

Skukuza symposium synthesis

9-13 October 2006

What is the problem?

- Massive decline of freshwater biodiversity, worse than for terrestrial & marine biomes
- Growing demand for water and pollution over large parts of the world threaten remaining freshwater biodiversity
- Threats exacerbated by climate change and government responses to climate change

Large areas of freshwater habitats incorporated in protected areas (e.g. Ramsar sites), but:

- Not representative
- Rarely sustained by environmental flows
- Existing reserves often not designated & managed for freshwater conservation
- Not networked effectively
- Freshwater biodiversity still declining => not good enough thus far

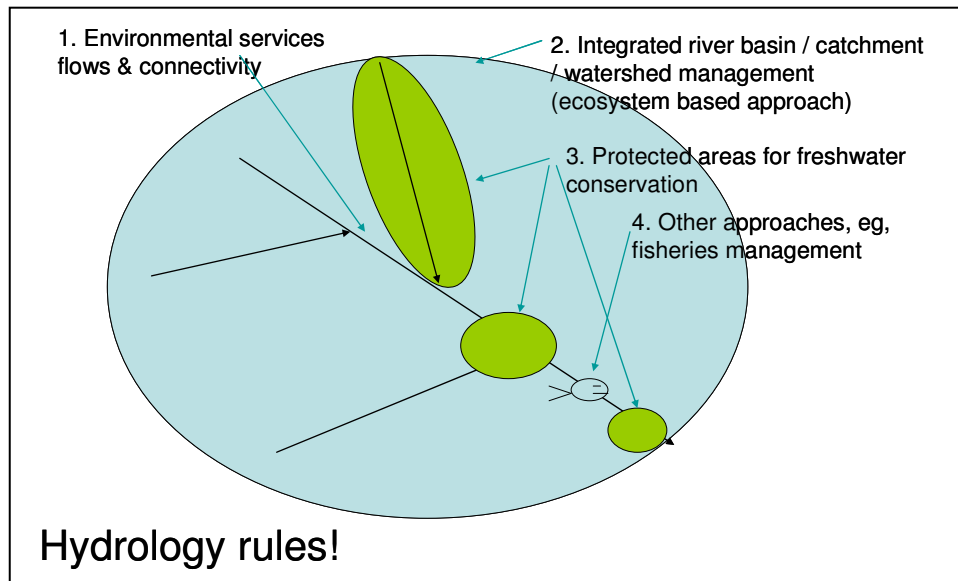
Politics

- Water is the key link between sustainable livelihoods and conservation
- Governments and societies are often unaware of the threats and opportunities to conserve freshwater ecosystems
- Unique opportunities now to advance freshwater conservation with government commitments, especially for protected areas to conserve freshwater habitats (eg. via CBD, Ramsar)

What are we trying to conserve?

| Scale | Feature |
|------------------|---|
| Globe | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Entire freshwater biome▪ Environmental processes |
| Basin / nation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Provision of particular ecosystem services (CBD emphasis) |
| Site / tributary | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Species▪ Ecological communities |

Set of linked approaches required concurrently at different scales



Roles of protected areas for freshwater ecosystem conservation

- Conserve biodiversity in situ (species, wetlands types)
- Maintain ecological processes (e.g. free-flowing, icon sites lever allocation of flows)
- Manage the ecosystem and biodiversity to deliver defined ecosystem goods & services, e.g. a) Sustain fisheries, b) Reliable sources of clean water supply
- Scientific reference points
- Reduce user group conflicts

Redefinition of protected areas to incorporate freshwater

“An area of land, inland waters and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and requisite ecological processes, ecosystem services, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.”

Key messages to promote awareness and action by others?

- Freshwater habitats need to be conserved as the source of water for people and nature.
- Protected areas are one of the best ways of conserving freshwater habitats.
- Globally, peace, good health and food security depend on sustainable management of freshwater ecosystems as the main source of water for people and nature.
- A well managed environment is the best defence against disasters such as floods and droughts.