Regional Dialogue on Wetlands Policies in the Lower Mekong Region

Robert McInnes and Raphael Glémet
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 National wetland policy frameworks

National wetland policy is a key feature envisaged in the implementation of the wise use concept of the Ramsar Convention. The first comprehensive reference to wetland policies was made in Recommendation 4.10 adopted at COP4, Montreux (1990). In the Annex to Recommendation 4.10 under guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept, it states that:

“It is desirable in the long term that all Contracting Parties should have comprehensive national wetland policies, [which] should as far as possible address all problems and activities related to wetlands within a national context.”

The most significant guidance on national wetland policy is provided in Resolution VII.6, adopted at COP7, San Jose, Costa Rica (1999), under the Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies. These guidelines have been substantially incorporated into Ramsar Handbook 2 (4th Edition) on National Wetland Policies.

Under the Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 the need for Contracting Parties to develop national wetland polices was reaffirmed. Under Target 1 of the Strategic Plan it states that:

“Wetland benefits are featured in national/local policy strategies and plans relating to key sectors …”

However, defining, developing and implementing national policies that promote wetland conservation and management remains an elusive goal for many Contracting Parties. Meeting the challenge of conserving wetlands of international and national significance requires comprehensive national policies to provide a basis for domestic action and a framework for international and national cooperation. Such policies for wetlands can be valuable as countries seek to address the management and habitat requirements for wildlife and other biological resources as well as for human needs for the current and future generations.

National wetland policy frameworks will vary from country to country. Issues of scale (whether the policy is intended at a national, regional or local level, governance (federal systems of governance may generate different policy frameworks than non-federal systems), and integration and harmonization with existing policies and legal instruments all have to be considered in the development and implementation of a national wetland policy.

1.2 Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative

Ramsar Regional Initiatives support cooperation and capacity-building on wetland-related issues in specific regions. Each regional initiative is endorsed by the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP) to the Ramsar Convention and by the Standing Committee (SC). Ramsar Regional Initiatives are independently governed and are not authorized to speak or act on the Convention’s behalf, but they work in close contact with the Ramsar Secretariat in order to deliver on the Convention’s strategic ambitions.

Decision SC52-20 of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention endorsed the Indo-Burma Regional Initiative (IBRRI) in June 2016\(^2\). Details of the initiative are described in document SC52-12, June 2016.

The concept of IBRRI was developed jointly by the Ramsar National Focal Points (NFPs) of the five Contracting Parties: Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and IUCN’s Asia Regional Office based on specific needs identified in these countries. The initial objective of IBRRI was to support the effective implementation of the Ramsar Convention among the five Contracting Parties by coordinating implementation of the objectives of the 4\(^{th}\) Strategic Plan 2016-2024.

IBRRI is supported by IUCN acting as the Secretariat through its Asia Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand, and its country offices in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia (RRC-EA) is a Ramsar Regional Initiative based in Suncheon City, Republic of Korea that provides regular capacity building support to Ramsar Contracting Parties in East, Southeast and South Asia following the priority capacity building needs of countries\(^3\).

The IBRRI Strategic Plan 2019-2024\(^4\) was adopted by the five Contracting Parties in February 2019. This plan consists of five “operational objectives” that align with the Ramsar Convention’s 4th Strategic Plan. Essentially, the five objectives are to share knowledge, ensure the conservation of key wetland species, help develop and strengthen policy on wetlands, raise awareness and promote education, and ensure that the Regional Initiative is sound and sustainable.

Operational Objective 3 of the IBRRI Strategic Plan 2019-2014 states:

“Assist with the development and/or strengthening and implementation of policy frameworks taking into account wetland management and conservation across sectors at all levels.”

The targets and activities specified under Operational Objective 3 are set out in the table below. Working in close collaboration with other Contracting Parties, IUCN and

\(^2\) https://www.ramsar.org/document/decisions-of-the-52nd-meeting-of-the-standing-committee-sc52

\(^3\) Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia Strategic Plan 2017-2024.

the RRC-EA, the obligation is on the five IBRRI countries to develop and implement their own national wetland policy framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</table>
| **3.1 All IBRRI countries have adopted an effective policy framework ensuring the wise use of all wetlands** | 3.1.1 Review the status of regional, national and local policies across the region and their inclusiveness of wetland wise use  
3.1.2 Develop and disseminate best practice guidance on the development and implementation of an effective policy framework promoting and supporting wise use of wetlands policies through publications and policy forums  
3.1.3 Support the revisions and/or drafting of national and local policies in all five IBRRI countries  
3.1.4 Review the effectiveness of national policy implementation on wise use of wetlands |
| **3.2 The contribution of wetlands towards wider policy frameworks is recognized and reported** | 3.2.1 Develop and disseminate best practice guidance on how to assess the impact of wetlands on the delivery of wider policy frameworks, such as SDGs, Nationally Determined Contributions, etc.  
3.2.2 Produce and disseminate best practice examples of the contributions wetlands make to the implementation of wider policy frameworks |

1.3. Regional Dialogue Workshop

In order for the countries of the IBRRI to make progress against these targets, IBRRI Contracting Parties, IUCN and RRC-EA organised a Regional Dialogue on Wetlands Policies in the Lower Mekong Countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) from the 28-30 May 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. The event was also organised in close cooperation with ONEP Thailand.

The Regional Dialogue was attended by National Focal Points, government representatives, the Ramsar Secretariat, representatives from other Ramsar regional initiatives or centres, International Organization Partners (IOPs), representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), university staff and support personnel. A full list of attendees is provided in Appendix 1.

The Regional Dialogue comprised formal presentations by national governments on the status of wetland policies in their countries and working sessions investigating the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches and highlighted future opportunities and threats to wetland policy frameworks. The agenda for the Regional Dialogue is presented in Appendix 2.

This report provides an analysis of the main outcomes of the Regional Dialogue and formulates a prioritized work plan for the IBRRI countries. The factual report of the Regional Dialogue is provided in Appendix 3.
### 2 REGIONAL DIALOGUE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

#### 2.1 Summary of national contexts

Each of the five Contracting Parties within the IBRRI presented a summary of the existing situation with regards to national wetland policies within their own country. The following observations were made on the status of national wetland policies across the region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of status of national wetland policies across the IBRRI region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not all five countries have distinct national wetland policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The countries that do have national wetland policies (Myanmar and Viet Nam) are at different stages of implementation. Both countries acknowledge that there is a need for further support on implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several of the countries include wetlands in national guidance, strategies and under the aegis of other laws, agreements and regulations. For instance, wetlands are addressed as one of the land use types in the National Land Use Master Plan 2030 in Lao PDR and in Viet Nam wetland policy objectives have been integrated into the National Strategy on Climate Change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where wider policy or legislative linkages have been made across the region, wetlands feature regularly in the following sectors: environmental protection, natural resource management, water resource management, protected areas, fisheries, biodiversity planning and management and forestry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Whilst some examples exist, links with the following sectors remain weak and poorly implemented across the region: economic growth strategies, tourism, sustainable development, climate change, health, education, industrial development, poverty alleviation and disaster risk reduction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The review of the national situations demonstrates that the five countries are at different stages in the development, harmonization and implementation of national wetland policies. In some cases the prevailing status of wetland policies reflects the priorities of other, broader national frameworks, such as land use planning. However, there remain significant sectoral gaps where wetlands are under-represented and the contribution of wise use approaches to the delivery of other sectoral targets, such as poverty alleviation or disaster risk reduction, are not fully recognised or embedded.

#### 2.2 Applying Ramsar Guidance

The adopted Ramsar Guidance (see section 1 above) was reviewed in the Regional Dialogue workshop. The guidance sets out the idealised steps that a Contracting Party should follow in order to develop a national wetland policy and to implement their obligations under Resolution VII.6.

Each country reviewed one of the key steps in developing a national wetland policy including: defining national issues, identifying stakeholders, conducting consultations, implementing workshops and ensuring political support. The discussions demonstrated that each country had a robust understanding of the process required to achieve the necessary outputs to feed into the development and implementation of a national wetland policy.

However, despite the good understanding of the processes, it is clear that challenges remain concerning the implementation of the process. These challenges include:
Challenges regarding applying the Ramsar Guidance

- Ensuring that all stakeholders, from across multiple sectors, are engaged in the process of developing a national wetland policy.
- Ensuring that engagement is a two-way process so that mutually reinforcing outcomes are achieved.
- The need to engage beyond national boundaries and to include wider regional stakeholders (such as the MRC) within dialogues.
- The need to engage at a variety of levels, including at the local or village level.
- Ensuring that there are adequate resources, both in terms of finances for the process, but also in terms of the competencies and availability of resource people to coordinate and implement the process of developing a national wetland policy.
- The need to seek finances from within and beyond government ministries, including the potential to engage with the private sector.
- The importance of having an internal government lead (either as a distinct ministry or department or a designated focus in a ministry) to ensure that legal harmonization across policy sectors is achieved and that perverse incentives, which may compromise the effectiveness of the national wetland policy, are removed.

2.3 SWOT analysis

A comparative assessment of policy frameworks for the five IBRRI countries was conducted during the Regional Dialogue through the use of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. The overall objective of the exercise was to assist in identifying the best way for countries to move forward on wetland policies, both individually and collectively across the region.

The results of the SWOT analysis are presented in the five tables below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambodia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Good foundation or start (Guidance on freshwater wetlands)</td>
<td>1 Overlapping roles and responsibilities (no clear accountability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Strong support and commitment of government and related agencies</td>
<td>2 Lack of financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Good understanding of wetland management and threats</td>
<td>3 The local enforcement of national policies is limited (local pressure from and lack of understanding of ecosystem services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 No wetland focussed policies (but wetlands are in other policies, i.e. fisheries, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Lack of understanding of policies and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Wetland inventories are outdated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Education and awareness raising are limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 IBRRI, RRC-EA, EAAFP and Ramsar momentum</td>
<td>1 Illegal activities (land encroachment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Richness of wetlands and importance in the minds of Cambodians</td>
<td>2 Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Strong support and cooperation of NGOs</td>
<td>3 Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Population pressure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Lao PDR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 National wetlands in several policies and plans, including Water and Water Resources Law, Forestry Law, Priority in Five Year MONRE Plan, draft management plans for Ramsar Sites</td>
<td>1 Lack of enforcement (wetlands not mainstreamed, no penalties, community traditions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Political and community support</td>
<td>2 Community not integrated into management actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 National and Provincial level Ramsar Steering Committees</td>
<td>3 Lack of capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 No mention of wetlands in climate change and agriculture policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Many INGOs willing to support</td>
<td>1 Agricultural expansion, especially by rice and cassava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Agriculture plans want to pursue sustainable production</td>
<td>2 Increase in population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Private sector interested in ecotourism</td>
<td>3 Climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Good regional cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Myanmar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 National Wetland Policy and National Wetland Committee</td>
<td>1 Lack of enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Strong political support</td>
<td>2 Weak collaboration among agencies (state to district)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Related policies i.e. Land Use, MCCP, NEP</td>
<td>3 Lack of sustainable financing mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Wetland inventory baseline from 2004 has been updated</td>
<td>4 Limited human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Limited budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 No private sector support (no CSR)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Related policies e.g. Water</td>
<td>1 Encroachment and illegal activities (mining, fishing, logging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The country is rich in wetlands</td>
<td>2 Limited public awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 International cooperation</td>
<td>3 Limited job opportunities for local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ecotourism</td>
<td>4 Conflicts of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Enthusiasm of regional and state governments</td>
<td>5 Invasive species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Potential biodiversity and environment trust fund</td>
<td>6 Security issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The SWOT analysis demonstrated some clear commonalities with regards to wetland policies across the IBRRI region. The common strengths across the region include the support of government, the inclusion of wetlands in multiple policies, the presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Viet Nam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Experienced and expert staff across different sectors</td>
<td>1 Human resources in policy sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 National mechanism on wetland management</td>
<td>2 Limited funding support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Role and function of government agencies</td>
<td>3 Wetland loss and degradation (overuse from agriculture, aquaculture, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Policy support (National Policy and Planning, Cabinet Resolution)</td>
<td>4 Low priority of wetlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 National Environment Fund and good fiscal budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Legal basis (water resources, coastal and marine, wildlife, etc.)</td>
<td>1 Lack of understanding and awareness on the values of wetlands in local governments and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Linkage to global issues and targets e.g. NDCs, CBD, SDGs)</td>
<td>2 Law enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Financial and technical support e.g. GEF, IBRRI, private sector (CSR)</td>
<td>3 Encroachment (thought that wetlands are wastelands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Wetland network across universities in the Mekong Region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Platform for conflict resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Viet Nam</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td>1 Limited human resources and capacity building at local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Strong political support</td>
<td>2 Low enforcement of wetlands at local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Staff at national level well experienced in wetland management</td>
<td>3 Less effective implementation due to overlaps across and conflicts between different sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Available basic legal regulations that support wetland policy e.g. Biodiversity Law, Land Law</td>
<td>4 Not available agencies in charge at local levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Wetland policies cover diversity of natural resources and various wetland types</td>
<td>5 Poor understanding of leaders and communities at local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 International and regional support and collaboration</td>
<td>1 Pressure from socio-economic development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Potential investment from the private sector in wetland sustainable development, e.g. ecotourism, aquatic resources, agriculture</td>
<td>2 Weak collaboration among relevant sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Potential for payment for wetland ecosystem services</td>
<td>3 Limited community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Different perceptions among levels in implementing wetland policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Climate change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of a national steering committee and the presence of experienced staff. The common weaknesses include weak enforcement of policies, lack of capacity and financial resources to implement policies, and poor or limited collaboration with local communities.

The common opportunities that exist for the development and implementation of wetland policies across the region include the international and regional support provided through the IBRRI and the RRC-EA, the support from multiple NGOs across the region, the potential to work with the private sector, especially through sustainable tourism initiatives, and the possibility to embed wetland policy issues within other policies such as the SDGs and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. The common threats identified across the region include the inability to control illegal encroachment into wetlands, limited awareness of the importance of wetlands within both local communities and local government, population dynamics which drive other pressures on wetlands and climate change.

The SWOT analysis also identified possibilities for the five Contracting Parties to collaborate and share knowledge on the challenges involved in developing and implementing national wetland policies. For instance, strong links with land use planning and the use of national wetland inventories and the establishment of dedicated environment funds or novel financing mechanisms were identified. Shared knowledge through IBRRI or RRC-EA workshops on such topics could potentially be invaluable to the five governments.

The outcomes of the SWOT analysis have been summarised below under two headings: things that the IBRRI countries ‘must do’ and those that they ‘should not do’ with regards to successful development and implementation of national wetland policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Must do</th>
<th>Should not do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure strong political support at a national level</td>
<td>• Do not develop wetland policies in isolation and without the input of wider government ministries and public stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish a functional cross-sectoral national wetland committee</td>
<td>• Do not expect other sectors to engage unless a specific mechanism for engagement is established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure strong engagement, participation and support at all levels of government through to village level</td>
<td>• Do not assume that multiple sectors will understand what wetlands are and where they exist in the landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand what wetlands are through a clear national definition and where wetlands are through the use of a robust national wetland inventory</td>
<td>• Do not exclude government or private sectors from engaging in the development and implementation of wetland policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify specific threats to wetlands including perverse incentives and conflicting policies</td>
<td>• Do not fail to enforce legal obligations enacted through wetland policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop sustainable and novel financing mechanisms, including through the private sector, to support implementation</td>
<td>• Do not be overambitious regarding implementation and enforcement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Build capacity within government agencies and across wider stakeholders and communities
• Seek mutually reinforcing outcomes through harmonizing across multiple cross-sector policies
• Attain legal endorsement of policy actions
• Implement a routine monitoring and reporting framework to assess progress

activities if funding is limited
• Do not neglect to monitor and review the success or otherwise of wetland policies
• Do not assume that a wetland policy will be relevant over a long timeframe, especially where policy changes may be rapid in other sectors

2.4  IBRRI Strategic Plan: Operational Objective 3

The Regional Dialogue workshop revisited the targets and activities specified under Operational Objective 3 (see section 1 above). A particular emphasis was placed on Target 3.2 ‘The contribution of wetlands towards wider policy frameworks is recognised and reported’. In order to evaluate the current and future state of knowledge, the participants considered the SDGs and the NDCs. This exercise allowed an understanding and evaluation of the best approach to adopting a policy framework that ensures the wise use of wetlands and whether this could be achieved through a separate National Wetland Policy document or through integration of wetland policy objectives in cross-sectoral policies.

2.4.1 SDG13 Climate Action

Each of the five Contracting Parties was asked to consider how delivery of SDG13 on Climate Action could be enhanced through improvement in wetland policies. Details of the delegates’ responses are provided in Appendix 3.

The participants from each of the countries had to consider which ministries or departments they would need to engage with in order to ensure that the roles wetlands can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change are firmly embedded in cross-sectoral policies. Wider recommendations were also discussed and reported.

The key issues identified with regards to wetlands and climate change across the region were:

• Issues regarding wetlands and climate change policies

  • There should be a clear communication pathway between the government departments responsible for wetlands and for climate change.
  • A National Wetland Committee can be an effective pathway to ensure good communication between the departments responsible for wetlands and for climate change.
  • Establishing clear strategies, potentially as annexes to wider national policies on wetlands and climate change, on mutually supporting topics, such as on cooperation on restoration of coastal wetlands, can enhance cross sectoral dialogue and outcomes.
Establishing cross sectoral pilot projects (such as a wetland restoration scheme that targets carbon sequestration, water resources and agricultural production) as tangible manifestations of policy initiatives can be very effective in demonstrating mutually beneficial outcomes.

Endorsement of cross sectoral policies, strategies and projects by government is essential for future success.

Raising awareness of the specific importance of wetlands in climate change adaptation and mitigation should not only be restricted to within government but should also be part of a consistent and broader awareness raising programme across society.

2.4.2 Other SDGs

In order to understand the implication of wetland policies within wider sectoral interests, each Contracting Party was allocated an additional SDG to consider. For each SDG the participants had to identify which other policies or government departments need to be influenced and changed and how the wetland wise use policy objectives can be embedded so that wetlands can contribute to the delivery of the SDG.

The responses of the five countries are summarized in the Appendix 3. The responses demonstrate the potential for wetlands to be included in multiple strategies and policy frameworks beyond the normal constraints of biodiversity. All the SDGs have intersections with wetland issues and consequently the analysis undertaken by the five IBRRRI countries demonstrates the importance of ensuring that wetland issues are either addressed through a comprehensive, stand-alone wetland policy or embedded within multiple cross-sectoral policies.

Currently, there are examples of good cross sectoral integration, for instance in the case of Lao PDR and the technical working groups on environmental impact assessment and hydropower generation, but there is significant room for enhancement across the region. In order to strengthen and increase the visibility of the role of wetlands in contributing to a multiplicity of SDGs the following conclusions from the discussions are summarized below:

- Information on how wetlands can contribute to different SDG policy targets needs to be made available and widely disseminated.
- Dissemination of information needs to make use of existing structures, such as established committees, working groups or focal points, but in the absence of such structures the government departments responsible for wetlands need to ensure that functional communication pathways are established and pursued to reinforce the exchange of information.
- Lateral thinking is essential to demonstrate how wetland wise use can contribute to cross sectoral SDGs. The use of pilot or demonstrate projects which align wetlands and other SDG objectives can be helpful in highlighting mutual benefits.
- There needs to be engagement with non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and the wider public to ensure that a two-way exchange of information is maintained, with governments benefiting from wider knowledge networks and the wider communities understanding how wetlands can contribute to multiple SDG delivery.
2.4.3 Nationally Determined Contributions

As has been highlighted in the role of wetland in delivering on SDG13, wetlands have a key role to play in reducing emissions and contributing to the climate change policy agenda. A review was conducted of the first round of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reports produced by the IBRRI countries under their commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement.

In advance of the workshop, a simple word search of three terms, ‘wetlands’, ‘peat’ or ‘peatland’ and ‘mangrove’ was conducted on the first round of NDC reports. The frequency at which each term occurred in the report is shown in the table below. This simple analysis suggests that policy linkages between wetlands and climate change are currently weak. In order to reinforce the policy linkages between the wise use of wetlands and climate change mitigation and adaptation, the participants were challenged to complete the following actions (for full results see Appendix 3):

- Produce a short statement for inclusion in next NDC report. The statement should include a rationale (why/how wetlands are important) and a specific example of how wetland wise use impacts positively on climate change.
- Describe clearly the steps needed to ensure that the statement is included in the next report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘Wetland’</th>
<th>‘Peat’ or ‘Peatland’</th>
<th>‘Mangrove’</th>
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<td>Viet Nam</td>
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</table>

This exercise suggests that whilst there is good knowledge and some examples of good practice across the region, the Contracting Parties require greater support, both in terms of knowledge and engagement guidance, in order to ensure that wetlands are more strongly embedded in climate change policies and actions. The following key actions have been summarized from the Regional Dialogue with regards to embedding wetland issues within the reporting on NDCs:

- **Issues relating to wetlands and NDC reporting**
  - There needs to be a willingness from all relevant government departments to highlight the importance of wetlands in contributing to NDCs.
  - The government department responsible for wetlands should contribute directly to the reporting process to ensure that the roles wetlands can play are appropriately communicated and documented.
  - There needs to be improved information on how wetlands can contribute to NDCs. This information needs to be disseminated across appropriate government departments.
  - Greater clarification is required to demonstrate the role of wetlands, and forested wetlands and peatlands in particular, can play in climate change mitigation that complements the information already reported for forests.
Clarification is also needed regarding the term ‘wetlands’. It is important that reporting recognises this term but also the habitat-specific terms such as mangroves, peatlands, swamps, etc.

Statements included in the NDCs, for instance, regarding wetland restoration and management objectives, need to be backed up with actions on the ground.

The links among the wise use of wetlands, sustainable livelihoods and climate change mitigation and adaption are important and should also be highlighted in NDC reporting.

### 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 3.1 What is required for best practice in wetland policy?

The Regional Dialogue was a first response to Operational Objective 3 of the IBRRI Strategic Plan 2019-2024 which seeks to ensure that all the five Contracting Parties have adopted an effective wetland policy framework and that the contribution made by wetlands to other policy agendas is recognized and reported.

It is clear that significant progress has been made across the region with regards to both developing wetland policies and ensuring that the contribution wetlands make to other agendas is recognized. However, the SWOT analysis and the exercises that focused on reporting through the SDGs and the NDCs highlighted that the potential remains for improvement.

Furthermore, the development and adoption of effective wetland policy frameworks remains only as the starting point. The Regional Dialogue has further highlighted that even where the most comprehensive policy frameworks are established, challenges remain in implementation, monitoring, enforcement and reporting. A vital message which came out of the Regional Dialogue is that establishing a robust wetland framework is not an end in itself; it is only part of an ongoing process.

#### 3.2 Prioritized work plan

The Regional Dialogue workshop has assisted in identifying a range of possible activities and key actions which will contribute to the delivery of Operational Objective 3 and support the underlying targets and activities. This support can take many forms to sustainably build capacity and effectively share knowledge across the IBRRI region.

The possible range of supporting actions have been mapped against the activities (i.e. what has to be achieved to implement the IBRRI Strategic Plan). A timeline has been proposed in order to prioritize the actions. These are shown in the table below.

---

5 in line with Strategic Objective 5 of the RRC-EA Strategic Plan 2017-2024 “Deliver a targeted and prioritised capacity building programme”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities (from IBRRI Strategic Plan 2019-2024)</th>
<th>Proposed actions</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Timeline*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Review the status of regional, national and local policies across the region and their inclusiveness of wetland wise use</td>
<td>Regional Dialogue workshop</td>
<td>HIGH - Completed</td>
<td>Held in Bangkok, May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2 Develop and disseminate best practice guidance on the development and implementation of an effective policy framework promoting and supporting wise use of wetlands policies through publications and policy forums</td>
<td>Publish a policy paper aimed at national governments and their collaborative partners providing specific recommendations on effective policy frameworks</td>
<td>HIGH – in progress</td>
<td>End of Q2 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize and run a regional workshop on financing mechanisms for policy implementation, including establishing dedicated wetland-funds, payment for ecosystem services, novel financing mechanisms, private sector funding opportunities and income-related sustainable tourism</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q4 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize and run a regional workshop on establishing and fully engaging with a national wetland committee in order to improve cross-sectoral delivery of wetland policies</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q1 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize and run national workshops in each of the five countries on establishing and fully engaging with a national wetland committee in order to improve national cross-sectoral delivery of wetland policies</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End Q4 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3 Support the revisions and/or drafting of national and local policies in all five IBRRI countries</td>
<td>Translate Ramsar Handbook 2 on Wetland Policies into at least five local languages</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>End of Q3 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop short training videos in five local languages on the basic principles behind wetland policies, based on a synthesis of Ramsar Handbook 2 on Wetland Policies</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End Q4 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4 Review the effectiveness of national policy implementation on wise use of wetlands</td>
<td>Develop a guidance document on best practice in monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of wetland policies</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q2 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize and run a regional workshop on how to implement best practice in monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of wetland policies</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End of Q2 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize a study tour to one country in order to review and understand effective enforcement and regulation of wetland-related policies</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q4 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities (from IBRRI Strategic Plan 2019-2024)</td>
<td>Proposed actions</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>Timeline*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Develop and disseminate best practice guidance on how to assess the impact of wetlands on the delivery of wider policy frameworks, such as SDGs, Nationally Determined Contributions, etc.</td>
<td>Produce a guidance note in five local languages on how best to report on the contributions made by wetlands to reporting of NDCs</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q1 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Produce a guidance note in five local languages on how best to report on the contributions made by wetlands to reporting of SDGs</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>End of Q2 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize and run five national workshops, involving cross-sectoral attendance, on how best to integrate the contributions made by wetlands into other policy frameworks</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End of Q4 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Produce and disseminate best practice examples of the contributions wetlands make to the implementation of wider policy frameworks</td>
<td>Organize and run a regional workshop (as a follow up to the Regional Dialogue Workshop) to review and highlight progress made towards best practice on wetland policy implementation in the IBRRI region</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End of Q1 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publish a report on best practice in wetland policy in the IBRRI region in English and five local languages</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>End of Q3 2022</td>
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* Timeline presented as quarters of a year: Q1 January-March; Q2 April-June; Q3 July-September; Q4 October-December.
## Appendix 1: Regional Dialogue attendees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Chuop Chansophal</td>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
<td>Department of Freshwater Wetlands Conservation, Ministry of Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Pech Moran</td>
<td>Chief of Office</td>
<td>Dept. Freshwater Wetlands Conservation Ministry of Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Sun Visal</td>
<td>Chief of Office</td>
<td>Dept. Freshwater Wetlands Conservation Ministry of Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Bounleuy Sengkeo</td>
<td>Technical officer</td>
<td>Natural Environmental Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Chindavanh Souriyaphach</td>
<td>Technical officer</td>
<td>Water Utilization Division, DWR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Khonesavanh Louangraj</td>
<td>Director Division of Social Environmental</td>
<td>Ramsar National Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Singthong Phanthamala</td>
<td>Chief of River Basin Planing and Development Division</td>
<td>DWR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Kyaw Kyaw Lwin</td>
<td>Deputy Director General</td>
<td>Forest Department &amp; Ramsar National Focal Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Toe Aung</td>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>Watershed Management Division, Forest Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Hsu Sandar Aung</td>
<td>Staff Officer</td>
<td>Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Thant Sin Aung</td>
<td>Park Warden Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary/Ramsar Site</td>
<td>Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Thwe Thwe Win</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>University of Forestry and Environmental Sciences (UFES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Khunchanaporn Wuddhivorawong</td>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Marine and Coastal Resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Parinya Leelahnon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Raweewan Bhuridej</td>
<td></td>
<td>ONEP-Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Ronasit Maneesai</td>
<td></td>
<td>Department of National Park, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms Sukanya Wisan</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms Tatiya Ouitrakarn</td>
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<td>Mr Tossapon Plantanakulchai</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Mr Wanlop Preechamart</td>
<td>Environmentalist Natural Resources and Environmental Management Division</td>
<td>ONEP-Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms Washiraporn Kumnerdpet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Office of National Water Resource</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Dr Tran Ngoc Cuong</td>
<td>Head of Ecology and Natural landscape Division, Natural Conservation and Biodiversity Agency</td>
<td>Vietnam Environment Administration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Ms Nguyen An Thuy</td>
<td>Department of Policy, Legislation and Inspection</td>
<td>Vietnam Environment Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Mr Nguyen Phong Van</td>
<td>Director Phu My Species and Habitat Protected Area</td>
<td>Vietnam Environment Administration</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Ms Nguyen Thi Thanh Hai</td>
<td>Official of Natural Conservation and Biodiversity Agency</td>
<td>Vietnam Environment Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ramsar Convention Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Ms Reiko Iitsuka</td>
<td>Senior Regional Advisor for Asia/Oceania</td>
<td>Ramsar Convention Secretariat</td>
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<td>RRC-EA</td>
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<tr>
<td>RO Korea</td>
<td>Mr Seung Oh Suh</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>RRC-EA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RO Korea</td>
<td>Mr Norman Emmanuel C. Ramirez</td>
<td>Program Officer</td>
<td>RRC-EA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RO Korea</td>
<td>Ms Seong Bo Kim</td>
<td>Network Officer</td>
<td>RRC-EA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO Korea</td>
<td>Mr Chin Ug Cho</td>
<td>Finance Officer</td>
<td>RRC-EA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO Korea</td>
<td>Ms Hang Ah Kim</td>
<td>Web Officer</td>
<td>RRC-EA</td>
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<td>IUCN ARO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Mr Raphael Glemet</td>
<td>Senior Programme Officer, Water and Wetlands</td>
<td>IUCN Asia Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms Kathryn Binson</td>
<td>Field Coordinator, South</td>
<td>IUCN Asia Regional Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms Kulkanya Hiranyasthi</td>
<td>IUCN Support staff</td>
<td>IUCN Asia Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Tang Punleu</td>
<td>Wetland Project Officer, BirdLife International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Yong Ding Li</td>
<td>Asia Advocacy and Policy Maker, BirdLife International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Priyanie Amerasinghe</td>
<td>Senior Researcher, Human and Environmental Health, International Water Management Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Tomos Avent</td>
<td>Head of Conservation &amp; Development, Wildfowl &amp; Wetlands Trust (WWT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs and Observers</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Phalen Leav</td>
<td>Cambodia Country Office Manager, International Crane Foundation (ICF)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Taing Porchhay</td>
<td>CEO, NatureLife Cambodia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Frank Momberg</td>
<td>Programme Director, Fauna and Flora International</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Pyae Phyo Aung</td>
<td>Director (Operations), BANCA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Corazon A. de Jesus Jr.</td>
<td>Capacity Development Specialist and SGP Coordinator, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Li He</td>
<td>Natural Resources Officer, FAO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Ms</td>
<td>Louise Whiting</td>
<td>Senior Water Management Officer, FAO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>Robert McInnes</td>
<td>Professional Wetland Scientist, RM Wetlands and Environment Ltd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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## Appendix 2 Regional Dialogue Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Moderator / coordinator</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>27 May 2019</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants arrive in Bangkok</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28 May 2019</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>08:30-09:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:00-09:30</td>
<td>Welcome remarks</td>
<td>IBRRI/RRC-EA chair, ONEP, IBRRI and RRC-EA secretariats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:30 – 12:00</td>
<td>Session 1: Country presentations on wetlands policy frameworks (both national and local levels);</td>
<td>Country delegations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 13:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 16:00</td>
<td>Session 2: Best practices on developing and implementing wetlands policies</td>
<td>IBRRI and RRC-EA (with resource person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00 – 16:30</td>
<td>Wrap up of Day 1</td>
<td>IBRRI/RRC-EA chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>29 May 2019</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 – 09:30</td>
<td>Welcome and summary of Day 1</td>
<td>IBRRI and RRC-EA secretariats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:30 – 12:00</td>
<td>Session 3: Comparative analysis on policy framework in the 5 countries and SWOT analysis</td>
<td>IBRRI and RRC-EA (with resource person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 13:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00 – 16:00</td>
<td>Session 4 – Dialogue on way forward and country needs (capacity building, legal advice, bilateral dialogues on policies etc…)</td>
<td>IBRRI and RRC-EA (with resource person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00 – 16:30</td>
<td>Wrap up and closing</td>
<td>IBRRI/RRC-EA chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30 May 2019</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study tour to Bang Krachao (Bangkok’s ‘Green Lung’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Appendix 3 Regional Dialogue Workshop Factual Report

Summary of national contexts

Each of the five Contracting Parties within the IBRRI presented a summary of the existing situation with regards to national wetland policies within their own country. The individual countries had been requested to follow a standardised presentation template in order to review information on:

- Does your country have a National Wetland Policy?
- If your country has a National Wetland Policy (NWP):
  - Briefly describe the process for developing the NWP
  - Briefly describe how the NWP was adopted
  - Briefly describe how the NWP is regulated and enforced to ensure compliance
  - Briefly describe how other government ministries contribute to the delivery of the objectives of the NWP
  - Briefly describe how other laws or policies have been harmonised with the NWP
  - Briefly describe how compliance against the objectives of the NWP are reported
- If your country has a National Wetland Policy:
  - Briefly describe how the national objectives are mandated, delivered and reported at a local and site level
- Whether your country has or doesn’t have a National Wetland Policy:
  - Briefly describe how wetland policy objectives are integrated within other policy mechanisms (such as climate change, biodiversity and nature conservation, poverty eradication, food production and agriculture, water resource management, urban development and planning, sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, health and well-being, etc.)
- Whether your country has or doesn’t have a National Wetland Policy:
  - List the three main issues that you need help with regarding wetland policy development, drafting, regulating, enforcing, resourcing, reporting, etc.

Country summaries

Cambodia

Cambodia does not have a specific wetland policy. However, wetlands are addressed through a series of related laws, including: Law on Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management; Law on Water Resources Management; Protected area law; and Fisheries Law.

However, Cambodia has produced Guidance for the Wise Use of Freshwater Wetlands. This provides support for stakeholders living in and around wetlands and describes the importance of wetlands and the services they provide. The guidance is in three parts:

- Background information: what is a wetland, wetland value, wise use of wetlands.
• Wetland management planning and engagement with people: information on developing a wetland management plan, engaging with stakeholders and using communications, education, participation, public awareness (CEPA) methods, applying R-METT, and vulnerability assessment on climate change.

• Managing wetlands: information on key wetland features and activities: key wetland features and activities that need to be addressed and conserved.

The process for developing the guidance spanned three years and involved planning workshop, consultation meetings with relevant stakeholders (including NGOs, and transboundary stakeholders such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC)), technical review, and finally endorsement by the Minister Council.

Moving forwards, with regards to the country’s needs, Cambodia highlighted the importance of having a specific policy on wetlands. In order to develop a National Wetland Policy further, the country recognises the following specific steps:

- Development and drafting
- Resourcing for both technical and financial support
- Monitoring and evaluation

Lao PDR

Lao PDR does not have a specific wetland policy, however, wetlands are addressed as one of the land use types in the National Land Use Master Plan 2030. Wetlands also feature in the Water and Water Resources Law, which has 103 articles, two of which relate to wetland definition and the use, protection and development of wetlands.

Wetlands can be subject to management agreements. These have three objectives, the second of which is to conserve the processes and characteristics of Lao’s water resources. Wetland management agreements can operate at three levels: national level (for wetlands larger than 200ha), provincial level (wetlands between 50 and 200ha) and at district level (wetland smaller than 50ha). Under these wetland management agreements there will be a zoning plan which includes a protected wetland zone and a wise use management zone.

Currently Lao PDR is drafting a National Water and Water Resources Management Strategy 2030. Wetlands will also feature in this strategy.

The country has a clear process for the development of policies. The development of national wetland policy would adhere to this process and include the following steps:

- Draft the concept;
- Review the related law and regulations;
- Consult with related agencies at national and local level;
- Revise follow the result of the consultation;
• Work with Department of Legislation (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE));
• Final consult with related agencies;
• Submission to Minister of MONRE for final approval;
• Disseminate and mainstream to the local level.

A range of pilot activities are currently on-going which will assist in informing the development of a national wetland policy. The main challenges ahead are the lack of a robust national wetland inventory, unregulated land use change and data deficiencies.

**Myanmar**

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar in collaboration with Government of Norway instigated a bilateral programme of environmental cooperation, including the improved management and wise use of wetlands, in 2015. The wetland work programme addressed many elements including establishing the National Wetland Committee in 2016, drafting management plans for Ramsar Sites, building capacity across a network of wetland managers, and developing a National Wetland Policy.

The development of National Wetland Policy and Strategic Actions commenced in 2017. Input, comments and feedback on various drafts were provided by the National Wetland Committee, experts involved in the bilateral Myanmar-Norway project, and various NGOs. Following the period of drafting, the final draft was completed in November 2018. The version was sent to the Cabinet for approval and finally distributed in January 2019 (with versions in both English and the Myanmar language).

The National Wetland Policy and Strategic Actions sets out the following vision for wetlands in Myanmar:

> “The conservation and wise use of wetlands and associated resources are focused on sustaining wetlands, as well as maintaining their ecological and socio-economical functions and values in a sustainable manner.”

Six Wetland Policies are set out, namely:

- Protection
- Wise use
- Maintaining wetland values in development plans
- Participation
- Raising awareness
- Collaborating in international and regional wetlands programmes

Each wetland policy is underpinned by a series of Objectives. There are total of 17 Objectives. Each Objective depends on the implementation of a range of 68 Strategic Actions. The overall National Wetland Policy and Strategic Actions is subject to the triannual review and reporting to the Union Government by the National Wetland Committee.
The Chair of the National Wetland Committee is responsible for the implementation of the National Wetland Policy and Strategic Actions. The Policy integrates with existing cross-sectoral policies. Integration is facilitated through the National Wetland Committee, which comprises representatives from other government departments such as Fisheries, Tourism, Agriculture and Irrigation.

The main challenges with implementing the National Wetland Policy relate to the need to develop an implementation plan, along with an adequate budget and the required human resources. This will also require an element of capacity building to ensure on-going implementation.

Thailand

Thailand has a series of National Strategies for the period 2018-2037 which set out a vision for the country. The vision is that:

*Thailand to become “a developed country with security, prosperity and sustainability in accordance with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.”*

In 2000, the Cabinet endorsed the list of wetlands on international and international importance. This list was extended in 2009 and endorsed again by the Cabinet along with a variety of conservation measures. The conservation measures were extended and improved in 2015 to include activities such as monitoring, controlling encroachment, CEPA, environmental impact assessment and zonation.

There is no separate national wetland policy; rather wetlands are an integral element within the Master Plan for Integrated Biodiversity Management (MPBD) 2015-2021. The MPBD is the fourth Masterplan formulated to address the underlying causes of wetlands and biodiversity loss by seeking to conserve, restore and protect wetlands and their ecosystem services, as well as enhancing the benefits from them, along with raising public awareness and understanding of the roles and importance of wetlands and biodiversity to human well-being, and collaborating with all relevant sectors in integrated management.

The MPBD operates under the auspices of the National Biodiversity Committee (NBC) and has guidelines for mobilization and coordination. The NBS is responsible for developing monitoring guidelines and reporting to Cabinet. The MPBD has four strategic elements:

- Integration of values and the management of biodiversity through participatory processes of all levels.
- Conservation and restoration of biodiversity.
- Protection of the benefit of the nation derived from the use of biological resources, and management of biodiversity in ways that are in line with the concept of green economy.
- Improvement of knowledge and databases of biodiversity that meet international standards.

Under ‘Conservation and restoration of biodiversity’, there are four wetland-related elements:
Integration of wetlands into the policies, plans, tools, mechanisms and networks, in order to enhance the management of wetlands

Capacity-building in government, NGOs, and local communities to enhance the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Prepare and propose priority wetlands.

Surveillance and monitoring threats to wetlands. Including the promotion of wise use.

Through the MPBD, the Government of Thailand recognizes that the conservation and wise use of wetland supports a variety of other sectoral policy objectives including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and targets for the reduction in carbon emissions and the protection of carbon stores under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Moving forwards, the main areas where the Government of Thailand requires help is in the cooperation between countries, improving their knowledge and experience in wetland management and the technology required to explore, conserve and restore wetlands.

Viet Nam

Viet Nam has developed a national wetland policy since the 1990s, initially though the action plan on biodiversity. In 2003, the Government issued Decree 109/ND-CP on Conservation and Sustainable Development in Wetlands. In 2004, the Action Plan on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in 2004-2010 was issued. In 2008, the Law on Biodiversity was promulgated, including the contents of wetland conservation. This was followed up in 2010, by Decree No. 65 / ND-CP on guiding the implementation of the Law on Biodiversity. In 2013, the Government of Viet Nam issued the National Biodiversity Strategy and the vision for 2030. The Master Plan on biodiversity for the whole country was approved in 2014.

In 2019, the Government is developing and submitting a Decree on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands to replace the 2003 Decree 109 / ND-CP. Additionally, an Action Plan on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in the period 2020-2030 is being developed. The process includes the following steps:

- Identify the problem;
- Policy development-working group development, public comments online;
- Submit to relevant authorities for approval;
- Implementation;
- Policy issues through legal documents should be enforceable.

The development of these decrees and plans has involved the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment inviting other ministries, agencies and related parties to participate in the process of formulation and submission. The responsibility for the content of wetland plans and decrees has been assigned by the Government of Vietnam to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Consequently, the
Law on Forestry and Fisheries also has a focus on the conservation of biodiversity of forests and the sea resulting in an overlap between the Forestry Law and the Fisheries Law and the Biodiversity Law. In addition to these Laws, wetland policies have been integrated within the following mechanisms:

- National Strategy on Climate change (2011)
- Law on water resources (2012)
- Green growth strategy of Vietnam (2012)

Moving forwards, the Government of Viet Nam still requires help and assistance with strengthening capacity for effective wetland management; developing further policy on the wise use of wetlands; and support for strengthening cooperation between countries in the region in order to conserve wetlands in Indo-Burma region.

Applying Ramsar Guidance

The adopted Ramsar Guidance (see section 1 above) was reviewed in the Regional Dialogue workshop. The guidance sets out the idealised steps that a Contracting Party should follow in order to develop a national wetland policy. These steps have been defined as:

- Establish a lead agency
- Considerations for a National Wetland Committee
- Define and state national issues
- Define “wetlands” at a national level
- Define and identify stakeholders
- Initiate national consultation
- Implement local and national workshops
- Create a policy writing team
- Ensure political support
- Set realistic timeframe
- Complete consultation and draft policy
- Develop a ‘cabinet’ memorandum
- Gain government endorsement

In order to further integrate the approach and requirements within the five IBRRI countries, each country was allocated one aspect from the above list to review and explain how the step would be implemented in their country.

Cambodia: Defining state and national issues

Cambodia identified the following approach to defining the range of wetland issues that would need to be included and addressed within a national wetland policy:

- Identifying key stakeholders and target groups
- Identify key wetland sites
- Consulting meeting
• Foster conversation between groups and input from all
• Ensure it is a two way approach, women’s group represented
• Financial resources: budget plan for Ministry of Finance

**Lao PDR: Defining and identifying stakeholders**

Lao PDR identified the following approach to defining and identifying relevant stakeholders:

- Relevant ministries: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- Academia: National University of Laos, researchers
- Regional and international organizations: MRC, ASEAN, Ramsar Secretariat
- NGOs: local, national, international
- Local authorities: province, district, village representatives
- Local communities: water user groups, resource user groups

**Myanmar: National consultation for producing a wetland policy**

Based on their recent experience of developing a national wetland policy, Myanmar identified the following stages for national consultation:

- National Wetland Committee at national level
- Forest Department and Environmental Department
- After National Consultation workshop with government, host another workshop with INGOs and local NGOs

**Thailand: Implementing national and local workshops**

In order to implement national and local workshops, Thailand made the following recommendations:

- Identify target stakeholders
- Prepare easy to understand documents
- Resource person to supply material
- Brainstorming among participants
- Adjust the plan according to feedback
- Involve NGOs, government, private sector, local communities
- Seek financing from government and the private sector

**Viet Nam: Ensuring political support**

To ensure political support, Viet Nam recommended that the following approach was established:

- Participate in international convention, workshop on wetland management
- Submit proposal for wetland policy, with support from international organization
- Developing policy for ministry (MoNRE)
• Steering committee for wetland policy in Viet Nam
• Seek financial resources from NGOs and government

IBRRRI Strategic Plan: Operational Objective 3

The Regional Dialogue workshop revisited the targets and activities specified under Operational Objective 3 (see section 1 above). The participants in the workshop considered the SDGs and the NDCs in order to assist the Contracting Parties in assessing whether the best approach to adopting a policy framework to ensure the wise use of wetlands was through a separate National Wetland Policy document or through integration of wetland policy objectives in cross-sectoral policies.

SDG13 Climate Action

Each of the five Contracting Parties was asked to consider how delivery of SDG13 on Climate Action could be enhanced through improvement in wetland policies. Details of the delegates’ responses are provided in Appendix 3.

The participants from each of the countries had to consider which ministries or departments they would need to engage with in order to ensure that the role wetlands can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change are firmly embedded in cross-sectoral policies.

The delegates from Myanmar identified the following approach:

• The National Wetland Committee forms the bridge between different departments to make sure wise use initiatives are shared with and integrated into different departments e.g. Forest Department.

Viet Nam identified the following approach:

• The focus should be with Agency for Climate Change, which is under MONRE.
• MONRE has setup a strategy on adaptation and climate change in Viet Nam. Wetlands and this includes cooperation on the restoration of coastal wetlands.
• There also needs to be dialogue between governments
• The importance of raising awareness at all levels, not just across government departments, was highlighted.

The representatives from Thailand identified the following approach:

• Pilot project for wetland management and increasing water retention-model will be shared with Agriculture Department and Education Department.
• National Committee on Climate Change Policy is an established cross sectoral body including the Development Sector, Agriculture Department, etc. It provides the Master Plan on Climate Change, which includes an ecosystem focus, including wetlands (mangroves, peatland).
• Royal Forest Department.
• Project work provides an opportunity to influence other government departments that sit on the National Committee on Climate Change Policy.

The delegates from Lao PDR recommended:

• The Climate Change Strategy has already been approved by government. It focuses on seven key areas: agriculture and food security, land use forestry (MONRE), water resource sector (MONRE), energy and transport (Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Public Work), Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Urban Development (Ministry of Public Work), Ministry of Public Health.
• Steering Committee for Wetlands is a well-formed committee of many different government departments that all have wetland issues embedded within them, e.g. Ministry of Mining has wetland implications.

The participants for Cambodia identified the following actors:

• National Council on Sustainability Development.
• Department of Freshwater and Wetlands Conservation reports to Department of Natural Resources Conservation.
• Ministry of Environment is Chair of National Council on Sustainability Development.

Other SDGs
In order to understand the implication of wetland policies within wider sectoral interests, each Contracting Party was allocated a SDG to consider. For each SDG the participants had to identify which other policies or government departments need to be influenced and changed and determine how wetland wise use policy objectives be embedded so that wetlands can contribute to the delivery of the SDG.

The responses of the five countries are summarized in the table below. The responses demonstrate the potential for wetlands to be included in multiple strategies and policy frameworks beyond the normal constraints of biodiversity. All the SDGs have intersections with wetland issues and the analysis undertaken by the five IBRRI countries demonstrates the importance of ensuring that wetland issues are either addressed through a comprehensive, stand-alone wetland policy or embedded within multiple cross-sectoral policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG2</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Wetlands ecosystem services such as water resource for agriculture, fisheries nurseries make important contributions Committee on Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Hunger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG7</td>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Two Ministries: Ministry of Energy and Mining and MONRE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Affordable and Clean Energy

- Strategy on sustainable hydropower
- Strategy on renewable energy
- Technical working groups of EIA on hydropower development
- Ability to work with strategies to target ministry of mining and energy and incorporate wetlands

SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

- Myanmar
  - Many big cities are in coastal areas and at risk of sea level rise
  - Ministry of Construction- at least 30% of area in cities is green.
  - Myanmar Climate Change Alliance.
  - Opportunity for the wetlands sector to contribute to those plans.

SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Thailand
  - Policy on Biodiversity based economic development
  - Ecotourism policy from Tourism Authority of Thailand- promotes sustainable tourism in local communities

SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals

- Viet Nam
  - MONRE focal point for wetland management
  - Ministry of Planning and Investment responsible for SDG and Green Growth Strategy
  - Invite Ministry of Tourism, Education, Labor, Technology to develop proposals
  - Also need support from INGOS and NGOs

Nationally Determined Contributions

Wetlands have a key role to play in reducing emissions and contributing to the climate change policy agenda. A review was conducted of the first round of NDC reports produced by the IBRRI countries. A simple word search of three terms, ‘wetlands’, ‘peat’ or ‘peatland’ and ‘mangrove’ was conducted of the first round of NDC reports. The frequency at which each term occurred in the report is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘Wetland’</th>
<th>‘Peat’ or ‘Peatland’</th>
<th>‘Mangrove’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This simple analysis suggests that policy linkages between wetlands and climate change are currently weak. In order to reinforce the policy linkages between the wise use of wetlands and climate change mitigation and adaptation, the participants were challenged to complete the following actions:

- Produce a short statement for inclusion in next NDC report. The statement should include a rationale (why/how wetlands are important) and a specific example of how wetland wise use impacts positively on climate change.
Describe clearly the steps which need to be taken to ensure that the statement is included in the next report.

Participants from Viet Nam reported that:

- NDCs only include wetlands once, biodiversity is mentioned seven times.
- This is despite the fact that wetlands provide key resources, including for rice growing, coastal protection from storms, carbon storage and sequestration.
- Vietnam colleagues provided input about wetlands into the first NDC report, but the information was cut from the final draft because there was a sense that “forests also do that”.

The delegates from Lao PDR highlighted that:

- For the first NDC report submitted to UNFCC they were not sure which department was in charge. However, they will find out and ensure that in the second report there is a statement on wetlands.
- NDCs in Laos have some of the strongest statements on wetlands but these were not drafted or reviewed by the participants at the Regional Dialogue, demonstrating a communications gap.
- Climate change office is responsible for the NDC reports, therefore it is important to engage with them and share technical reporting and messages on wetland monitoring and services.

The representatives from Cambodia stated that:

- The Department of Climate Change is responsible for NDC reporting to UNFCCC.
- There have been efforts to promote the importance of wetlands, peatlands, mangroves in climate change mitigation roles.
- There is a recognition that carbon storage in wetlands is much higher than in forests.
- Tonle Sap, largest lake in South East Asia, is important for livelihoods and fisheries as well as for adaptation to climate change.
- Communication with climate change focal point and NDC reporting could be improved. The Delegates will ask what information they need to report on wetlands and climate change. This may include further information including a more robust wetland inventory.

The delegates from Thailand stated that:

- They use scientific information about wetlands and climate change to share with the NDC reporting.
- In the next round of reporting, they will make sure that this information goes into the reporting and that wetlands are well represented.
The Myanmar delegation stated:

- The country has set a target of placing 10% of the land area into protected areas, partly as a contribution towards addressing climate change.
- The country had a strategy for reducing deforestation of mangroves as part of climate change activity.
- They recognised the need to protect wetlands in order to contribute to climate change mitigation because of carbon storage.
- In addition to climate change benefits, local households in coastal areas benefit from healthy mangrove forests and supported fisheries and livelihoods. Furthermore, the government was actively distributing fuel-efficient stoves to communities to reduce illegal destruction of mangroves for fuelwood.
- The members responsible for the NDC reporting are usually from the Forest Department, but there is a need to ensure that wetlands are more fully included in future reports.
- Peatland conservation is also highly valuable in the region for NDC proposals and this needs further emphasis.
- The delegation felt that messaging is important. Whilst it is important to use the general term “wetlands” it is also vital to include other terms such as coral reefs, peatlands, mangroves, floodplains, to reinforce the links so that people understand the reasons for advocating for wetland conservation.

This exercise suggests that whilst there is good knowledge and some examples of good practice across the region, the Contracting Parties require greater support, both in terms of knowledge and guidance on how to engage, in order to ensure that wetlands are more strongly embedded in climate change policies and actions.