**More details on the factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site’s ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:**

a) within the Ramsar site:

The main threats to biodiversity at U Minh Thuong National Park can be grouped into four categories: forest fire; peat dry-out; hunting; and tourism development.

In 2002, a series of devastating fires destroyed much of the *Melaleuca* forest within the national park. While fire is a natural part of the ecology of *Melaleuca* forest and accidental fires periodically occur, an inappropriate hydrological management regime at the national park led to low water levels during the dry season and drying out of the peat layer, thereby vastly increasing the severity of fires that took place during 2002. Any future forest fire at U Minh Thuong has the potential to destroy all the remaining natural *Melaleuca* forest. Therefore, Tordoff (eds.) (2002) recommends that a hydrological management regime that avoids drying out of the peat layer and maintains the hydrological value of the site as a source of freshwater for local agriculture be introduced, and that no new canals be constructed in the national park, as these will cause will further drying out of the peat swamp, increasing the risk of fire at the site, and facilitating access by poachers, who are responsible for many accidental fires. It is also important that habitat rehabilitation efforts at the national park rely on natural regeneration not plantation, in order to mitigate the risk of alien invasive species, especially the *Mimosa pigre*, water hyacinth and apple snail.

The second main threat to biodiversity at U Minh Thuong is degradation and decomposition of the peat layer and inhibition of the peat formation process, both of which result from a low water table throughout most of the year. The drying of the peat layer enhances the risk of fire in the peatswamp forest. The CARE project undertook a series of hydrological research and monitoring activities to formulate a water resources management plan for the purpose of maintaining moist peat soils all year round. Another management objective is to provide an equitable supply of water to buffer zone communities during the dry season, in compensation for the lack of access to fish and forest products within the core zone (Sage (eds.) 2004).

The third major threat to biodiversity at U Minh Thuong is illegal hunting and trapping of mammals, reptiles and birds. These activities are conducted by both local people and organised groups of outsiders. Poverty is cited as the root cause of these illegal activities, although the well developed trade in wildlife and wildlife products is a contributory factor. In addition to exploitation of wildlife, another illegal human activity is the conversion of wetlands in the core zone of the national park to agricultural land (Sage (eds.) 2004).

The final major threat to biodiversity is the planned development of tourism infrastructure in the core zone of the national park. Recent infrastructure developments include building a surfaced road into the centre of the core zone and erecting a monument there. These developments were in breach of Special-use Forest management regulations (Sage (eds.) 2004). Tordoff (2002), which recommends that all planned infrastructure developments at the national park be carefully assessed for their potential impacts on flora and fauna.

b) in the surrounding area:

There are 12 human settlements with c. 4,000 households and 21,000 people inhabiting along 38 km boundary of the U Minh Thuong National Park. Only 26 forest guards working in 8 guard stations are not enough to effectively control the illegal encroachments in the dry seasons that cause severe potentials of forest fires. The local awareness on the wetland values and functions is still low and the illegal use of wetland products from the park pose a threat to the biodiversity conservation of the site.