

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
Asia Regional Meeting on Ramsar
COP9
Beijing, 13-16 May 2005



**ASIAN REGIONAL MEETING ON THE CONVENTION ON
WETLANDS**

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(http://www.ramsar.org/mtg/mtg_reg_asia2005_index.htm)

Background

A presentation and discussion session on the draft Principles for a Code of Conduct for Sustainable Management of Mangrove Ecosystems was arranged within one of the Technical Sessions on Day 2 of this regional meeting, which was organised by the Ramsar Secretariat as the third of three preparatory meetings for the Convention of the Parties (COP9), to be held in Kampala, Uganda (November 2005).

The following is a summary of the session in which the draft Principles for a Code of Conduct for Mangroves were presented and discussed.

The mangrove session was preceded by a session on the Asian Tsunami and Coastal Wetlands. This is also reported on here because of its relevance to many of the issues presented in the mangrove document (hereon referred to as “The Principles”).

The Asian Tsunami Session was introduced with a presentation on the recommendations from an Asian Wetlands Symposium held in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India on 9th February 2005. This was followed by a presentation on Natural Mitigation of Natural Disasters. A number of comments and suggestions were also contributed by the delegates.

The AWS meeting concluded that, overall, coastal mangroves did protect shorelines hit by the Tsunami, for the following main reasons: (a) mangroves resisted the energy generated by the Tsunami; (b) mangroves reduced the amount of seawater inundation; (c) mangroves prevented people and debris from being washed out to sea as the water receded.

For example:

- In Bakongan South Aceh, 160 km approximately from the epicentre of the earthquake which generated the tsunami, *Rhizophora* mangroves and *Casuarina* trees reduced the tsunami's impact. However, nearer the epi-centre of the earthquake in Sumatra mangrove forests were completely destroyed.
- In India, the Pichavaram mangroves protected six hamlets from the tsunami, but other hamlets situated on or near open beaches were totally destroyed.
- In Ranong and Phang Nga Bay, southern Thailand, the mangrove forests saved many lives.
- The cyclone shelter belt of *Casuarina* forest in Tamil Nadu similarly helped to reduce the impact in this region of India.

Such experiences from the tsunami have raised awareness about the importance of natural coastal protection, including coral reefs, mangroves, other coastal forest types and sand dunes.

Specifically:

- The need to collate and make better use of indigenous knowledge about mangroves and other traditional coastal protection measures.
- The value of mangrove “green belts” or “bio-shields” for coastal protection, including planning and regulations for green-belts. And, corresponding with the green belt concept, to have no development zones for mangroves, supported by mangrove rehabilitation where necessary.
- The need for accurate baseline data on mangroves in relation to coastal protection; and information on mangrove planting techniques and the optimal mangrove forest area and composition for specific protection functions.

Regarding the draft principles for a Code of Conduct for mangroves, Dr Lai Guanchun summarised the views expressed by Ramsar delegates at the Regional Meetings for the Americas (Merida, Mexico) and Africa (Ashura, Tanzania).

The Americas:

Delegates from the Americas were uncertain of the status of the document under review and it arrived rather late.

There is a need for more consultation on the code, covering *inter alia* its purpose, content and ownership.

More community involvement is needed in the on-going consultation.

The delegates agreed to arrange national workshops for discussion of the document, but more time will be needed for national consultation and feedback.

Africa:

Mangrove clearance to create grazing land for livestock was raised as an important issue in Africa.

More emphasis should be given in the document to community participation and co-management arrangements to improve mangrove management effectiveness.

On more specific topics, the delegates suggested that:

Principle 2 should evoke EIAs as a vital mechanism to protect mangroves from unnecessary or unsustainable development.

The need to protect the cultural values of mangroves should be elaborated more strongly.

The recommendation to promote green-labelling of sustainably produced mangrove products may be difficult for some African countries.

Principle 13 on mangrove education belongs better with Principle 8.

Dr Chris Gordon, Presenter of the draft Code for mangroves in Ashura, also presented proposals for a project follow up to the Code in the African sub-regions.

General comments/questions received from national and institutional delegates in Beijing on the content of the draft Principles [the response from the presenter is included in square brackets]

China:

Pleased to learn that the code's development is an on-going process and that more effort is being placed on "bottom-up" activities. The Government of China recognises the importance of coastal wetlands for natural protection of the coastline. China has more than 22,000 ha of mangroves in four southern provinces (2001 estimate). During the 19th Century Chinese brought mangroves back from SE Asia and planted them in areas such as Hainan. It is appreciated that mangrove research is important and that countries need to adapt mangrove planting techniques to suit their own particular needs and conditions (e.g. choice of species). *[all these points are useful and the last comment is strongly supported, including by other speakers].*

Vietnam:

The draft Principles are good and important in the context of Vietnam. It should be regarded as a guiding document only, for national use, but more consultation is needed at national level, including governmental involvement in the case of Vietnam. [Agreed, and important to follow up as Vietnam has been selected for field testing of the Principles].

The delegate from Vietnam also pointed out that the term “wise-use” (a term used in the document) does not translate well into Vietnamese.

[The Chairman explained that wise-use does have a specific meaning (which is not the same as “sustainable use”) and that a new, more precise definition of wise-use would be forthcoming soon.]

The sub-heading “Cultural Issues” should be changed. The Chairman advised that “Cultural Aspects” would be a more appropriate term. *[agreed to]*

India:

Widespread use of the term “ecotourism” has created more interest in coastal wetlands, but the definition of ecotourism needs more consideration, also the potential impacts from tourism on wetlands. Thus ecotourism planning should carefully consider the issue of carrying capacity. *[agreed to]*

Regarding Principle 4, the importance of sediment dynamics in mangrove ecosystems should be included. There should also be more attention given to off-site interactions and impacts, and boundary issues. This stronger focus should include guidance on EIAs, both on- and off-site. *[agreed to]*.

Thailand:

Regarding Principle 7 dealing with local culture and conservation, these should be linked better; see e.g. the Ramsar COP on “Cultural Values in Wetlands”. *[to be followed up]*

Wetlands International

Reference to ICZM is missing; but the need to integrate mangrove management with coastal zone management planning overall has been made even more evident by the Asian tsunami disaster. *[strongly agreed]*

The recommendations from COP7 should be consulted regarding sustainable aquaculture and coastal wetlands *[to be followed up]*

Ramsar

Biodiversity is not specified as a Principle in the document. [Biodiversity conservation is presented as a cross-cutting issue, rather than as a specific Principle. Biodiversity is also covered by the reference to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and by the ecosystem approach recommended as a fundamental principle of mangrove management.]

Main Conclusions and Recommendations made regarding the status of the draft mangrove document in general, and with reference to COP9.

- The present version of the mangrove principles needs to be re-edited, based on the comments received.
- Most importantly, “article” (the original term used for each section of the draft document) has a legal implication, and therefore it was correct to change it. But simply converting “Article” to “Principle” as has been done in the draft version under review, is not an adequate solution.
- By definition, the document’s “Principles” are in fact the short lead statements presented at the start of each section, and listed together in Annex 3. The main text paragraphs in each section then serve as supporting guidelines to the principles.
- The statements and supporting text (guidelines) should be edited into the appropriate form of language for a document of Principles, namely simple, positive sentences.

Regarding Ramsar and COP9:

- Careful consideration should be given to how the revised document is presented in Kampala at COP9.
- It is a World Bank document which meets certain objectives and needs. Its status and value to Ramsar should be clarified in the time available before COP9.
- Consideration should also be given to how the principles will be presented at COP9 (ensure a “same wavelength” position).
- Regarding the above, it should be noted that adoption by Ramsar requires line-by-line confirmation. The existing document is much too large for complete adoption.
- Consideration should be given, therefore, to adopting a much reduced version, i.e. an edited version of what are currently the lead statements (Annex 3).

Alternatively, in place of “adoption” simply “recognition” of the full document by Ramsar could be considered

Technical Session V: Code of conduct for Mangrove Forest Management

Presenter: Professor Donald J. Macintosh, Centre for Tropical Ecosystems Research
Chair; Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General Ramsar Convention Secretariat
Rapporteur: Dr A.K.Pattnaik, Chief executive Chilika development authority, India

Donald Macintosh made a presentation on mainstreaming conservation of coastal biodiversity through formulation of a code of conduct for sustainable management of mangrove ecosystem. At the outset he clarified that the project is to develop a document for a better understanding about the management of mangrove ecosystem.

He mentioned about various stages of the evolution of the project i.e. how the draft code was arrived at based on the country case studies this was followed by three regional workshops (Asian, African & Americas). This was followed by a review workshop at Washington DC. He further mentioned that following the peer review of the articles individual articles became guidelines. He explained that based on the consensus the document was renamed as “principles for a code of conduct for the management and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystem.” The 15 Articles were re-designated as Principles. He mentioned that the draft principles are put to field testing in two sites in Brazil and Vietnam. He explained that the next step would be to pass the ownership of the document to public domain.

This was followed by a brief presentation by Lee Guanchun, Advisor Asia –Pacific on the outcome of the Americas and the Africa regional meetings. He mentioned that the document reached quite late so the participants got little time to go through the document. He underscored some of the key points like EIA and more explicit explanation of the tourism and the cultural values etc. suggested in the above meetings.

Professor D Macintosh in his second presentation threw more light on the 15 principles. He clarified that the document is not a solution to every problem. The specific needs are so divergent that it is very difficult to address everything through one document.

The response from the participants;

- Simple replacement of the word Article by Principle need to be given more serious thought.
- For tourism Carrying capacity should be given due weightage.
- Financing and cost recovery mechanism.
- It should be a document of principle rather than the code of conduct.

- It should be considered bring the edited Principles main statement from the annex to the front of the document perhaps as part of the executive summary.

Specific response from the participants:

The delegate from China mentioned that the management of mangrove in China is evolved through ages. The conservation, restoration and planting of the native species have been a priority of Chinese Government. He suggested that the essence from the traditional management practices from various countries should be incorporated.

The delegate from Vietnam commented that the document should be more explicit to meet the need of the various countries to serve as a guide.

The Advisor Asia Pacific suggested that the flow of sediment might not be always considered detrimental to the mangrove vegetation. Regarding tourism he mentioned that in addition to the carrying capacity it should be it should be more explicit on the benefit to the local communities.

Dr Pattnaik mentioned that the fresh flow from the drainage basin is very important for the health of the mangrove ecosystem. The alteration of flow upstream may have significant impact on the mangrove ecosystem. So the ecological flow and the management of drainage basin must be give due weightage.

The Secretary General suggested that since the wise use concept is going to be redefined in terms of ecosystem service delivery, so it need to be appropriately modified. He further mentioned that the mechanism for consideration of the document by the next standing committee needs to be explored. He thanked the presenter as well all the participants for the active participation.

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