**The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands - Terms of Reference –**

**Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee**

***Updated, August, 2020***

**Introduction**

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Ramsar Convention is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem i.e. wetlands. The treaty was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and the Convention’s Member States cover all geographic regions of the planet.

The Convention’s mission is *‘the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and International cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.’*

The Convention uses a broad definition of the types of wetlands covered in its mission , including lakes and rivers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands and the peatlands, oases, estuaries , deltas, and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, mangroves and coral reefs, and human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt plans.

At the centre of the Ramsar philosophy is the ‘*wise use’* concept. The wise use of wetlands is defined as the *‘the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development ‘.* ‘Wise Use’ therefore has at its heart the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources, for the benefit of humankind.

The Ramsar Contracting Parties, or Member States, have committed themselves to implementing the ‘three pillars’ of the Convention:

* To designate suitable wetlands for the List of Wetlands of International Importance (‘Ramsar List‘) and ensure their effective management;
* To work towards the wise use of all their wetlands through national land-use planning, appropriate policies and legislation, management actions, and public education;
* To cooperate internationally concerning transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands.

The Republic of Ireland is a ***Contracting Party*** to Ramsar, implementing the convention in 1985, and currently has 45 sites, covering a surface area of 66,994 hectares (ha). Nationally, each Contracting Party designates ***Administrative Authority*** as its focal point for implementation of the Convention. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) fulfils this role of implementation and advancement of Ramsar aspirations in Ireland.

Member States are encouraged to establish ***National Wetland Committees***, involving all government sectors dealing with water resources, development planning, protected areas, biodiversity, tourism, education, development assistance, etc. Participation by NGOs and civil society is also encouraged. Towards the end of 2009, a proposal was made to then Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government that a national wetland committee be established under Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Council, in line with other Ramsar Member States. This committee would provide recommendations to policy makers and support wetland education and public awareness of

wetlands as envisaged in the Ramsar convention, as well as supporting and encouraging the work of NPWS with regards to implementing Ramsar.

**Terms of Reference of the Irish National Wetland Committee**

The Ramsar Committee in Ireland will be known as the Irish Ramsar Wetlands committee. The committee will be jointly supported and hosted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (the state’s Administrative Authority for Ramsar) and the Environmental Protection agency (EPA), with secretarial support provided by NPWS.

The committee will be representative of public authorities, 3rd level academic institutes and non-governmental organisations who have a role in wetlands policy development, service provision, conservation, education, management, use, and knowledge seeking dissemination. It will include representatives from the above. Additional work groups for specific wetland related topics may develop over time with representation from outside the committee.

It will provide a broad focus at national level for the implementation of the Convention through its multi-stranded membership (refer to Appendix for full list of Departments and Organisations).

More specifically, the committee will draw its membership from:

* Government departments
* Agencies and other public bodies
* Local authorities
* Academic institutes
* Non-governmental environmental organisations
* Land owners and users

The committee will seek to support the implementation of the three objectives of the Ramsar Convention. It will undertake this task trough the following measures.

Strategically, it will:

* Provide a coordinated mechanism for increasing awareness of the Convention’s approach to wetland and water-related issues
* Link policy makers with policy implementers
* Promote guidance on the ‘wise use of wetlands‘

In practical terms, the IRWC will:

* Facilitate the preparation of a national inventory of wetland resources
* Promote stewardship of the wetlands resource at community, regional and national level
* Support the development of relevant legislation, national policy and guidance
* Identify relevant applied wetland-related research opportunities and seek to generate synergies between potential partners
* Highlight key endangered wetlands and promote conservation, restoration and focussed research on these habitats
* Contribute to the work of the National Biodiversity Data Centre
* Mainstream wetland ecosystem services in the context of e.g. the Ramsar Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity, Water Framework Directive’s, River Basin Management Plans, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Flood Directive, Flood Risk Management Plans, Habitats and Birds Directive’s, Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Action Plan.
* Support wetland education and public awareness of wetlands through a variety of fora
* Increase the awareness of the total economic value of wetlands
* Foster engagement with Ramsar Committee in Northern Ireland and jointly support the nomination of transboundary wetland(s) as Ramsar sites
* Promote and support update of network of Ramsar sites
* Contribute to and support the preparation of National Reports to Ramsar

The committee will have four meetings per year, at least one of which will be open. The meetings will encompass the technical and outreach/awareness raising elements. A field visit, with a learning/practical focus will form part one of these meetings each year.

Individual membership of the IRWC will be for a three-year term, with options for extension as appropriate and at the discretion of the member’s parent body and subject to agreement by the Committee.

The Chair will be appointed by the Committee, and in consultation with NPWS/EPA. The Chair will direct meetings, be the key spokesperson for the committee and be the key contact for liaising with NPWS and EPA on Ramsar issues. The Chair will be reviewed by the group on an annual basis.

It is envisaged that each representative will be supported by their parent body regarding their attendance at meeting etc.

Where a committee member has no parent body, the EPA or NPWS will fund financial outlays incurred by attending committee meetings.

The committee will work to an agreed long term Work Programme, with annual aims, actions and targets identified, that will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

The committee will establish a website at an early stage, to act as its primary information dissemination platform. A future plan for the maintenance and updating of the website will be reviewed within the work programme.

The committee will publish a summary annual report.

**Appendix**

List of all Government Departments (and organisations within departments) and other state and semi state organisations represented on the IRWC

* Dept. Communications, Climate Action and Environment (EPA, IFI)
* Dept. Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (NPWS).
* Dept. Housing, Planning and Local Government.
* Dept. Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
* *Dept. of Tourism and Trade* *(Fáilte Ireland)\*.*
* Office of Public Works
* Teagasc
* National Biodiversity Data Centre
* Local authorities as represented by Heritage Officers’ network (Currently Waterford County Council Heritage Officer)
* Academic institute personnel dealing with wetland ecology, hydrology, ecosystem goods and services etc

List of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s) with an engagement in wetlands represented on the IRWC

* Coastwatch
* Irish Peatland Conservation Council
* Irish Environmental Network (with representation from various NGO’s e.g. BirdWatch Ireland, Irish Wildlife Trust, An Taisce); currently BWI
* Community Wetlands Forum
* *Farming organisations (IFA, ICMSA)\*.*

*\*Not currently represented on the IRWC*

*6th August, 2020.*