The National Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Policy of Sri Lanka

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(1) Introduction and Background

The Invasive Alien Species (IAS) have continued to affect the natural (terrestrial, aquatic and marine) and agro-ecosystems of Sri Lanka affecting its biological diversity and food security. Open economic policies that have facilitated international trade, travel and transport, and natural and man-made disasters supporting the free movement of international aid has seen the incidence of IAS becoming more frequent over the past several decades. Introduction IAS to Sri Lanka has been deliberate or accidental.

The threats of IAS cannot be treated in isolation, but are part of a complex set of pressures and drivers of biodiversity loss and environmental change. In Sri Lanka, the social, political and economic drivers are growing in both scale and scope. Therefore, the responses to IAS need to go beyond short-term crisis-focused approaches. They need to be at multiple levels, and in many incidences an inter-linked approach, which takes into account the horizontal linkages between environmental sectors as well as the links between development and social objectives will need to be adopted. Policies across different sectors as well as at different scales, including the national and regional, will need to be harmonized.

Sri Lanka has recognized the importance of IAS as a major threat to the native biodiversity. While being a signatory to international and regional agreements related to trade, *i.e.* WTO, SAPTA, among others, and international conventions such as Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution From Ships (MARPOL 73/78), Sri Lanka has enacted large number of ordinances/acts to impose laws governing import of fauna and flora to the country. The direct legal instruments available in Sri Lanka to tackle the issues related to IAS are the Water Hyacinth Ordinance No. 4 of 1909, Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No. 2 of 1937 (as amended), Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, No. 02 of 1996 (as amended), Plant Protection Act No. 35 of 1999, Prevention of Mosquito Breeding Act No. 11 of 2007, and Marine Pollution Prevention Act No. 35 of 2008.

Considering the sectoral nature of the legal enactments stated above, and the importance of the development and implementation of legal instruments to support the country's efforts to manage IAS, the Cabinet of Ministers of Sri Lanka on 15th January 2009 granted approval to a cabinet paper submitted by the MENR to develop a new act to prevent entry of and control of IAS. The Cabinet of Ministers has further highlighted the importance of obtaining assistance of other line ministries in this effort.

The article 14 in the Chapter 6 (Directive principles of state Policy and Fundamental Duties) of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka clearly states that "The State shall protect, preserve and improve the environment for the benefit of the community". This governs the activities of all state, private sector and non-governmental organizations and

individuals in protecting the environment of Sri Lanka. Keeping in line with the constitutional directives and the international conventions that the country has been a signatory, several government institutions have developed policy statements of mechanisms to tackle the issues related to IAS in Sri Lanka. Keeping in line with the national needs, the National Environmental Policy of 2003 was launched where the Policy Statement 4 indicates that "Environmental management systems will be encouraged to be flexible so as to adapt to changing situations (e.g. climate change, invasive species and living genetically-modified organisms) and adopt the precautionary principle as priority areas requiring action". In addition, the National Environmental Outlook[1], Caring for the Environment II 2008-2012[2], the Addendum to the Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan[3] published by the Ministry of Environment; the National Action Plan for the *Haritha Lanka* (Green Lanka) Programme published by the National Council for Sustainable Development of the Presidential Secretariat[4], highlights the need to address IAS issues as priority interventions. The other policy documents implemented by the different line Ministries/Departments of the Government of Sri Lanka containing relevant statements to tackle IAS issues are the National Agriculture Policy (2007)[5] and the National Wildlife Policy (2000)[6].

Protecting the Sri Lankan ecosystems from the impacts of IAS is a national priority. Hence this document provides the "National Invasive Alien Species Policy - NIASP" aiming at preventing the introduction and spread of IAS and their control. This policy is intended to provide consistent guidance to the Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy (ME&RE), which is the focal point for implementation of the CBD in Sri Lanka, and the stakeholder institutions in line Ministries, non-governmental and private sector organizations, and the citizens of Sri Lanka for any activities that could introduce or cause the spread of invasive alien species in the country. It is also intended to form a basis for making recommendations to the Government of Sri Lanka regarding actions needed against IAS. This policy supplements any other policy and program guidelines that may exist.

(2) The need for a National Invasive Alien Species Policy (NIASP)

Despite the fact that IAS issues are being accepted as a concern to be dealt with a sense of urgency, the sectoral policy and regulatory framework for minimizing the risks posed by IAS in Sri Lanka still remain under-developed and not well coordinated. Although many institutions hold a stake in IAS related activities namely, Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Irrigation, etc., these institutions to-date have not harmonized their policies to account for the effects of IAS. Therefore, a national policy is required as the guiding light that shows the path to achieve the vision and the long-term goals envisaged by state and other stakeholder organizations in minimizing the risks of IAS across sectors in Sri Lanka.

[1] Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (2009): National Environmental Outlook
[2] Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (2008): Caring for the Environment II 2008-2012.
[3] Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (2007): BCAP Addendum
[4] National Council for Sustainable Development (2009): *Haritha Lanka* Action Plan.
[5] Ministry of Agriculture Development and Agrarian Service (2007): National Agriculture Policy
[6] Ministry of Forestry and Environment (2000): National Wildlife Policy

(3) Process involved in preparing the National IAS Policy

The national IAS policy was prepared by the Core Consultant Group through the following approach:

(a) Review of available information:

(i) Relevant information available from various sources especially Ministry of Environment were reviewed. In this connection, publications in Sri Lanka on the identification, impact and management of IAS and information collected during the national symposium conducted during the Project Preparatory Grant (PPG) of the GEF/UNDP Project on Strengthening Capacity to Control the Introduction and Spread of Alien Invasive Species" were used base documents.

(ii) The services of experts in the field of invasive alien species representing different sectors were obtained during six workshops conducted and individual consultations.

(iii) The information gathered was used to analyze the major policy gaps with regard to IAS in Sri Lanka.

(b) Preparation of preliminary draft: Using the information gathered in the review, a preliminary draft of national policy was prepared and discussed at stake holder consultative meetings held during the years 2010 and 2011.

(c) Finalization: Final draft of the National IAS policy was presented at a consultative workshop participated by relevant stakeholders representing the directorates of the state, private and NGO sectors.

(4) Scope of the National Invasive Species Policy

- All actions taken or authorized by the Government of Sri Lanka should consider and minimize, to the extent possible, the detrimental effects caused by the introduction of non-native invasive species.
- This policy does not imply that the government of Sri Lanka will not permit introduction of all exotic species to the country. However, the government of Sri Lanka recognizes that all alien tree species are potentially invasive, caution is required until a formal risk assessment is performed
- The introduction of biological measures to control Invasive Alien Species or scientific studies on Invasive Alien Species approved by the Government of Sri Lanka is not covered by this policy.
- This policy supplements any other policy and program guidelines that may exist.

The National IAS Policy (NIASP)

Vision

Sri Lanka is free from risks posed by Invasive Alien Species

Mission Statement

A comprehensive, coordinated, and efficient system to protect aquatic, marine and terrestrial ecosystems and the domestic and native biodiversity of Sri Lanka from risks associated with IAS.

Objectives

The main objective is to establish a coordinated policy, which is implemented through an effective and efficient institutional coordination mechanism that prevents, detects, responds to, and manage the risks of IAS to the economy, environment, and society. The policy will address the following specific objectives;

1. To minimize the risks of IAS on the biodiversity, ecosystems, economy and society
2. To contribute to global efforts to control IAS through nationwide operations
3. To communicate with all stakeholders on the national position and priorities in dealing with IAS related issues
4. To keep all stakeholders concerned of the risks posed by IAS and promote stakeholder participation in responding to it
5. To promote sustainable economic development, technology transfer and enhanced productivity in relevant sectors through minimizing risks of IAS

Guiding Principles

1. Sustainable development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding practices.
2. The potential impacts of IAS on the biodiversity of ecosystems are irreversible and need urgent attention
3. Compatibility with the existing international agreements to which the country has become a signatory is a priority need
4. Cooperation at all levels of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations within Sri Lanka, SAARC region, and international arena is essential to manage the risks posed by IAS
5. Use of scientifically valid best available knowledge, engaging the public and encouraging private-public partnership is a primary need for effective management of risks associated with IAS
6. Implementing an adaptive management approach that continually improves based on the learning experiences from the outcomes of operational programs,
7. A shared vision with shared responsibility from all the citizens is a necessity to address the IAS problem

Leadership and Coordination

Leadership is a precursor to decisive and effective coordination that moves beyond sectoral and jurisdictional approaches to respond to new invaders and pathways of invasion and ensure efficient responses to threats that will change with the evolving nature of global trade and travel. Dedicated leadership with assigned tasks and coordination at central and provincial government levels is imperative for a successful response to the challenge of IAS. Following aspects are highlighted in providing leadership and an effective coordination;

Central Government:

1. Recognize IAS the second most important threat to the biological diversity of the country
2. The "*Haritha Lanka*" program of the government of Sri Lanka identifies and recognize "Strengthening Capacity to Control the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species" as a national priority.
3. Recognize the Ministry of Environment as the lead organization on issues related to IAS.
4. Establish, designate and recognize the multi-stakeholder National Steering Committee on IAS (NSC-IAS) as the key coordinating body to tackle issues related to IAS in Sri Lanka
5. Establish, designate and recognize the National Invasive Species Specialist Group (NISSG) as the body to provide technical guidance to the NSC-IAS

Joint Central/Provincial government initiatives

1. Establish a coordinating network with multiple stakeholders from provinces that represent the Departments and Agencies in the Central Government.

Provincial Governments

1. Establish an independent multi-stakeholder Advisory Committees on IAS at the provincial level

Strategic Goals

The policy is guided by four equally essential strategic goals that form the foundation of the management of IAS:

1. **Prevention** of intentional and unintentional introductions of IAS
2. **Early Detection and Rapid response** to the new invaders at pre-entry and post-entry levels
3. **Containment, Control and Eradication of** established and spreading invaders
4. **Restoring of Biodiversity, Habitats and Ecosystems** degraded due to impacts of IAS

The Policy Statements

The policy statements mainly focus on five different sections. The statements that are overlapping or cross-cutting depending on the national needs and the nature and relative importance of the invasion is presented under general section.

1. General and Cross-cutting

Key Policy Statements

1.1. Ensure public awareness on pathways of entry, invasiveness, environmental impact and management strategies of IAS
1.2. Ensure an organized risk management process, and effective enforcement of regulations and monitoring of IAS entry and control across all sectors, in consistent with national and international levels, through an effective institutional coordination mechanism
1.3. Ensure development and maintenance of a national database containing information on identification, risk assessment, invasiveness, impact, and management strategies of IAS and that the information is made available to the general public

2. Prevention

Preventing introductions is generally the far more cost effective and environmentally desirable approach for their managing IAS avoiding significant long-term economic, environmental and social costs. Prevention focuses on the application of risk analysis for the prior approval of intentional introductions.

Key Policy Statements

2.1. Recognize the need and ensure the improved capacity building of both human and physical resources among stakeholder institutions for IAS risk assessment and early warning systems..
2.2. Strengthen the capacity for inspections and enforcement at Sri Lanka's entry points for import of commodities, pathways, and vectors to verify and detect introductions
2.3. Ensure pathways-analysis is conducted and risk assessments are performed for all pathways of introductions of alien species.
2.4. Ensure development of a national database for IAS that is easily accessible to the public in order to provide information on the risks associated with IAS.
2.5. Ensure financial and logistical support for research on developing tools to predict the invasiveness of alien species, methods/technologies to limit impacts or risks of introduction of IAS to minimal levels.
2.6. Ensure international cooperation to prevent IAS introductions at their point of origin.

3. Early Detection and Rapid Response

Once an IAS has entered the ecosystems of Sri Lanka, early detection and rapid eradication is the most cost effective way of preventing its establishment and wider spread. It is essential to have integrated rapid response networks and contingency plans, and emergency funds for quarantine and eradication of such species immediately upon detection. Early action has been proven to be much more economically and environmentally effective

Key Policy Statements

3.1. Ensure development of education and outreach activities targeting public support for early detection and rapid response measures.
3.2. Ensure accurate and rapid identification of IAS
3.3. Strengthen the surveillance activities through a coordinated monitoring network in geographic areas at high risk from IAS to detect and report invasions
3.4. Promote the development of networks for rapid decision-making, communication and implementation of emergency response plans for threats from the IAS
3.5. Ensure adequate financial support for rapidly responding to threats from the identified IAS
3.6. Strengthen international cooperation to develop a network of diagnostic and taxonomic expertise in key areas to respond rapidly to threats from IAS

4. Containment, Control and Eradication

If the IAS becomes established, appropriate management responses (eradication, containment, control) are needed at the relevant geographical scale. It is important to have initiatives to restore the native and managed ecosystems to ensure that they are not re-invaded, after the threat of existing invaders are removed. The IAS should be prioritized based on their impact, invasiveness, distribution and the need for alternative management options, to ensure targeted management activities, research, and innovation to minimize their long-term costs. Risk analysis, economic analysis, and other tools can be used to select the most appropriate and cost-effective mitigation measures to be undertaken. An ecosystem approach should be used to managing IAS within Sri Lanka.

Key Policy Directives

4.1. Ensure decision making on containment, control and eradication of IAS and identification of integrated management options for IAS based on risk assessment, prioritization and stakeholder consultation
4.2. Ensure the education and partnership initiatives to generate support for eradication, containment and control plans for IAS
4.3. Encourage research on eradication, containment and control methods/technologies for priority IAS

5. Restoration of Biodiversity, Habitats and Ecosystems

The application of appropriate restoration concepts to manage the impacts of IAS to a ecosystem is a critical component of a fully functional invasive species control program. As each invasion characteristic is unique, specific restoration programs are required to be designed at the appropriate level. Restoring degraded areas to their proper ecological function would prevent infestations from IAS or to prevent re-occurrence after their control.

5.1. Ensure development and implementation of restoration plans for vulnerable ecosystems

Definitions

1. **Invasive Alien Species** means species of plants, animals, and micro-organisms introduced by human action outside their natural, past or present distribution (*based on the definition contained in the Convention on Biological Diversity Decision VI/23*)
2. **Biodiversity** means variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (*Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992*)
3. **Containment** means application of measures in and around an infested area to prevent spread of an invasive alien species beyond a defined area (*International Plant Protection Convention ISPM No. 05 Glossary of Phytosanitary Terms, 2002*)
4. **Control** means the long term reduction in abundance or population density of the invasive alien species.
5. **Eradication** means to completely remove the invasive alien species.
6. **Restoration** means a process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed resulting from the invasion of alien species
7. **Risk Assessment** means the evaluation of the probability of the introduction and spread of a pest and of the associated potential economic consequences (*International Plant Protection Convention ISPM No. 05 Glossary of Phytosanitary Terms, 2002*), where economic consequences are interpreted to include environmental consequences

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