Secretariat provided by the
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Agenda item 13
Doc TC 7.10
11 October 2006

7th MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
29 October - 01 November 2006, Bern, Switzerland

GUIDANCE ON DEPENDENCE ON A HABITAT TYPE WHICH IS UNDER SEVERE THREAT

(Report by TC Working Group 3)

BACKGROUND

AEWA's third Meeting of Parties called for guidance on the interpretation of criteria used in Table 1 of the AEWA Action Plan as follows:

Recalling Resolution 2.1 and the call of the MOP upon the Technical Committee to develop guidance for the interpretation of the term "significant long-term decline" in the context of Table 1 of the AWEA Action Plan;

Noting the responsive output presented by the Technical Committee to MOP3, being a succinct guidance (document MOP 3.11);

Further noting that there are more criteria used to classify species in various categories in Table 1 of the AEWA Action Plan for whose application no clear guidance exists;

The Meeting of the Parties:

Calls upon the Technical Committee to develop guidelines for interpretation of other criteria used in Table 1 of the Action Plan, notably:

- the degree of concentration on a small number of specific sites at any stage of annual cycle;
- the dependence on a habitat type which is under severe threat; and
- the extent of fluctuation in population size or trend.

The term we are asked to define occurs in two places in the criteria given in the introduction to the Action Plan's Table of species:

Column A

Category 3: Populations numbering between around 25,000 and around 100,000 individuals and considered to be at risk as a result of:

(b) dependence on a habitat type which is under severe threat;

Column B

Category 2: Populations numbering more than around 100,000 individuals and considered to be in need of special attention as a result of:

(b) dependence on a habitat type which is under severe threat;

POSSIBLE APPROACHES

Our task is to try and develop some guidance as to what this means for use in further elaboration of AEWA listings. The guiding principle here should be that any guidance should be simple and recognise data deficiency through much of the AEWA agreement area. In particular, there seem to be are two major issues:

1. The lack of detailed (wetland) habitat classification over the whole agreement area. Whilst there are some regional classifications, such as the European CORINE classification (http://reports.eea.europa.eu/COR0-landcover/en) — which was used as the basis for the classification adopted by the EU Habitats Directive (http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/eu_nature_legislation/habitats_directive/index_en.htm), these do not extend to the whole AEWA area.

2. Lack of national wetland inventories for most countries in the AEWA area. This is an issue that Ramsar has wrestled with for many years (Resolution VIII.6, 2002: http://ramsar.org/res/key_res_viii_06_e.pdf), as a coherent national inventory is obviously a prerequisite for taking a more strategic approach to the identification and designation of important wetlands. It applies even more so in trying to say something about differential wetland loss and degradation at international scale.

Of course, Ramsar has its own wetland habitat classification (Appendix 1), although in many respects it is rather strange. Thus wetland formations such as peatlands occur under several of the Ramsar wetland types depending, for example, whether or not they are forested. Despite this, it is probably the best that currently exists at international scale, although there are proposals to re-visit it in the context of Ramsar STRP's current work programme.

Ramsar has defined several types of wetland that are 'under-represented' in the Ramsar List. These are:

- Subterranean karst and other cave hydrological systems (Ramsar wetland type **Zk**)
- Coral reefs (**C**)
- Saltmarshes (Seasonal/intermittent saline/brackish/alkaline marshes/pools (**Ss**))
- Seagrass beds (Marine subtidal aquatic beds (**B**))
- Peatlands (both Forested peatlands (**Xp**) and Non-forested peatlands (**U**))
- Mangrove swamps (Inter-tidal forested wetlands (**I**))
- Seasonal/intermittent freshwater marshes/pools on inorganic soils (**Ts**)

Wetlands International have noted that there are different aspects of under-representivity, as follows:

1. “Global coverage - the global distribution of designated wetlands in relation to the global wetland resource.
2. Regional or national under-representation, according to appropriate biogeographical classifications, and notable in those Parties who have designated only one or very few sites.
3. Numbers of sites designated or certain of the wetland types of the Ramsar Classification of Wetland Type.
4. Numbers of sites designated for their wetland-dependent biodiversity (under Criteria 2-8), for example gaps in the site networks for migratory waterbirds and globally threatened species.”

There are two important things to note here:

First, that under-representation on the Ramsar List does not necessarily equate to "habitats under severe threat" in the current context. It just relates to the fact that there are rather few sites of that particular habitat type designated as Ramsar sites.

Second, and linked, is that the list of 'under-represented' habitats has not been derived from any analytical process but is rather an *ad hoc* list compiled over several Conferences of the Parties. Indeed, Ramsar's STRP have a current task to try and derive a rather more objective list, possibly against the four types of representation listed above.

So what to do?

Leaving aside issues of definition, the consideration of 'severe threat' perhaps allows the immediate exclusion of some wetland types where anthropogenic impacts are limited (*e.g.* sea cliff breeding areas, rocky shore wintering areas, and maybe the extensive tundra breeding areas). One approach might be simply to derive a list of severely threatened habitats on the basis of expert opinion, although this would inevitably be rather a subjective approach.

Alternatively, one could look at the species already included in the table of the action plan on the basis of this (sub-) criterion and, given knowledge of their habitat use.

Maybe the best approach is a combination of both the above pragmatic approaches?

Appendix 1

Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type

The codes are based upon the Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type as approved by Recommendation 4.7 and amended by Resolutions VI.5 and VII.11 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The categories listed herein are intended to provide only a very broad framework to aid rapid identification of the main wetland habitats represented at each site.

To assist in identification of the correct Wetland Types to list in section 19 of the RIS, the Secretariat has provided below tabulations for Marine/Coastal Wetlands and Inland Wetlands of some of the characteristics of each Wetland Type.

Marine/Coastal Wetlands

A -- **Permanent shallow marine waters** in most cases less than six metres deep at low tide; includes sea bays and straits.
B -- **Marine subtidal aquatic beds**; includes kelp beds, sea-grass beds, tropical marine meadows.
C -- **Coral reefs**.
D -- **Rocky marine shores**; includes rocky offshore islands, sea cliffs.
E -- **Sand, shingle or pebble shores**; includes sand bars, spits and sandy islets; includes dune systems and humid dune slacks.
F -- **Estuarine waters**; permanent water of estuaries and estuarine systems of deltas.
G -- **Intertidal mud, sand or salt flats**.
H -- **Intertidal marshes**; includes salt marshes, salt meadows, saltings, raised salt marshes; includes tidal brackish and freshwater marshes.
I -- **Intertidal forested wetlands**; includes mangrove swamps, nipah swamps and tidal freshwater swamp forests.
J -- **Coastal brackish/saline lagoons**; brackish to saline lagoons with at least one relatively narrow connection to the sea.
K -- **Coastal freshwater lagoons**; includes freshwater delta lagoons.
Zk(a) – **Karst and other subterranean hydrological systems**, marine/coastal

Inland Wetlands

L -- **Permanent inland deltas**.
M -- **Permanent rivers/streams/creeks**; includes waterfalls.
N -- **Seasonal/intermittent/irregular rivers/streams/creeks**.
O -- **Permanent freshwater lakes** (over 8 ha); includes large oxbow lakes.
P -- **Seasonal/intermittent freshwater lakes** (over 8 ha); includes floodplain lakes.
Q -- **Permanent saline/brackish/alkaline lakes**.
R -- **Seasonal/intermittent saline/brackish/alkaline lakes and flats**.
Sp -- **Permanent saline/brackish/alkaline marshes/pools**.
Ss -- **Seasonal/intermittent saline/brackish/alkaline marshes/pools**.
Tp -- **Permanent freshwater marshes/pools**; ponds (below 8 ha), marshes and swamps on inorganic soils; with emergent vegetation water-logged for at least most of the growing season.
Ts -- **Seasonal/intermittent freshwater marshes/pools on inorganic soils**; includes sloughs, potholes, seasonally flooded meadows, sedge marshes.
U -- **Non-forested peatlands**; includes shrub or open bogs, swamps, fens.
Va -- **Alpine wetlands**; includes alpine meadows, temporary waters from snowmelt.
Vt -- **Tundra wetlands**; includes tundra pools, temporary waters from snowmelt.

W -- **Shrub-dominated wetlands**; shrub swamps, shrub-dominated freshwater marshes, shrub carr, alder thicket on inorganic soils.
Xf -- **Freshwater, tree-dominated wetlands**; includes freshwater swamp forests, seasonally flooded forests, wooded swamps on inorganic soils.
Xp -- **Forested peatlands**; peatswamp forests.
Y -- **Freshwater springs; oases**.
Zg -- **Geothermal wetlands**
Zk(b) – **Karst and other subterranean hydrological systems**, inland

Note: "**floodplain**" is a broad term used to refer to one or more wetland types, which may include examples from the R, Ss, Ts, W, Xf, Xp, or other wetland types. Some examples of floodplain wetlands are seasonally inundated grassland (including natural wet meadows), shrublands, woodlands and forests. Floodplain wetlands are not listed as a specific wetland type herein.

Human-made wetlands

1 -- **Aquaculture** (e.g., fish/shrimp) **ponds**
2 -- **Ponds**; includes farm ponds, stock ponds, small tanks; (generally below 8 ha).
3 -- **Irrigated land**; includes irrigation channels and rice fields.
4 -- **Seasonally flooded agricultural land** (including intensively managed or grazed wet meadow or pasture).
5 -- **Salt exploitation sites**; salt pans, salines, etc.
6 -- **Water storage areas**; reservoirs/barrages/dams/impoundments (generally over 8 ha).
7 -- **Excavations**; gravel/brick/clay pits; borrow pits, mining pools.
8 -- **Wastewater treatment areas**; sewage farms, settling ponds, oxidation basins, etc.
9 -- **Canals and drainage channels, ditches.**
Zk(c) – **Karst and other subterranean hydrological systems**, human-made

Tabulations of Wetland Type characteristics

Marine / Coastal Wetlands:

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Saline water</td><td rowspan="3">Permanent</td><td>< 6 m deep</td><td>A</td></tr>
<tr><td>Underwater vegetation</td><td>B</td></tr>
<tr><td>Coral reefs</td><td>C</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Shores</td><td>Rocky</td><td>D</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sand, shingle or pebble</td><td>E</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Saline or brackish water</td><td rowspan="3">Intertidal</td><td>Flats (mud, sand or salt)</td><td>G</td></tr>
<tr><td>Marshes</td><td>H</td></tr>
<tr><td>Forested</td><td>I</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Lagoons</td><td>J</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Estuarine waters</td><td>F</td></tr>
<tr><td>Saline, brackish or fresh water</td><td colspan="2">Subterranean</td><td>Zk(a)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Fresh water</td><td colspan="2">Lagoons</td><td>K</td></tr>
</table>

Inland Wetlands:

Fresh water	Flowing water	Permanent	Rivers, streams, creeks	M
			Deltas	L
			Springs, oases	Y
		Seasonal/intermittent	Rivers, streams, creeks	N
	Lakes and pools	Permanent	> 8 ha	O
			< 8 ha	Tp
		Seasonal/intermittent	> 8 ha	P
			< 8 ha	Ts
	Marshes on inorganic soils	Permanent	Herb-dominated	Tp
		Permanent/ Seasonal/intermittent	Shrub-dominated	W
			Tree-dominated	Xf
		Seasonal/intermittent	Herb-dominated	Ts
	Marshes on peat soils	Permanent	Non-forested	U
			Forested	Xp
	Marshes on inorganic or peat soils	High altitude (alpine)		Va
		Tundra		Vt
Saline, brackish or alkaline water	Lakes	Permanent		Q
		Seasonal/intermittent		R
	Marshes & pools	Permanent		Sp
		Seasonal/intermittent		Ss
Fresh, saline, brackish or alkaline water	Geothermal			Zg
	Subterranean			Zk(b)