a number of other countries, New Zealand was identified as a Contracting Party with potential future site nominations, and was also encouraged to update Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS<sup>7</sup>) for existing Ramsar sites.



Waders, Access Bay, Firth of Thames. *Photo: Dick Veitch.*

Whangamarino Wetland *Photo: DOC.*

## *The changing face of wetlands*

**Recognition of the increasing pressure that wetland ecosystems are experiencing on a global scale<sup>8</sup> was a key theme at COP10.**

Through a resolution entitled ‘The Changwon Declaration’, Parties voiced their concerns about wetland degradation and loss<sup>9</sup> and the resultant decline in water availability for 1–2 billion people globally. Through this Declaration, people are called to act urgently to:

- Improve water-use efficiency
- Prevent wetland degradation and loss
- Restore degraded wetlands
- Wisely manage existing wetlands

<sup>7</sup> The Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) is designed to provide essential data on all designated Wetlands of International Importance to allow analysis of Ramsar-listed wetlands around the world, to provide baseline data for measuring changes in these listed wetlands, and to provide material for Ramsar publications.

<sup>8</sup> Based upon the *IPCC 4th Assessment Report; the Global Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity & Climate Change; The Wetlands and Water Synthesis Report* (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment); *The World Water Development Report (2006)*; and *UN FAO priorities*.

<sup>9</sup> This is occurring at a faster rate than for any other ecosystem type as a result of major changes in land-use, water diversions and infrastructure development.

**Resolutions were adopted in relation to a number of issues and threats of particular relevance to New Zealand, including:**

*Increasing Waterbird Conservation*

Resolution X.22 includes:

- Support for existing and increased international co-operation for conservation of migratory flyways (including the East Asian-Australasian Flyway)
- Guidance for responding to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI H5NI)

*Climate Change*

Resolution X.24 recognises that particular wetland types are negatively affected by climate change and/or may perform valuable ecosystem services relating to climate change mitigation and/or adaptation. Parties are urged to manage the impacts of climate change on wetlands and fully utilise wetland conservation/restoration as a tool for climate change management. A summary of recent technical information is included in this resolution.

*Biofuel production*

Resolution X.25 stems from concerns about the potential impacts of increased biofuel production on wetland ecosystems through increased irrigation requirements and pressure for wetland conversion. Contracting Parties are urged to ensure that the use and production of biofuels are undertaken in a manner that is consistent with the wise use of wetlands.

*Extractive industries*

Resolution X.26 stems from concerns about the potential impacts of resource extraction (including oil, gas, minerals, coal, sand, gravel, peat, salt and soda ash) on wetlands and reinforces the need for wetlands to be managed wisely. Parties are reminded of relevant Ramsar guidance (including Environmental Impact Assessment, Wetland Inventory, Community Involvement, Compensation and Mitigation) and are urged to apply these approaches as appropriate.

Protecting and providing for the ecosystem services<sup>10</sup> of peatlands (particularly as carbon stores) is a recurring theme in a number of resolutions, and Contracting Parties are being called upon to review their management of peatlands to ensure that they are appropriately managed and/or restored, and that their functions are understood and fully acknowledged.

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<sup>10</sup> In relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation (for carbon storage and flood protection), and for food and water provision.

## *Improved monitoring, reporting and management of wetland condition*

There was a strong call for Contracting Parties to improve their monitoring, reporting and management of wetlands. To this end, the COP adopted the following technical documents that had been prepared by the STRP:

- 'A Framework for Ramsar Data and Information Needs', which sets out the information requirements of the Convention (structured around the reporting requirements of the Strategic Plan)
- 'Updated scientific and technical guidance for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)'
- 'A Framework for Processes of Detecting, Reporting and Responding to Change in Ecological Character', which sets out Ramsar processes and responsibilities for monitoring and responding to changes in ecological character
- 'Guidelines for Describing the Ecological Character of Wetlands' for the purposes of core inventory, description of ecological character, Ramsar Information Sheet completion, and reporting on changes in ecological character
- Consolidated scientific and technical guidance in relation to Wetlands and River Basin Management
- Scientific and technical guidance for Biogeographic Regionalisation in the application of the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List

## *Activities in New Zealand following on from COP10*

Since the COP10 in Korea, the Department of Conservation has undertaken a number of initiatives to progress the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in New Zealand. The national mapping of wetlands (WONI) and the Arawai Kākāriki Wetland Restoration Programme, which includes two Ramsar sites, support many of the key messages and resolutions from COP10.

On 8 June 2009, the New Zealand Government announced its new strategy 'New Start for Fresh Water'. It outlines the Government's new direction for water management in New Zealand and sets out some of the choices we face and the implications of those choices.


The Department is currently reviewing the national roles and responsibilities for implementing the Convention, including the identification of criteria that will be used to prioritise future site nominations. Ramsar Information Sheets for existing sites will also be updated prior to COP11 (in 2012).

Further information on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands can be found at: [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org).

Further information on the 'New Start for Fresh Water' strategy can be found at: <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/water/freshwater/new-start-fresh-water.html>.

Further information on DOC's role and the Ramsar Convention can be found on the DOC website ([www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)), including the full report ('Ramsar Resolution Implementation in New Zealand: 10th Conference of Parties'), due March 2010.

For any enquiries regarding this factsheet or the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in New Zealand, please contact: [ramsar@doc.govt.nz](mailto:ramsar@doc.govt.nz).



Waituna Lagoon, part of the Awarua Wetland Ramsar site, Southland.  
Photo: H. Robertson, DOC.