



The purpose of this document is to contribute towards the adequate representation of important areas for waterbirds in the List of Wetlands of International Importance in Asia. (PHOTO: SIMBA CHAN)

be designated as a Ramsar Site may also contain other non-wetland areas, which may not need to be included in the Ramsar designation. However, the simple fact of an area being a non-wetland component need not be a reason for its exclusion, if it plays an integral part in the functioning of the wetland ecosystem.

Guidance and standards for boundary definition of Ramsar Sites have been adopted by the Conference of Parties, in the annex to Resolution VII.11 (1999) on the Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (see Box 1). In addition, Recommendation 5.3 (1993) has referred to the importance of a whole catchment approach, to buffer zones, and to ecological corridors.

In Resolution VI.16 (1996) the Parties decided that when sites are designated, their boundaries must be “precisely described and also delimited on a map”. Some standards of precision for this are given in Appendix D of Ramsar Handbook No. 7 (Ramsar Convention Secretariat 2004), and in general Parties are urged to use the best practicable degree of precision, especially in the interests of legal certainty.

CONSULTING AND FINALISING SITE DETAILS

In most cases, Parties will wish to conduct consultations on proposals for new Ramsar Site designations with stakeholders such as local administrations and affected communities. This can be important in building support for the implementation of the Convention and can produce information that might be important in refining site details and boundaries. An appropriate balance will need to be struck between exhaustive discussion and prompt protection.

In the light of consultations, site details can be refined and finalised prior to the formal act of designation. An essential step at this stage is the completion of a standard Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for submission to the Ramsar Secretariat. The sheet and guidance on its completion can be accessed at

www.ramsar.org/ris/key_ris_index.htm. COP Recommendation 4.7 (1993) and Resolutions VI.13 (1996) and VIII.13 (2002) encourage the use of the RIS.

PROTECTING SITES PRIOR TO DESIGNATION

BirdLife’s two strongest recommendations arising from this work on candidate sites are (a) that the sites identified should be designated as Ramsar Sites as soon as possible, and (b) while waiting for the designation process to be completed, or for accession to the Convention in the case of countries which are not yet Parties, sites should receive the degree of protection which Ramsar designation would afford them.

Sites are sometimes damaged through lack of knowledge about their value. Once their value is known, it would be unfortunate not to apply the desired level of protection simply because a formal step of designation had not yet been completed.

Ideally, this should apply to all the sites in this document from the time of its publication. At the least, however, BirdLife would advocate that it be applied as a matter of policy upon adoption of official lists of candidate sites at government level, as described above in ‘Confirming official lists of candidate sites’. This practice exists in some places already, where decision-making authorities treat recognised candidate sites as though they were already designated. To do so effectively requires that this approach be advertised as an official policy, endorsed at the same level of government that designates sites.

APPROACHES TO DESIGNATION

The act of designation takes different forms in different countries, and its manner is not prescribed under the Convention. Typically, it may be an administrative notification to relevant authorities, land-owners and (by public announcement) local communities,