



MALAYSIAN WETLAND NEXUS WITH RAMSAR CONVENTION

By Amanda Lee Siek Hsia

Picture from malaysia.wetlands.org

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands taking cognizance of the important ecological functions of wetlands that embody their economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971.

Malaysia with six Ramsar sites totalling 331,510 acres of wetlands of international importance became a member of Ramsar Convention on March 10, 1997.

It is therefore important that all Malaysian stakeholders involved in development works, particularly practicing engineers understand the importance of the function of wetlands to the ecosystem of the country and Malaysia's commitment to the Ramsar convention.

The Ramsar List of Wetlands globally includes 2208 Sites (known as Ramsar Sites) covering over 210,734,269.41 ha (520,735,720.3 acres). The definition of Ramsar wetlands may include, among others, the areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters as well as fish ponds and paddy fields.

Presently there are 169 contracting parties, up from 21 initial signatory nations in 1971. The state parties meet every three years as the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP).

With its headquarters at Gland, Switzerland, the Ramsar Convention is managed by a standing committee, a scientific review panel, and a secretariat. It works closely with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local

and national actions and international co-operation, as a contribution to achieving sustainable development throughout the world. It calls upon contracting parties to recognize the interdependence of humans and the environment as well as the ecological functions of wetlands, such as wildlife habitats, nutrient cycling and flood control.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION PARTNERS

The Ramsar Convention works closely with five other organisations known as International Organisation Partners (IOPs). These are Birdlife International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International. These support the work of the Convention by providing expert technical advice, helping implement field studies and providing financial support. The IOPs also participate regularly as observers in all meetings of the Conference of Parties and as full members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel. For example, at the 2008 Convention of Parties, IWMI scientists contributed directly to a number of resolutions including those relating to wetlands' links with human health, biofuels, poverty reduction, bio-geographic regionalization and biodiversity in rice paddies.

SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

At the Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP) meeting on November 2-6, 2015, Dr Ania Grobicki, Deputy Secretary-General of the Ramsar Convention acting as the Ramsar Secretariat's focal point for the Convention's subsidiary advisory body, the STRP presented an important paper entitled "The STRP and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Looking Ahead".

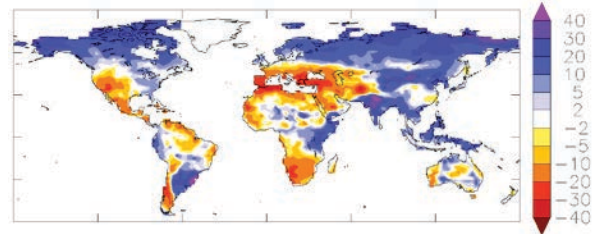
• Unique Policy Opportunity in 2015

Several important international forums presented unique opportunities to raise awareness and to commit world bodies to address the issues relating to the environment, and in particular to environmental sustainability related issues, confronting the world.

Among the international forums are:

- a. UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai Japan on March 2015.
- b. The World We Want Post 2015 – Sustainable Development Goals – September, 2015
- c. COP 21 Paris – Climate change agreement 2015

• More Climatic Extremes are happening



Graph - Run-off variation (1960-90 /2070-90)



Prepare for more floods and draughts

• Integrated Flood Management Principles: River Basin as a Planning Unit

Integration of:

- Land and Water Management
- Upstream and Downstream
- Structural and Non-structural
- Short-term and Long-term
- Local and Basin Level Measures - small and large-scale
- Development Needs with Ecological and Economic Concerns
- Climate Predictions with Sectoral Policies and Plans
- Functional Integration of Institutions and Stakeholders
- Wetlands are the key!

WHAT IS THE SECRETARIAT'S ROLE IN STRP

The Secretariat continues to support STRP. Relevant staff include the Deputy Secretary-General, Senior Regional Advisors, the Head of Communications and the Scientific and Technical Support Officer. The Secretariat's responsibilities include:

- facilitating the work of STRP, including organising and administering its meetings and maintaining the STRP Workspace;
- fostering opportunities for collaboration with other conventions, international organisations (including financial organisations), inter-Governmental institutions, and national and international NGOs, and facilitating such collaboration as required;
- facilitating linkages between potential experts within countries, regions and globally, including indigenous peoples and local communities; and
- identifying the needs of potential audiences and thematic priorities in different countries or regions to suggest to the Parties for their consideration.

RAMSAR SITE INFORMATION SYSTEM

There are a total of 2,218 Ramsar Sites worldwide covering over 214 million ha.

RAMSAR 4th STRATEGIC PLAN (2016 – 2024)

Monitoring and evaluation across all the four goals below:

Strategic Goal 1: Addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation;

Strategic Goal 2: Effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site Network;

Strategic Goal 3: Ensure the wise use of all wetlands; and

Operational Goal 4: Enhancing implementation of the 3 strategic goals

Vision

“Wetlands are conserved, wisely used and restored, and their benefits are recognized and valued by all”

- Supporting countries to achieve wise use of wetlands alongside development
- Ramsar’s approach is designed around four Strategic Goals:
 - Addressing the drivers of wetland loss & degradation
 - Conserving and managing Ramsar Sites
 - Using wetlands wisely
 - Enhancing implementation of the Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal 1: Addressing the drivers of wetland loss & degradation

- Target 1:** Wetland benefits and ecosystem services feature in national/ local policy strategies and plans relating to key sectors such as water, energy, mining, agriculture, tourism, urban development and infrastructure;
- Target 2:** Water use sustainability is improved while respecting ecosystem and basin requirements;
- Target 3:** Public and private sectors have taken steps to apply guidelines and good practices for wise use of water and wetlands;
- Target 4:** Invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized; priority invasive species are controlled or eradicated;
- Target 5:** The ecological character of Ramsar sites is maintained, through effective planning and management
- Target 6:** There is a significant increase in the Ramsar site network, in particular underrepresented types of wetlands;
- Target 7:** Sites that are at risk of loss of ecological character have their threats addressed;
- Target 8:** National wetland inventories have been completed;
- Target 9:** The wise use of wetlands is strengthened through integrated water resource management at river basin levels;
- Target 10:** Wetland services and benefits are widely demonstrated and documented; and
- Target 11:** Restoration is in progress or completed in degraded wetlands;
- Target 12:** Sustainable fisheries, agriculture and ecotourism are expanded, contributing to biodiversity conservation and human livelihoods;
- Target 13:** Scientific and technical guidance at global and regional levels is developed on relevant topics;
- Target 14:** Ramsar Regional Initiatives are reinforced with the active involvement and support of the Parties in each region;

- Target 15:** Wetland values are mainstreamed through CEPA: communications, education, public participation and awareness;
- Target 16:** Financial resources for implementing the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan are increased;
- Target 17:** International co-operation is enhanced; and
- Target 18:** Capacity is built for using wetlands wisely

WETLANDS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all [Water Goal]

Target 6.6: Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers & lakes

Indicator for 6.6: Change in wetlands extent over time [Ramsar]

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems...halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss [Biodiversity Goal]

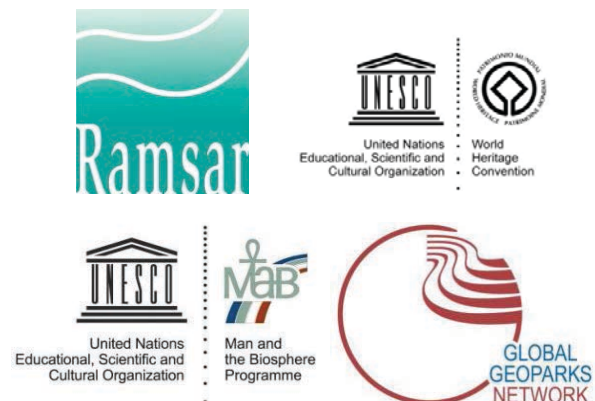
Target 15.1: Ensure conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and dry lands, in line with obligations under international agreements

HARMONIZATION AT CONVENTION LEVEL – THE BIODIVERSITY LIAISON GROUP

The Liaison Group of Biodiversity-Related Conventions that share common objectives are as follows:



Common objectives, among others, can be harmonized at site level as follows:



MALYSIAN WETLANDS UNDER RAMSAR CONVENTION LIST

- Tasek Bera
- Tanjung Piai State Park
- Pulau Kukup State Park
- Sungai Pulai Wetlands
- Kuching Wetlands National Park
- Lower Kinabatangan-Segama Wetlands

Apart from the above listed wetlands, it is encouraging to know the special effort placed on the management of other wetlands in Malaysia. Most notable is the 40,000ha Matang Mangrove Forest in Perak that is regarded as one of the best managed sustainable mangrove ecosystem in the world.

The lessons learnt from the last Tsunami in 2004 that claimed many lives across a vast region of the world should serve as a good reminder of the importance of preserving our wetlands along coastal areas as a buffer against the devastating effect of a Tsunami.

The Ramsar Convention should be credited for their effort in preserving our ecosystem as an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goal beyond 2015. ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to thank Dr Ania Grobicki (grobicki@ramsar.org) from Ramsar Convention for his kind consent to extract his presentation for this article. A big thank to him too for the noble effort in moving the world towards an environmentally sustainable world to live in.

For more details, please refer to www.ramsar.org