

Meeting Minutes

Sixth meeting of the Regional Technical Workshop of The Himalayan Wetlands Initiative



**Kathmandu, Nepal
1 – 3 September 2008**

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ICIMOD**

Organised by

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Introduction

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) organized a 'Regional Technical Workshop on the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative from 1-3 September 2008 in Kathmandu Nepal with financial support from ICIMOD and the EU Asia Pro Eco Programme. The main objective of the workshop was to discuss and formulate a draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative strategy and to develop an action framework for the next ten years. The workshop also provided a forum to discuss priority for national activities of regional importance and exchanged progress in conservation and wise use of the Himalayan wetlands. The workshop provided opportunities to regional countries to shape the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative towards a framework for action and to develop a common vision and collaborative action plan for wise use of Himalayan wetlands. The draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative strategy was revised to a format that was approved by the participants (Annex I) to be taken back to their home countries for discussion in preparation for the Ramsar Tenth Conference of Parties in Changwon, Republic of Korea in late October – early November 2008.

The workshop was attended by representatives from Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan; representatives of ICIMOD, IUCN, WWF, Wetlands International; the Representative of the Delegation of the European Commission to India, Bhutan and Nepal; and the Ramsar Regional Adviser and Regional Technical Officer for Asia-Oceania (Annex II). The main working document of the workshop 'Draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative Strategy' was sent out prior to the workshop to each participant as well as background documents with summary of earlier Himalayan Initiative meetings' outcomes in order to give an opportunity to fully become familiarized with the content of the draft 'strategy'.

First Day (1st September 2008)

Opening session

Prof. Hua Ouyang, ICIMOD welcomed all the participants of the regional technical workshop. He highlighted that this workshop is very important for the conservation and management of wetlands in the Himalayan region. Himalayan wetlands support many important ecological services to sustain lives and livelihoods in the mountains and agriculturally valuable areas downstream. The issue of climate change has become a highly relevant topic for the Himalaya region. The change in glacier mass balance will have adverse impacts on the mountain people and biodiversity. He shared that climate change has become a central theme in ICIMOD's new strategy for coming five years. He hoped that this workshop will aware decision makers in the region for the wise use of wetlands in the region in the light of global climate change. He further emphasized that the meeting will finalize the draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative strategy for its endorsement and will make important decisions.

Mr. Ananda Raj Pokharel, Nepal, the secretary of Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation highlighted the importance of the Himalayan wetlands which provide important ecological services for sustainable livelihoods. Wetlands are also home to many biodiversity and many special values to local people. The wetlands are under great threat from climate change He acknowledged the support and technical advice on conservation and sustainable use of wetlands from the international organizations; ICIMOD, IUCN, the Ramsar Convention, Wetlands International and WWF International to member countries. Through the Himalayan

Wetlands Initiative, member countries will exchange the available data to make sound decision on sustainable use of mountain resources and wetlands. Finally, Mr. Pokharel argued to have a strong partnership among Himalayan countries for the conservation and wise use of the wetlands.

Mr. Lew Young, Ramsar Convention Secretariat expressed his pleasure to represent Ramsar secretariat in this regional initiative meeting. He briefed about Ramsar history and provided overview of Ramsar perspective. Ramsar convention was signed in 1975 in Iran for the international cooperation for the wise use of the wetlands where 180 contracting parties are signatories. One thousand Ramsar sites have been declared so far around the globe. He shared that Himalayan region is of a great interest for Ramsar because of the unique High Altitude Wetlands (HAW), snow fields, glacial lakes, marshes in various river basins that provide live and livelihoods for downstream people. The region has been facing many threats and challenges. Climate change has been recognized as a major threat and other includes increase in human population, livestock growing pressure. Himalayan Wetlands Initiative meeting is being held regularly, however, the progress is relatively slow. Now it is time to show that the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative is serious. The main task of this meeting is to finalize the strategy and revise from the respective countries to endorse the strategy. It is encouraging that ICIMOD has placed the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative in the institutional strategy for next five years. In the upcoming Ramsar COP10 meeting, our intentions should be to endorse the initiative before the meeting and prelaunch of the initiative with work plan.

Mr. Valdemar Holmgren, ICIMOD outlined the objectives of the meeting. The objectives shared were:

- To discuss and formulate an integrated strategy for the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative;
- To discuss priority national activities of regional importance for the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative during the next triennium (2009-2011);
- To exchange progress in conservation and wise use of high altitude wetlands;
- To discuss and plan for Himalayan Wetlands Initiative representation during COP10;

Mr. Holmgren emphasized this workshop is not an ICIMOD, nor a Ramsar meeting, but has been organized to provide the Regional Member Countries with an opportunity to update each other on work done on the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative and to take it forward towards formal recognition. Expected outcomes of this meeting are a revised draft strategy for the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative and lessons learned concerning high altitude wetland conservation from Member Countries exchange of experiences. The improved Himalayan Wetlands Initiative strategy would lay the ground for further national reviews, to gain endorsement of the strategy document prior to the Ramsar COP10 meeting 28 October – 4 November 2008. With these points in mind, it is very important for Member Countries to establish Himalayan Initiative focal points.

The objective of the workshop was followed by introduction of participants and group photo.

Session I – Himalayan Wetlands Initiative: Regional Member Country updates

The session was dedicated to share progress, achievement and challenges faced by member countries regarding Himalayan Initiative progress and challenges.

Bhutan

Mr. G. Karma Choppel, National Environment Commission, and **Mr. Lhendup Tharchen**, Department of forests, Ministry of Agriculture, The Royal Government of Bhutan

Bhutan is new to this initiative though it has been attending few meetings. At the national level, the Nature Conservation Division is a nodal agency for wetland conservations. The division has put the note about the initiative to national planning commission. The initiative has been identified as one of the priority issue. Few sites for Ramsar designation has been identified and waiting for Government response.

Discussions:

It was discussed that Bhutan's move toward the designation of Ramsar sites is highly appreciative. Bhutan may further look for 15-20 wetlands to designate as a Ramsar site. Mr. Lhendup Tharchen informed that Bhutan is working on the inventory of Bomdeling site and also that Bhutan is in the process of establishing a Watershed Management division, which would be the focal point for wetlands. Bhutan is also aware of the issues concerning high altitude lakes in remote areas and has already started working there.

CHINA

Prof. Yang Yuming and Prof. Tian Kun: National Plateau Wetlands Research Centre

In 2006-2007, the Chinese government had setup "China National Wetland Protection Regulation" related to national High Altitude wetlands conservation. Followed national laws and regulations, related provincial governments (Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan) had issued policies and regulations on their provincial wetland conservations. 19 plateau wetland nature reserves has been newly established and 6 important wetlands has been designated as Ramsar site. Chinese government had invested 9 billion Yuan (Chinese currency) to support national wetland conservation and restoration, of which, about 100 million Yuan had been put to conserve and restore 4 Ramsar sites and 6 important wetlands in northwest Yunnan. The program like biodiversity and environment conservation education courses were given to staffs and key stakeholders including people from communities concerning wetlands by international organizations All wetland nature reserves established management offices for wetland conservation and all managers have been trained. The challenges for China in wetland conservation include: lack of public awareness on wetland conservation, lack of knowledge and assessment methodologies on high altitude wetlands, ecological function and biodiversity value and fast economic development in wetland area. China has given future priorities on strengthening regional linking, seeking more supports from international organizations, information sharing, and conservation knowledge exchange.

Discussion

It was discussed that the Chinese model is very successful and can be replicated in other countries. Prof. Tian Kun shared that capacity building in wetland related issues in west China is felt necessary. Government of China has supported to local communities and has also trained staff, managers, community about wetland and biodiversity conservation.

INDIA

Dr. S. Kaul, Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India

The National Wetland Conservation Programme identified 103 Wetlands for conservation covering 25 States. 25 Ramsar Sites had been identified covering 14 states with the total area of 677131 ha of which two sites were high altitude wetlands. More than 10 new HAWs are being processed for the designation as Ramsar sites. India has a gap on lack of appropriate training, lack of baseline data, lack of proper institutional mechanism, inadequate inventory data on HAW, lack of comprehensive management action plans for conservation of HAW, information sharing, absence of proper synergy and linkages between various countries and need for capacity building. National Environment Policy (NEP) had identified six fold action plans for the conservation and management of wise use of wetlands.

Discussion:

It was suggested to establish partnership with business sector. Private company such as water suppliers can be a good partner for wetland conservation taking the model of public and private partnership.

NEPAL

Jhamak Karki, Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Nepal

Since 2007, four sites were declared as high altitude wetlands – Rara lake (largest lake of Nepal), Phoksundo, Gokyo and Gosaikunda lakes. Of these four sites, two sites i.e. Gokyo and Gosaikunda wetlands were drafted by site management and submitted for approval process. Nepal has been able to inventories six more high altitude wetlands. Maipokhari, a mid altitude wetland, has been under declared category of Ramsar. Khaptad Tribeni Wetlands of Khaptad National Park has been forwarded to the Ministry of forest and soil conservation for approval towards designation of Ramsar Sites. The National Lake Conservation and Development Committee has been formed under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation as a political committee to work for the wetland conservation. Nepal has felt a gap in inventory of mid hill and high altitude wetlands, training and capacity building for wetland managers.

PAKISTAN

Dr. Muhammad Yasin, Director, Water Resources Research Institute (WRI)

The Pakistan presentation focused on the glacial resources of the country. Total number of Glaciers in Pakistan is 5,218 with a total glaciated area 15041 Km². 52 potential dangerous lakes have been found in Pakistan. Analysis of glaciers length and glaciers thickness showed a decreasing trend, some with up to 80-90% in length and with 50% in thickness. One of the most important wetland complexes in Pakistan are the North-west Alpine Wetlands Complex which consists of a series of high altitude, interlinked glacial, marshes, peat bogs and braided stream beds in the Yarkhun Valley. From the study, the integrated use of RS and GIS techniques with sparse in-situ data has been found helpful in analyzing glacier behavior.

Session II- Himalayan Wetlands Initiative: International organisations' updates

WWF International, Dr. Bikshan Gujja

For the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative, the Urumchi meeting is a milestone for its progress and development. WWF International has identified 200 sites which are potential to become Ramsar or national designated sites. Tens sites are transboundary for which more than one country cooperation is required. China has gone

ahead and committed to increase funding. WWF supports the regional activities to develop capacity building within communities, provide necessary data and facilitating integration of HAWs in river basin scale. In this regard, HAWs are unique sites with unique people and culture. WWF is also working on the programme 'Saving Wetlands Sky High' (2007-2010) which look into the wetlands and climate change issues and links hydrology to river basin scale. Nepal has done a very good job in Ramsar sites and designation. Further, in India, major achievements are; community based wetlands management and partnership with Indian Armed Force for conservation action at ground level. Further, climate change impact and adaptation at the downstream issues are ongoing activities with few partners. Earlier it was focused on Western Himalayas and currently on Eastern Himalayas. Finally, there is a need of at least few specific trans-boundary projects on wetlands which can give a regional nature.

Wetlands International – South Asia

Dr. C. L. Trisal

River basin level management planning for wetlands are practicing in Wular lake in India. National Wetland Policy formally designated for Nepal focussed on biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilization of resources through participatory processes. National Environment Policy of India, 2006 focussed on integration of wetlands into Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). For framework implementation, capacity building strategy has to be developed. There is a need for integration of HAWs into Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) and the associated capacity building needs within the focal countries.

Discussion

The discussion was mainly related to the need of communication among the people working in the wetland issues. Dr. Trishal responded that good communication is needed between water manager and wetland managers. Network of experts should bring together so that it would help to share the information and experiences. Dr. Mats Eriksson shared that Abu Dhabi dialogue was organised in Singapore on 23-25 June 2008 attempting to bring high level water decision makers from the region together with the purpose to facilitate a dialogue on water management across country borders in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region.

IUCN Nepal

Dr. Bishnu B. Bhandari

At regional level, Water and Natural Initiative (WANI) programme addresses water and natural issues. The outputs of the WANI include: studies on e-flow, integrated watershed management and stakeholder workshops. The second phase of WANI programme will include the activities such as, e-flow mechanism, economic valuation of water infrastructure, payment for environmental services and climate change adaptation mechanism and water dialogue. Additionally, HKKH partnership project is a three year regional initiative aimed at consolidating institutional capacity for systemic planning and management of socio-ecosystems in the Hindu Kush-Karakoram-Himalaya region (HKKH). Similarly, at national level, Global Environmental Fund/United national Development Project (GEF/UNDP) Wetland Project aims to enhance wetland values, environmental goods and services. The major activities are the assessment and valuation of wetland ecosystem services and Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) materials. There had been several public awareness activities at the Gokyo and collaborative works in the Tilicho and Gosaikunda.

Session III – Demonstration and discussion of the ‘Greater Himalayan Wetlands Information System (GHWIS)’

Mr. Sushil Pandey, ICIMOD outlined the overview of the Greater Himalayan Wetlands Information System (GHWIS) (www.ghwis.icimod.org:8081/wetlandsnew2). The project is supported by European Unions' Asia Pro Eco programme. He highlighted that the GHWIS database offers a tool to share, gather, extract and manage information on wetlands in a systematic and scientific way. The database is designed so that national partners of the member countries can submit data themselves. Three components are integrated in GHWIS: i) Asian wetland inventory database ii) A meta-database iii) An Interactive Web Mapping tool.

Mr. Kabir Uddin, ICIMOD demonstrated the implementation of remote sensing based information as part of the Asian Wetland Inventory (AWI) approach. The database consists of four levels. The first level is for river basin (such as Gange basin), the second level is at catchment level (Kosi river basin), the third level is at complex level (Dudh Kosi river basin) and fourth level is Habitat level (Kosi Tappu).

Discussion:

The discussion was mainly about the resources used, usefulness and customization of the database. Mr. Basanta Shrestha, ICIMOD explained in detail that: the database was established with freeware and open software which are virtually free of cost except human resources; Institutional will at technical level is required for such initiation; and the beneficiaries of the database are policy and decision makers and wetland managers.

DAY Second (2nd September 2008)

Session III: The High Andean Initiative – the regional initiative on wetlands from South America

Mr. Denis Landenbergue, WWF International, introduced High Andean Initiative through a documentary film which will be presented in COP10 meeting in South Korea. The film showed the wetland issues and activities in High Andes Initiative. He suggested that Himalayan Wetlands Initiative can develop similar documentary to share experiences of Himalayan region to outside people.

It was suggested that HWI can produce booklet and introduction of the strategy for distribution similar High Andean Initiative. HWI can also think about a documentary film similar to Andes.

Following the film, Mr. Denis Landenbergue in his presentation shared the regional conservation and sustainable use strategy of high Andes Wetland. The regional strategy of the High Andes is a guiding framework for regional cooperation among involved countries with a 10 years perspective (2005-2015). The purpose is the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and of wetlands' complexes (e.g.: 'páramo', 'jalca', and 'puna' ecosystems), as well as other high Andean wetland ecosystems. He suggested that the possible next step for Himalayan regional initiative could be formal endorsement by Himalayan governments at the COP10 meeting (could be announced at COP10 side event).

Session IV: Draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative Strategy with action plan for the triennium 2009-2011

Mr. Valdemar Holmgren, ICIMOD presented an overview of Himalayan Wetlands Initiative Strategy prepared by ICIMOD and based on the Ramsar strategy. Chapter three discusses about the six specific objectives and activity areas of the strategy. Chapter four provides information about the governance, funding and sustainability of the strategy.

Discussion:

Dr. Lew Young shared that the initiative has to set up some governance strategy and institutional framework to run the initiative. Additionally, the initiative should report annually to the standing committee. Funding for the initiative is limited. Himalayan Wetlands Initiative may receive 10,000-20,000 Swiss Francs (SF) at the most. At present the High Andes Initiative is receiving 20,000 SF. He hopes that Himalayan Wetlands Initiative will manage long term funding and suggested that each country should now present their general comments about the strategy.

Dr. Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD

Regarding the name of the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative, different names have been proposed in different meetings. In Bangkok meeting, it was felt that Himalayan Initiative might not give the full scope for outsider, so the name 'Himalayan Wetlands Initiative' was purposed. The discussion at that time suggested to make the initiative more inclusive for a longer period of time. The general agreement in Bangkok was Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. In the first phase of three years, the initiative could focus on the high altitude wetlands.

Dr. Biksham Guja, WWF International advised to ask each country for what purpose they like to have the strategy. How they think that the initiative will help their activities in wetland conservation. He opined that the initiative should be need-based.

Dr. Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD responded that the whole process of developing strategy has started after the request came from the member countries. ICIMOD was given the task to produce the draft strategy in Bangkok meeting.

Dr. Lew Young informed that according to the minutes from Bangkok meeting, it was agreed that ICIMOD will continue to serve as a facilitator and coordinator to develop the proposal and will be the communication point for Ramsar Secretariat on behalf of the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. Other international NGOs like WWF, Ramsar International will provide their support to ICIMOD and Himalayan countries to develop initiative. The draft strategy which ICIMOD shared is an output of what was agreed in Bangkok. He further clarified that there were several meetings earlier and the name was agreed for Himalayan Wetlands Initiative in last meeting. Dr. Lew Young further proposed that one member country could assume the role of 'chair-country' for the HI and asked if Nepal could assume that role for the time being, with consideration to Nepal being the host country for his meeting. He then requested that each country should make comments about the usefulness of the strategy.

China

Liang Haitang shared that this strategy is needed and will be very useful for the Himalayan countries.

Prof. Tian Kun shared that Strategy is very much important and necessary for many activities like information sharing, training and awareness, capacity building, and forum to discuss issues related to wetlands. The criteria for high altitude wetlands need to be defined. In high altitude, there is less population and less threat from environmental changes.

Myanmar

Tin Tun shared that the strategy is important which has to be simple and reflect country perspective considering the specific issues such as importance of wetland for downstream. Myanmar will try to endorse this Strategy for Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. Myanmar is willing to collaborate with Himalayan countries.

India

Dr. Siddhartha Kaul, shared that high altitude wetlands are very important. Certainly strategy is needed because it has a mandate to work at regional scale. We will need this strategy for regional initiative with all countries.

Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Yasin shared that Himalayan Wetlands Initiative is needed for regional collaboration and for the conservation of high altitude wetlands. He also highlighted the need for regional cooperation for collective wetland management and the strategy can help to achieve the cooperation.

Nepal

Jhamak B. Karki shared that the initiative is very useful for Nepal and suggested that focus should be on all Himalayan wetlands. Altitude of high altitude wetlands can always be defined later and for the time being we can take 3000 m for HAWs. On behalf of Nepal, he acknowledged the proposal that Nepal could be 'chair-country' for the Himalayan Initiative and said that Nepal would make a good effort to make this role productive.

WWF International

Mr. Denis Landenbergue shared that not having definite altitude gives flexibility for downstream which is less than 3000 meter.

Dr. Lew Young finally, informed that the floor has made consensus for the name '**Himalayan Wetlands Initiative**'. The broad objective of the strategy is to improve networking between countries. In terms of altitude, each country can decide which the best altitude is for them later. He further informed that the other countries in the region could become observer first and later can be included as a member.

The major comments and inputs about the strategy document by the participants are as follows:

- Himalayan Initiative Strategy (HIS) will be changed into '**Himalayan Wetlands Initiative Strategy (HWIS)**'
- Greater Himalayan region will be removed and this document will concentrate on the Himalayan region only
- The time frame of the strategy will be from 2008-2018

- 'Himalayan Wetland Initiative Strategy Framework' will be revised as 'Himalayan Wetlands Initiative' throughout the text
- 'Regional' word will be cautiously used because of the sensitiveness with the word. Hence, objective 1 is rephrased as 'Develop a database methodologies on Himalayan wetlands'
- Sub-activities under Strategic activity area will be removed for the time being from the strategy document
- Cross-boundary terms will be removed from the whole text considering the sensitiveness of this term
- ICIMOD will revise the 'Rational' section of the text under each strategic activity area.
- In introduction section, the geographical areas of HAWs including downstream areas will be included.
- Ecological functions of wetlands will be put into the introduction section
- CEPA programme will be included in the title of the Objective 5
- Whenever needed, the details of references will be including in the text

Third Day: (3rd September 2008)

Dr. Lew Young suggested a format for work plan under two columns: what countries are doing and what countries are planning to do. He further shared that the initiatives should be self-sustaining. Seed money can be provided upon request for proposal development. These initiatives need political and financial support from the government. He further informed that China, Thailand, and Iran are in the Standing committee. COP will elect new Asian country and China could be re-elected. He suggested that maybe one country from the Himalayan region can represent in the standing committee for more funding for the regional initiative.

Mr. Valdemar Holmgren proposed that each country could share what will happen with the Himalayan Initiative process when they go back home. Upon this, each country representative spoke about the possibilities.

Nepal

Nomination process is already done. The head of secretary will convince the ministry to go for the strategy.

India

Home ministry will push forward the draft to ministries.

China

We will actively push the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative strategy to the government. We will discuss the Kathmandu meeting with the Chinese government. We hope that we will get more cooperation in future from the Government.

Bhutan

We will follow up with Nature conservation division which is a nodal agency for wetland conservation. This will be taken to planning commission and then to cabinet through Ministry of foreign affair. We will follow up these activities. At technical level, we will fully support the initiative. It was suggested that if somebody visit the concerned agencies in Bhutan that would help for endorsement.

Myanmar

I will explain and describe about the strategy and Kathmandu meetings to the Director General who is a Ramsar contact person. Then it will go to the cabinet for approval.

Pakistan

I will discuss about the draft strategy to the chairman who will submit to the ministry for approval.

The strategy was again discussed and it was agreed that for the time being, the section four the governance of the strategy will be excluded from the strategy.

Dr. Eklabya Sharma informed that ICIMOD is committed about Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. ICIMOD will assign a senior focal person to look after the initiative. We have considered Himalayan Wetland Initiative as a programme and kept this within institutional strategy of ICIMOD.

Session VII – Himalayan Wetlands Initiative way forwards - Kathmandu to Changwon

There will be a side event on the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative at COP10 meeting in South Korea. The side event could be a good opportunity for Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. Some posters and information sheet can be displayed during the event. Dr. Lew Young proposed that countries can be given sometime to show their support to the initiative. Jhamak Karki proposed that it would be good to send out the outputs of the meeting to governments which will be supportive and output could be useful to the country. It would be useful to send it through secretariat.

Conclusion and recommendations

Ms. Pragati Tuladhar, Ramsar Convention Secretariat presented conclusions and recommendations of the sixth meeting of the regional technical workshop in the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative (Included in Annex I as Annex 2). It was agreed that conclusion and recommendation will be disseminated to other countries by the host country Nepal (Annex III).

Annex

Annex I
Draft Himalayan Wetlands Initiative Strategy

Separate sheet attached

Annex II

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**Regional Technical Workshop
of
the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative**

Venue: Kathmandu

01 – 03 September, 2008

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Annex III

Letter from the Government of Nepal to Countries



Government of Nepal
Ministry of Forest & Soil Conservation
Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation



08 September 2008

Dear Sir,

The Government of Nepal is happy to inform you that from 1 – 3 September 2008, representatives from the Governments of Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan with those from international organizations such as ICIMOD, IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF, met in Kathmandu, Nepal to discuss the conservation and wise use of the wetlands and wetland complexes in the Himalayan region by promoting regional collaboration between the governments of the countries sharing the region and between other relevant institutions.

This meeting was the 6th in a series under the umbrella of the 'Himalayan Wetland Initiative' which is supported by the Ramsar Convention (Resolution IX.7, Annex I.B1).

Participants at the meeting held fruitful and constructive discussion during the three day meeting and were successful in developing a draft **Himalayan Wetland Initiative Strategy** which I am happy to enclose.

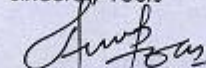
This is an important document which will lead to greater and more effective networking between the Himalayan countries to achieve the long-term goal for the conservation and wise use of the region's wetlands. As this is a draft document, it will now need formal support from each of the governments in the region.

As the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) will be held in Changwon, R.O. Korea from 28th October to 4 November, where there will be a side-event on the Himalayan Wetland Initiative, that will be an opportune moment for the countries present to give formal support to the 'Himalayan Wetland Initiative Strategy'.

As a result, the Government of Nepal along with the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and ICIMOD, would like to respectfully urge your Government to consider this Strategy and then if possible, be amenable to give formal support for this Strategy at the Ramsar COP10 in Korea.

If your Ministry have any comments on the text of this Strategy, then please convey them to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and ICIMOD so they may be able to answer any queries.

Sincerely Yours


Dr. Annapurna Nand Das

Director General and Head of the Ramsar Administrative Authority for Nepal

¹ Ramsar COP9 recognized the Himalayan Initiative as having potential for operating within the framework of the Ramsar Convention, subject to acceptance by the Contracting Parties concerned and further development and consideration at COP10.