

Ramsar Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10
Maruay Garden Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand, 14 – 18 January 2008

Meeting Report

The Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10 was attended by a total of 160 participants:

- 65 representing 20 member countries in the Asia region;
- 1 representing the Russian Federation, which has formal observer status in the Asia region;
- 2 from non-member countries (Lao PDR and Yemen) attending as observers; and
- 92 representing Ramsar's International Organization Partners (BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF), several international organizations and regional and national non-governmental organizations, attending as observers, and a number of invited experts.

The full list of participants is available for download at the Ramsar web site:

www.ramsar.org)

The parties represented were Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, P.R. China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, I.R. Iran, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. Apologies were received from Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Philippines, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The meeting discussed issues ranging from challenges in implementing the Ramsar Convention at the regional and national levels to scientific and technical issues of concern to the countries of the region, and explored opportunities to advance regional cooperation through existing and proposed mechanisms under the Convention.

On the final day, participants adopted a set of key messages and recommendations from the meeting. This is intended primarily to advise national-level planning and preparation for COP10. The document also details the key outcomes from each of the thematic discussion sessions held during the course of the meeting. This document, which is presented as a stand-alone report titled "**Key messages and recommendations from the Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10**", has been forwarded to all participants and the Ramsar Standing Committee, and is available for download at the Ramsar web site for the information of all concerned with the wise use of wetlands in Asia.

MONDAY, 14 JANUARY 2008

OPENING CEREMONY

Welcoming and opening address by Mr Chartree Chueyprasit, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand

On behalf of the Government of Thailand as the host of the meeting, he welcomed all participants to Thailand and to the meeting. He noted that, with the COP10 theme of "Healthy wetlands, healthy people", this preparatory meeting provided an opportunity to build understanding among members countries on the relationship between peoples' lives and wetlands, and how to ensure the maintenance of healthy wetlands. He stressed the need for sufficient ecological information to support the conservation and sustainable development of wetlands.

With regards wetland management, he noted that there are a number of countries which face the same challenges as Thailand. One such challenge is the conflict between the development and conservation needs at the local level. Thailand has responded to this by establishing mechanisms to enable local people to participate in the decision making process for all matters that affect their communities. A fine example of such work includes the Sam Roi Yod Wetland located in the Khao Sam Roi Yod National Park, Prachuab Khirikhan Province. At this site, the local people participate fully in the decision making process to formulate the direction of the development and resource conservation. This was made possible through the designation of the area as a Ramsar Site and the application of the Convention's wise use principle and suite of guidance tools. Thailand has applied the same principle to other wetland areas as part of the process leading to Ramsar site designation.

He concluded by drawing the attention of the participants to the planned excursion to the Bang Pu Nature Study Center in Samutprakan Province. He noted that the Center is a fine example of ongoing work to promote the conservation of wetland resources in Thailand, and credited the success of the Centre to the cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Welcome remarks by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention

He welcomed the accession of Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and Republic of Iraq since COP9, and noted that Yemen is just about to finish the accession process at national level. He expressed his hope that Afghanistan, Lao PDR, Bhutan, Maldives, Brunei, Oman, North Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkmenistan would accede in the near future.

He expressed the appreciation of the Ramsar Secretariat to the Government and people of Thailand for hosting this important meeting in preparation for COP10, and took the opportunity commend the Government of Thailand for the steps taken to enhance their implementation of the Convention. He made particular mention on the recent designation of Sam Roi Yod wetland, which he noted is an outstanding case of

successful participatory process. He took the opportunity to thank the Republic of Korea for accepting to host COP10 and for taking important steps to prepare for this conference.

He expressed his satisfaction on the progress regarding the implementation of the Convention in the Asia region, and noted in particular the efforts taken by the Government of the P.R. of China to enhance the quality and coherence of China's implementation policy, programmes and activities related to wetlands. He also thanked the countries and organizations that had provided the necessary funding to organize this meeting, namely, the Government of Thailand, the Swedish SIDA, the Republic of Korea, Star Alliance (and particularly Mr. Alistair Carthew), BirdLife International UK, BirdLife Cambodia Program and WWF Nepal.

He noted that the role of the Ramsar Convention in contributing to sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear; much of the impact of the changing and increasingly extreme climate on our future world will be felt through wetlands and the water they receive, transport, purify and store. The impacts are already being felt in the increasing frequency of natural disasters – notably, floods, droughts and fires - in both the developing and developed world, which often affect the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities. Maintaining, managing and restoring wetlands are thus crucial components of any successful response to climate mitigation and adaptation. He expressed concern that whilst wetlands are amongst the most valuable ecosystems in terms of the services they provide to people, they are also still the most rapidly degrading ecosystems in the world. He attributed this to the fact that, in national and international decision-making processes, sufficient attention is not being paid to the role and importance of wetlands, both inland and coastal, when decisions are taken for other purposes, including climate adaptation, and that this is leading to the loss of the valuable water-related and other ecosystem services they provide. He also noted that all countries face an ever-increasing burden of responding to the decisions and processes of many different agreements, and yet the resources and capacity to do so remain severely limited.

Additionally, he expressed concern that, at both national and international levels, decision-makers and planners are continuing to work in parallel and sectorally rather than cross-sectorally in their responses to different commitments - MDGs, climate mitigation, different MEAs etc. and that continuing such a way of thinking and operating will likely hinder the achievement of these different goals and targets.

He concluded by calling on each member country to promote a culture of partnership; to create a framework inclusive of all overlapping government institutions, that coordinates with donors, civil society and the private sector to lead a national environmental partnership - an umbrella organization - empowered politically and by law to guide and respond to issues of atmosphere, land and water management, so that

our world's wetlands, forests and other ecosystems can continue to deliver their essential services to us all as we adapt and respond to the changing climate.

Presentation on the objectives of the meeting and adoption of the agenda by Mr Tobias Salathe, Ramsar Secretariat

He explained that regional meetings were held in between global meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP), and served to provide an opportunity for member countries and other interested parties, to:

- exchange experiences, know-how and views;
- focus on specific problems in the region;
- take stock of their achievements, and progress in implementation;
- caucus and prepare common positions on specific issues for the upcoming COP; and
- define further efforts needed to keep Ramsar at the forefront of international instruments to cope with the environmental problems of the 21st Century.

He asked that participants, in their deliberations during this meeting, consider the following:

- How best to deliver the Convention's mission to use all wetlands wisely at all levels: local, national, international?
- What operational procedures are best at Asian, sub-regional, national and local level to deliver this?
- How to develop wetland communication, education, participation and awareness as a supporting tool for the implementation of wise use?
- How to apply the new scientific and technical guidance in preparation under the Convention?

Overview of the achievements and challenges for the implementation of the Convention in the Asia Region: the international perspective by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention

He explained that in the lead-up to COP10, several preparatory meetings had taken place, or are scheduled to take place, as follows:

- Final meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) for the 2005-2008 triennium: 28 January -1 February 2008;
- Meeting of the Standing Committee Sub-Group on COP10 in advance of the 36th and 37th meetings of the Standing Committee
- Standing Committee (SC36): 25 – 29 February 2008;
- Standing Committee (SC37): 2 – 6 June 2008; and
- Regional meetings in all the six Ramsar regions (regional meetings for the Americas and Africa have already taken place; regional meetings are planned for Oceania (April 2008) and Europe (May 2008).

He touched on issues he felt that the Asia Contracting Parties (CPs) needed to discuss and address in their preparations for COP10, particularly with regards dealing with technical resolutions, and national reporting. He also noted other issues to be deliberated at COP10 which CPs may want to consider, including the legal status of the Secretariat; Secretariat structure and staffing; the Convention budget; synergies with other MEA's; outreach of the Convention; the further development of the Convention; and the new strategic plan.

He concluded by listing some priority issues that he felt Asia CPs should pay particular attention to, as follows:

- National issues: Adopt wetland policies and national strategies for wetlands; establish participatory and multidisciplinary National Wetland Committees; and where possible, restore wetlands.
- Synergy issues: Improve coordination between the Convention Focal Points at the national level; get closely involved with other sectors and include the broad water and biodiversity dimensions in wetland conservation.
- Site issues: Prepare and implement comprehensive management plans for Ramsar sites and other key wetlands in their territories; carry-out wetland inventories; establish a coherent regional network of wetland sites; designate under-represented wetlands to the Ramsar List; and where they exist, work to remove sites from the Montreux Record.
- Other issues: Enhance or build partnerships with the UN system and its specialized agencies; the Asian Development Bank; Regional Economic Commissions; River/Lake Basin Organizations; Parliaments; and Municipalities.

Presentation of the draft Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014 by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention

He explained that the draft Strategic Plan, to be adopted at COP10, responds to current and emerging challenges facing wetlands and their wise use. It is designed to contribute to delivering the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG7; the outcomes of the 5th World Water Forum, the 2010 Biodiversity targets and the 2012 targets for Marine Protected Areas; responding to Climate Change; and to the decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

The Plan identifies and addresses issues relating to the management of the Convention, namely the required mechanisms, resources, and capacity, as well as issues related to membership and measuring the performance of the Convention.

The Plan contains a number of strategies for:

- Wetland inventories, wetlands assessment, and wetland monitoring
- Policies, legislation, practices, growth and development of institutions
- Increased recognition of the significance of wetlands in terms of the ecosystem services that they provide, such as water supply, coastal protection, climate change mitigation/adaptation, food security, and poverty reduction

- Ramsar site designation and management
- Reinforcing and expanding partnerships, and enhancing the sharing of expertise and information
- Implementing wetland CEPA (Communications, Education, Participation and Awareness)

He called on all CPs to review the draft Plan once it has been endorsed by the Standing Committee at their 37th meeting in June, and in advance of COP10.

Ramsar Implementation in Thailand by Dr. Kasemsun Chinnavaso, Secretary General, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEPP)

He explained that wetlands cover an area of 36,616.16 square kilometres or approximately 7.5% of the total land area of the country. A large proportion of the Thai population has continued to depend directly on wetlands for their livelihoods and culture. Threats to wetlands include encroachment for cultivation and livestock rearing; pollution from toxic and other chemical substances in soil, groundwater, and surface water; deterioration of water quality due to the increases in nutrients and reduction of dissolved oxygen; excessive tourism and recreational activities; and the use of illegal fishing techniques.

Thailand has established the following institutional mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention:

- **National Committee on Wetlands Management:** established by the National Environmental Board, and chaired by the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, with the ONEPP serving as its Secretariat. Membership includes the relevant government organizations, non-governmental organizations, and experts. The Committee develops common guidelines and coordinates action on wetland management through the formulation of a national wetland policy; and provides support and monitors the implementation of the national policy.
- **Wetland Technical Working Group:** comprising wetland experts, scientists, the relevant government organizations, and non-government organizations. The Working Group provides technical and scientific advice to the national committee and acts as the preliminary technical review panel for wetland management initiatives in the country.

He then outlined the steps that the government of Thailand has taken prior to, and after ratification of the Ramsar Convention in 1998, as follows:

- **Before ratification:** Formulation of policies and action plans on wetland management, national inventory of natural wetlands; and formulation of management plans for specific wetland sites.

- **After ratification:** Compiling a national lists of wetlands; obtaining the Cabinet's decision on the list of wetlands in Thailand and proposed conservation measures; promoting coordination among the relevant agencies; nomination of 11 Ramsar sites; development of a National Wetland Action Plan; participation in COP8 and COP9; and currently serving as one of the representatives of the Asia Region on the Ramsar Standing Committee.

He explained the steps that Thailand had taken to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation including through its participation in the National Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Project (MWBP). He concluded by explaining their future goals as follows:

- Establish community national wetland networks by 2012
- Nomination of at least 3 Ramsar sites/year
- Enhance the capability of at least 50% of communities and local administration organizations to conserve and use wetlands wisely within five years.

PLENARY SESSION: PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TRIENNIUM 2008 - 2011

Ramsar Secretariat Report on the implementation of the Convention in the Asia region: up-date and progress since COP9 by Ms Pragati Tuladhar, Assistant Advisor for Asia, Ramsar Secretariat

- **Membership:** She reported that three countries had joined the Convention since COP9: Kazakhstan, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iraq, and that the accession process is ongoing in Yemen. She has also received information that the accession instruments and Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) for Afghanistan, Lao PDR and Bhutan have been prepared and were awaiting approval from their respective governments. She has received communication from Maldives, Brunei, Oman, North Korea, and Qatar about their intention to accede to the Convention.
- **Wise of wetlands:** The Republic of Korea, P.R. of China and Kyrgyzstan report progress in developing national wetland policies and wetland legislation; wetland inventories have been carried out in some Asian countries, especially in response to the need to monitor migratory waterbirds to address the avian influenza crisis.
- **Wetlands of International Importance/Ramsar sites:** At present, there are a total of 215 Ramsar sites in Asia; 17 of these were added to the Ramsar List since COP9 - Indonesia (1), Republic of Korea (5), Nepal (4), Thailand (1), and China (6). The Secretariat has been informed about 10 nominations in the pipeline: Thailand (1), Nepal (1), Bangladesh (3), Sri Lanka (1), Kazakhstan (1), and Pakistan (3). She also noted that many of the CPs in Asia had yet to send updated RISes, as requested by the Convention: Updates have been received from Kazakhstan (1), Philippines (1), Malaysia (1), China (6) and Iran (21), but a further 71 have yet to be received. 12 sites from 5 Contracting Parties in Asia

- have been listed on the Montreux Record (MR): India (2), Iran (7), Jordan (1), Kyrgyz (1) and Azerbaijan (1). Positive development has been reported in the 2 MR sites in India, 1 of the sites from Iran, the 1 site from Kyrgyzstan, but none of these Parties has officially requested that the sites be removed from the Record.
- **International Co-operation:** Ongoing Regional Initiatives - Ramsar Regional Centre for Central and West Asia; and the East Asian Australasian Waterbird Flyway Partnership. Regional Initiatives in preparation - Ramsar Regional Centre in Korea; and the Himalayan Initiative.
 - **Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF):** Each year since COP9, about 16 proposals have been received for the SGF, however only about half of them were officially endorsed by Administrative Authority, which is a prerequisite for submission. Asia CPs that have received funding under the SGF are: Tajikistan and Jordan (2005); Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan and Nepal (2006); and China (2007). Two projects have been funded under the Evian Initiative: Beung Kung Lung Ramsar Site, Thailand; and Jagdishpur Reservoir Ramsar Site, Nepal.

Presentation of the Work Plan of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, including National STRP Focal Points by Ms Rebecca D’Cruz, STRP Vice-Chair & Regional Networking Member for Asia

She began by explaining the structure and composition of the STRP: 12 full panel members comprising 6 regional network members and 6 thematic experts who are appointed by the STRP Oversight Panel under the Standing Committee; representatives of all the five International Organization Partners (IOPs); and other invited experts. She went on to explain the *modus operandi* of the Panel as follows:

- Meetings once a year
- Inter-sessional technical meetings, as needed
- Working groups for each main thematic area; 9 in total for this triennium
- The web-based STRP Support Service
- Full-time STRP Support Officer based at the Secretariat – Dr Edgar Kaeslin

She outlined the products coming through to COP10 from the work of the STRP (the full list of STRP products for COP10 is attached as Annex 1 to this report),

She presented a summary of the outcomes from the first meeting of the European STRP National Focal Points (STRP NFPs), held in Austria in August 2007. She noted that 24 of 29 CPs in Asia have appointed STRP NFPs, and reiterated the need for CPs to ensure that their STRP Focal Points are fully capable of delivering their tasks, and fully engaged in the work of the Panel.

Reception Dinner hosted by the Government of Thailand

During the reception dinner, Ramsar Site certificates were handed-out for the six sites from China (Fujian Zhangjiangkou National Mangrove Nature Reserve, Guangdong Haifeng Wetlands, Guangxi Beilun Estuary National Nature Reserve, Hubei Honghu Wetlands, Shanghai Yangtze Estuarine Wetland Nature Reserve for Chinese Sturgeon

and Sichuan Ruoergai Wetland National Nature Reserve), one from Republic of Korea (Muan Tidal Flat) and one from Thailand (Sam Roi Yod Wetlands) by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention.

TUESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2008

PLENARY SESSION: WETLANDS AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Lessons learnt from Wetlands, Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction initiatives by Mr Chen Kelin, Wetlands International

He began by outlining the importance of wetlands in Asia for as a source of livelihoods - wetlands in Asia are located within highly populous landscapes; wetlands are central to food security, particularly for the poor and underprivileged; wetlands play a significant role in reducing livelihood vulnerabilities in disasters; there is strong evidence of the success of community-led management based on traditional knowledge; and there are intensive tradeoffs between economic development and maintenance of ecosystem services, often mediated by hydrological processes. In this regard, he noted that it is important to create and collate information on the linkages between wetland degradation and poverty to inform decision-making processes.

The objectives of the Wetlands International “Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project (WPRP)” are: Support to demonstration projects; Seed funding to develop integrated proposals; and Collation of Best Practices and Lessons Learnt. The initiatives currently being implemented under the WPRP project are:

- *Mainstreaming wetlands in development planning*, through incentive systems that promote livelihoods through conservation (e.g. biorights for mangrove conservation in Indonesia), and the use of economic valuation as a tool for policy and decision making (e.g. in Loktak Lake, Harike Lake, and Chilika Lake in India)
- *Wetlands and water resources management*, through water allocation for the maintenance of wetland services and dependant livelihoods (e.g. Loktak Lake and Chilika Lake in India); integrating wetlands into river basin management; and a focus on water and sanitation.
- *Getting knowledge and information to the right people*, through targeted publications on the socioeconomic values of wetlands; and wetlands, poverty reduction and sustainable tourism.
- *Capacity building*, through training courses for wetland managers on integrated wetland management planning; curriculum/courses developed for managers and policy makers on e.g. wetlands & water resources management, wetland valuation, policy setting & advocacy, and financial mechanisms (Bio-Rights & Savings for Change)

The key lessons learnt to-date from the implementation of the WPRP project are:

- Successful wetland conservation and wise use is crucially linked to the management of livelihoods.
- Stakeholder-led adaptive management, which integrates community knowledge, is an effective way to reduce conflicts and promote sustainable development.
- Mainstreaming wetlands into developmental planning helps address the development – conservation tradeoffs and identify win-win strategies. Inter-sectoral approaches focusing on water sanitation are required for addressing wetland conservation and human health.
- Integrating the ecological requirements of wetlands into water management is important for maintaining ecosystem services for livelihoods.
- Innovative use of incentive systems can help integrate conservation and livelihood objectives.
- Enhancing the knowledge base and effective dissemination of information on the interlinkages between wetlands - livelihoods strengthens management and policy making.
- Wetland conservation as an adaptive response augments livelihood security against the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.
- Working with development sector partners is critical!

PLENARY SESSION: WETLANDS AND AGRICULTURE, INCLUDING FISHERIES

Presentation on rice paddies and wetland conservation in Asia by Prof. Gea-Jae Joo, Pusan National University, Republic of Korea

He provided an account of the history of rice farming in Asia; the loss of wetlands due to the expansion of rice paddies to meet the growing demands for food and nutrition; and the increasing threats to rice paddy systems as a result of intensive use of fertilizers and herbicides. He stressed the importance of rice paddy systems as a human-made wetland habitat type under the Ramsar Convention, including as a habitat for birds, and providing food for birds and local people. He went to explain some recent initiatives in Asia, led by the private sector in Korea, Japan and China, to introduce rice farming techniques that help improve biodiversity in the rice fields of East Asia. He explained the concept of winter-flooded rice paddies which is widely practiced in California, Korea, Japan, Spain and France. Organic rice-farming, he explained, is gaining increasing acceptance in some countries in Asia for its positive impact on both agricultural returns and biodiversity conservation. He concluded by outlining some key considerations on the issue of a draft resolution on rice paddies, including the need to increase the level of understanding about the scientific, socio-economic, and cultural values of the rice paddy system; and the need to explore the differences in farming and management practices between developed and developing countries.

An assessment of the importance of aquatic biodiversity in rice-based ecosystems in Lao PDR by Ms Penroong Bamrungrach, FAO

She reported the results of a survey undertaken to assess the catch of aquatic biodiversity from rice-based ecosystems and its contribution to household consumption in 3 provinces in Lao PDR. The principal objective of this study was to influence policy relating to aquatic biodiversity, i.e. to optimize the use of aquatic biodiversity from rice-based ecosystems. The survey revealed the following:

- Around 2/3 of all aquatic organisms consumed/used by rural households comes from rice fields; fish alone makes up 50% of this. Amphibians are very important in the diet of the local people - more than 90% of these are harvested from rice-field habitats.
- Rice fields contribute far more to people's livelihood and food security than just rice alone. Rice field habitats including the rice fields themselves, natural ponds/trap ponds in rice fields and rice field streams/canals are an important habitat for aquatic animals which in turn are very important as a source of food for the people in rural areas.
- This rich aquatic biodiversity in rice fields, in terms of the number of species and their abundance, is dependent both on maintaining the connectivity of aquatic waterways and good rice management practices.

PLENARY SESSION: AVIAN INFLUENZA, WETLANDS AND WATERBIRDS

Introduction by Dr Taej Mundkur, Deputy Wildlife Coordinator for Avian Influenza Infectious Disease Group/EMPRES Animal Health Service, FAO

He provided a comprehensive account of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and the mechanisms for its spread, including transmission modes; the cycle of Avian Influenza viruses; the potential role of birds (and their products) in the transmission of avian diseases (including AI viruses); the potential routes for virus movement into and out of farms; and other potential routes for virus movement.

He detailed the major impacts of HPAI (on Asian wetlands and waterbirds), as follows:

- Socio-economic impacts on local people and the poultry industry;
- Destruction of important protein sources and impacts on local food security;
- Death of adults and children in some countries;
- Decline of waterbirds; higher risk to threatened species;
- Confusion due to lack of good information on issues;
- Declining support by some national governments and local people for wetland and waterbird conservation;
- Ineffective and destructive responses implemented/proposed which have a negative impact on waterbirds and wetlands; and
- Impacts on tourism and related industries around wetlands.

He explained how Ramsar Resolution IX.23 "Highly pathogenic avian influenza and its consequences for wetland and waterbird conservation and wise use", adopted at COP9 in Uganda had provide opportunities for synergy and collaboration with CPs of the

CBD, CMS and AEWA for concerted action. He went on to outline the needs at the Asia regional level, to respond to the spread of HPAI:

1. Knowledge
 - a. Migratory strategies and routes of migratory waterbirds
 - b. Distribution and congregatory sites
 - c. Adequate AI surveillance
 - d. Information sharing of research developments and surveillance activities
2. Capacity
 - a. Established national programmes for waterbird marking and monitoring
 - b. Adequate national skills for waterbird migration and monitoring research
 - c. Appropriate AI surveillance programmes for migratory waterbirds
3. Regional tools and collaborative mechanisms
 - a. Communication links on issues of AI and knowledge sharing
 - b. Colour-marking schemes for different waterbird groups
 - c. Sustainable funding of research and monitoring
4. Awareness raising of policy makers, managers and the public
 - a. Wide range of AI transmission factors (potential of wild bird involvement)
 - b. Need for enhanced research and surveillance to identify high risk areas and species
 - c. Negative impacts of culling of wild waterbirds and destruction of habitats

He listed global and regional initiatives underway to improve coordination and support, and provided a summary account of each:

- Global: UN Scientific Task Force of Avian Influenza and Wild Birds; and Global Avian Influenza Network For Surveillance (GAINS); and
- Regional: Asia-Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza; East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership; and Central Asian Flyway Action Plan

He concluded by outlining the opportunities provided by COP10 to build on Resolution IX: 23, by considering:

- Effective management and response measures to ensure the conservation of habitat and waterbirds;
- Establishment of expert groups with ornithological expertise to strengthen national capacity to advice and guide strategy development and responses;
- Strengthening of flyway cooperation and rapid sharing of information with neighbouring CPs;
- Improved synthesis of the current status of knowledge;
- Collation of and availability of guidance and guidelines;
- Encouraging translation and adaptation of information into local languages;

- Reviewing the role of the Scientific Task Force and other regional groups to support the Convention; and
- Resource mobilization to support countries in need.

Report from the working group meeting in China by Mr Doug Watkins, Wetlands International - Oceania

He reported the outcomes from the Beijing meeting of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership held in November 2007. The Partnership focuses on improving management and conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats. The meeting proposed actions to better understand the linkages between avian diseases, particularly avian influenza, and domestic birds. It identified several actions that need to be taken in this regard, including improving understanding of migratory routes, and stopping sites, and improving surveillance of wild birds.

Discussion

Dr Mundkur led a Q&A session in response to the issues raised in his presentation:

Q1: What are the 'species' of migratory birds that are likely to be involved in spreading AI?

A1: At this time, it is not possible to identify any single species as being a likely carrier of the HPAI H5N1, and more work is needed on this.

Q2: What diagnostics laboratories exist in the region?

A2: Each country has the capacity to diagnose H5N1, or is developing it. In addition, through the OFFLU network (FAO-OIE), samples are sent to a regional laboratory in Geelong, Australia for diagnosis. In some countries university labs are also undertaking analysis.

Q3: What are the treatments apart from Tamiflu?

A3: It is not considered appropriate to answer the question, without input from experts in the field.

Q4: Is there a connection between poultry feed and disease transmission?

A4: If the virus contaminated the poultry feed, then it is possible that this could lead to the spread of the disease, especially if the viruses were not destroyed due to heat or through drying.

Q5: There was no clear evidence of migratory birds that spread viruses over long distances and it is important to empower CPs with clear information of how HPAI spreads, so they can help communicate this to government agencies, the poultry business world and others. While studying migration routes of birds was important, it was more important to make it clear we are not assuming that migratory birds are the cause of transmission; wild birds and wetlands are not responsible for spreading disease.

A5: HPAI H5N1 is largely a poultry-related disease, but it is possible that wild birds can carry the virus over short distances, and pose a potential risk. However, the focus should be on improving the poultry producers. As it has been established that both domestic birds and wild birds were affected by the virus, it is necessary to look more

closely at how poultry is managed around wetlands and what the risks are associated with this. Additional resources are needed, not only for research but also for control measures; it is important for this work to continue on all fronts at the same time.

PLENARY SESSION: RAMSAR AND OTHER WETLAND-RELATED REGIONAL INITIATIVES IN ASIA

The role of regional initiatives by Mr Tobias Salathe, Ramsar Secretariat

He explained the rationale for regional initiatives, i.e. that they are a mechanism for several countries in a (sub)region to work together to enhance implementation the Convention, and make common activities more effective. There are two types of Ramsar Regional Initiatives: (a) **programmes** of coordinated actions among the countries making up a specific (sub)region (e.g. East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership); and (b) regional **centres** for wetland training and capacity building (e.g. West and Central Asian Ramsar Centre in Iran).

He explained that the call for proposals for continuing or new regional initiatives has been sent out to all CPs via Diplomatic Note; the deadline for submission of these proposals is 31 March 2008, after which each proposal will be evaluated by SC37 for submission to COP10. He stressed that funding for regional initiatives from the Ramsar core budget is intended as an incentive and to aid short term start-up; it needs to be complemented by regional funding sources. He explained that the main criteria for evaluating submissions for the 2009-2011 triennium are that the initiative is:

- operational and ready to start (or continue);
- corresponds to regionally-perceived needs;
- has no geographical overlap with existing initiatives; and
- has local and regional support, including financial support.

1. Ongoing Regional Initiatives under the Ramsar Convention

1.1 Ramsar Regional Centre for Central and West Asia, Iran by Ms Yasaman Rajabkhah

She explained that the establishment of the Centre was approved through Resolution VIII.41 (Valencia, 2002) and that it is hosted by the Government of the I.R. of Iran. The overall goal of the Centre is to enhance the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region through training, research, advocacy and public awareness programmes. The specific objectives of the Centre are to:

- Ensure that the major stakeholders involved in wetland management have the knowledge, skills and ability needed to effectively conserve wetlands and promote their wise use.
- Enhance communication, cooperation and networking to allow the effective dissemination of knowledge and information and sharing of experience.
- Improve the conservation and wise use of wetlands through facilitation and promotion of appropriate research programmes.

- Raise the awareness of key stakeholders about the importance of the conservation and wise use of wetlands and promote public participation in wetland management.
- Encourage the accession of non contracting parties of the region to the Ramsar Convention.
- Develop the structures and capacities necessary to build an active, robust and viable Centre.

She went on to outline the steps taken to establish the Centre: adoption of Centre's TOR; development of the Centre's Strategy and Action Plan; and the establishment of the Collaborative Management Board. The Collaborative Management Board is responsible for monitoring the work of the Centre, based on the work plan and to meet the targets set out in the Centre's strategy. She concluded by detailing some of the challenges faced in managing the Centre, as follows:

- Financial stability of the Centre
- Low participation of National Focal Points
- Political issues in the region
- Language Barriers

1.2 East Asian-Australasian Waterbird Flyway Partnership by Mr Doug Watkins, Wetlands International

He explained that the Partnership was launched in Bogor, Indonesia in 2006, and involves government, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), NGOs, research bodies, business, and donors. The key features of the text of the Partnership are:

- Voluntary (non-binding) arrangement with endorsement;
- Open to governments, international non-government and intergovernmental organisations, private sector; and
- 5 Objectives: (a) Network of Sites of international importance – Developing and implementing activities; (b) Public Awareness – Importance of birds for local communities; (c) Research and Monitoring – Enhancing and sharing knowledge; (d) Capacity Building – Training and Management; and (e) Protecting Endangered Species – Flyway approach to recovery

The Partnership is implemented at three levels:

- **Flyway Level:** international coordination and support
- **National Level:** national partnerships in each country
- **Site Level:** partnerships of stakeholders surrounding the local sites

He noted that there are 22 countries in the East Asia-Australasian flyway, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, P.R. of China, DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, Russia, USA, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor. There are a total of 63 Network sites, located in 10 of the 22 flyway countries. 54% (or 34) of these are also Ramsar Sites.

2. Ramsar Regional Initiatives in preparation

2.1 Proposed Regional Initiative for Asia by Mr Hwang Suk Tae, Head of the Task Force for Ramsar COP10, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea

He explained that with the challenges to wetlands brought about by rapid economic development, population increase and urbanization in East Asia, there is a need to enhance regional cooperation through information sharing and capacity building for the sustainable management of wetlands. With COP10 being held in Asia, there was a good opportunity to launch a concrete regional initiative in East Asia.

The **goals** of such a Centre would be:

- Contribution to enhanced public awareness
- Assistance to decision makers and practitioners
- Promotion of scientific and technical cooperation
- Support for active and informed participation of stakeholders

The **principles and strategies** that would govern such a Centre are:

- Avoid duplication and increase synergy
- A catalytic role for China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea
- Develop working partnerships with specialized bodies, international institutions, and NGOs
- Build networks for information and knowledge sharing
- Use advanced technologies, e.g. Information Technology

Activities undertaken by the Centre would include:

- Capacity Building Programs: Training programs, workshops, conferences, and technical assistance, for decision-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders
- Participatory Action Research: On current wetland-related issues in East Asia, to develop the most appropriate policy measures and practices
- Dissemination of Information, Knowledge and Skills: Development of database using advanced information technology

The **organizational structure** for the Centre would comprise:

- Board of Directors: Final decision making body, representatives from the Korean government, Contracting Parties in East Asia, Ramsar Secretariat, international organizations etc.
- Advisory Committee: Advice and guidance on scientific and technical matters, comprising approximately 9 experts
- Center: Implementation of work plans, backed by Korean institutions (NIER, NIBR, NFRDI)

The **financial resources** to manage the Centre would come from:

- Annual grant from the Wetland Foundation that will be founded and managed by the Gyeongnam provincial government
- If possible, grants and donations from Asian Contracting Parties, the public and private sectors and NGOs
- Possibly, symbolic assistance from the Ramsar Convention

The Government of the Republic of Korea welcomes the active participation of the Contracting Parties of East Asia in the establishment of the Centre; and requests the strong support of the participants of Asia Regional Meeting for this initiative. The draft resolution for the establishment of the Centre will be submitted to the Standing Committee no later than April 2008, for consideration at SC37 and eventually, for approval at COP10.

2.2 Himalayan Initiative (Regional Cooperation for Wise Use and Conservation of Wetlands in the Greater Himalayan Region) by Dr Eklabya Sharma, ICIMOD

He explained that Greater Himalayan Region contains 9 large river basins, and that the 1.3 billion people living in these basins depend on these rivers for their livelihood. The aim of the Himalayan Initiative is the "Wise use and conservation of the wetlands and wetland complexes in the Himalayan-Hindu Kush and Pamir-Alay region by promoting regional cooperation and collaboration." Preparations are underway for presentation and approval of this initiative at COP10, including the finalization of strategy and action framework documents for the cooperation. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) based in Kathmandu, Nepal, has agreed to continue facilitating the process with support from Wetlands International and the Ramsar Secretariat.

3. Proposed Regional Initiatives

3.1 Opportunities and benefits of an Amur Ramsar Regional Initiative by Ms Tatiana Minaeva, Russian Coordinator, UNEP-GEF Amur/Heilong Project

She explained that the watershed of the Amur-Heilong basin covers an area of 2,129,700 km² across the territories of China, Mongolia and Russia. 80.3 million people live within this watershed and depend on its natural resources for their livelihood. The area is rich in biodiversity resources. Threats include: changes in hydrology (large dams, small dams, water transfer, drainage in the watershed); direct disturbance to wetland habitats (agriculture in floodplains and a variety of impacts in the highlands); contamination (existing and abandoned industries, agriculture and urbanization, transportation esp. oil and chemicals); infrastructure development (linear construction etc); non-sustainable forestry, fisheries, harvesting of non-timber wild (medical plants, mushrooms), and hunting. There are 14 Ramsar sites in the region; two of them are transboundary sites. She explained that recognition of this as a Ramsar Regional Initiative would provide the political mechanism necessary to:

- Integrate the results of the wide range of activities into national and international policy and practice;
- Enhance the coordination of activities;
- Integrate the outcomes into decision making;
- Enable the sharing of responsibility for ecosystem management and conservation; and
- Allow for comprehensive development planning based on the wise use principles of the Convention.

It would also provide the framework and institutional structure to:

- undertake joint actions on the ground;
- share expertise and project outcomes;
- integrate the project's activities into national frameworks; and
- fundraise effectively for wetlands conservation and wise use.

She concluded by outlining the next steps to getting this initiative recognized under the Ramsar Convention:

- A concept paper to be developed and circulated to interested countries (including the Republic of Korea, Japan, and North Korea).
- A trilateral workshop to be organized with government-level representation.
- Include the initiative in the list of Ramsar Regional Initiatives under Development, at COP10.
- Following COP10, to undertake activities aimed at further developing the proposed Ramsar Regional Initiative in the framework of the UNEP/GEF project.
- Submit proposal for the establishment of the Amur-Heilong Ramsar Regional Initiative to COP11, for adoption.

4. Lessons learnt from other Regional Initiatives

4.1 Lessons for Wetland Management from the UNEP-GEF Project: "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand" by Dr Vo Si Tuan

He explained that the project involved 7 countries - Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam – and in excess of 400 institutions. The project aimed to address challenges faced by habitat loss and degradation, over-exploitation of fisheries, land-based pollution, and regional coordination. Common actions were undertaken at demonstration sites, from which lessons were drawn for application in other sites across the region. Lessons learnt included:

1. Regional Network of the Demonstration Sites Operated Efficiently

- Periodic Mayors' round-tables as fora for senior government officials and site managers
- Information exchange through project website
- Site visits
- Regional meetings at the demonstration sites

2. Demonstration Site Network of the SCS Project

- Network expanded by the involvement of self-funded projects
- Projects funded by different sources can work together, especially in sharing information & experiences

3. Involvement of Related Stakeholders in Development of Fisheries Refugia

- Using knowledge of local fishermen to identify spawning and nursery areas – interpretation between local and scientific languages
- Participation of local people in development and implementation of management plans and regulations
- Formalisation of local agreements by government

- Development of a regional refugia network

4. Cross-sectoral Management to Ensure Coordination, Mechanism for Multiple-use of Coastal Habitats

- Management Boards with participation of related government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities
- Integration of activities under demonstration projects with other related actions at local levels
- Maintenance of coordination mechanisms for management of habitat and resources beyond the project

5. Involvement of the Private Sector in Habitat Management

- Appropriate government policy for private sector in habitat management
- Profits for investors through sustainable use of resources
- Integration of private sector and local communities

6. Law Enforcement through Support of Local Government and Participation of Communities

- Appropriate mechanism and legal basis for local involvement
- Financial support from local government
- Mobilising funds from other sources
- Training on knowledge of habitats and enforcement skills
- Public awareness actions to gain community support

7. Changes of Awareness and Habits for Encouraging Local People in Managing Land-based Pollution

- Involvement of local people in planning and implementation
- Clear responsiveness in sustainable development
- Tools for management (legal basis and commitments, monitoring)
- Enhancement of public awareness

8. Integration of Traditional Wisdom into Management Plans

- Possibility to integrate traditional wisdom into management practice at large scales
- Promotion of participation of local communities in enforcement

9. Supplementary and Alternative Livelihoods as a Tool for Improvement of Habitat and Resources Management

- Finding alternative activities that do not directly harm the habitats
- Training on techniques and improvement of quality & prices of products
- Reasonable use of nature living resources that are recovered by effective management

10. Sustainable Tourism Based on Coastal Habitats

- Planning with participation of related stakeholders
- Sound scientific information required for planning
- Enhancement of consensus and awareness on sustainable management
- Appropriate mechanisms for enforcement
- Encouraging responsiveness of the tourism sectors

4.2 The UNEP-GEF Siberian Crane Wetlands Project, by Mr Crawford Prentice, CTA

He explained that the goal of the project is to “Secure the ecological integrity of the network of critical wetlands needed for the survival of the Siberian Crane, migratory waterbirds and other globally significant wetland biodiversity in Asia.” Under the project, actions are taken at 3 levels – (a) addressing threats at site level, (b) addressing broader measures for wetlands and waterbird conservation at the national level, and (c) coordination and activities at the flyway level. The project has its origins under the CMS MoU on Siberian Crane, and cooperates with other international initiatives such as the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership and the Central Asian Flyway Initiative (CMS/WI).

The project supports and contributes to the delivery of the Ramsar Convention through: technical assistance, e.g. for the designation or extension of Ramsar sites; wise use of wetlands; promoting international cooperation; site protection; management planning; stakeholder participation in wetland management; capacity building for community-based organizations; environmental flows; and enhanced waterbird monitoring.

He concluded by noting the following successes and lessons learnt:

- The project has probably had the greatest success at site level, with strong support from the national environmental authorities (direct responsibility);
- Site activities are being mainstreamed by national authorities/regional governments for sustainability;
- Apparent shifts in attitudes regarding stakeholder participation at sites;
- National level changes to policy, legislation etc often requires inter-agency cooperation, which is challenging;
- Central government support is important for flyway network development;
- Sharing of approaches, data formats between flyways;
- Sharing of information is important for international cooperation, there is a need to make information more available; and
- Regional public awareness efforts have been successful (e.g. World Wetlands Day, World Migratory Bird Day), and are a suitable activity for flyway networks, support conservation.

WEDNESDAY, 16 JANUARY 2008

The participants spent the day visiting the Bang Pu Nature Education Centre, located on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand, some 37km away from the capital city, Bangkok. This education centre is joint venture between WWF Thailand and Royal Thai Army to celebrate the 72nd birthday of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand. The centre receives financial support from the Toyota Motor (Thailand) Company Ltd.

The area comprises mangroves and mudflats, which support a large population of resident birds, endangered migratory shorebirds as well as wintering gulls. The main

objective of education centre is to provide nature education to local secondary school students by involving them in field activities. In addition, the centre has educational materials for nature lovers, birdwatchers and tourists.

The visit began with a brief overview of the Centre and its activities by the Centre Manager. Participants then enjoyed a tour of the nature exhibition hall and visitor centre. This trip provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the importance of mangrove conservation. A walk along the nature trail and a stopover at a bird hide added value to visit, and allowed participants the opportunity to get acquainted with the habitats.

The visit, and the delicious Thai lunch, was kindly arranged by the Government of Thailand.

THURSDAY, 17 JANUARY 2008

PLENARY SESSION: WETLANDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Report from the Secretariat on Climate Change and Wetlands and the UNFCCC COP in Bali by Mr Anada Tiega, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention

He explained that much of the impact of the changing and increasingly extreme climate on our future world will be felt through water – in some cases too much in the wrong time and place; elsewhere too little or none where we need it. Regrettably, less well recognized is the crucial role wetlands also play in the global water cycle, through holding and processing the water that we need. Maintaining, managing and restoring wetlands are therefore crucial components of any successful response to climate mitigation and adaptation.

He noted that insufficient attention is being paid to the role and importance of wetlands, both inland and coastal, in national and international decision-making processes, including those related to climate adaptation. It is increasingly being recognized at the global level that well-managed wetlands can provide a key contribution in the development and implementation of realistic National Adaptation Plans for Action (NAPAs) in all national and regional economic development settings. However, we are still, at both national and international levels, continuing to work in parallel and sectorally rather than cross-sectorally in our responses to different commitments – MDGs, climate mitigation, different MEAs etc.

What is needed is a much more effectively-integrated and collaborative partnership approach, so as to apply all our respective knowledge and capacities to tackle these urgent matters. The issue of responding to climate change provides a clear opportunity to catalyze and bring together such an approach.

He concluded by urging each nation to create a framework inclusive of all relevant government institutions, that coordinates with donors, civil society and the private sector to lead a national environmental partnership to deal with climate change issues.

Special session on peatlands including a presentation on the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy by Mr Faizal Parish, Global Environment Centre and Ms Tatiana Minerva, Russian Federation, and a presentation on Wetlands in Indonesia by Mr Sulis Sulistrianto, Ministry of Forestry, Republic of Indonesia

Mr Parish provided an overview of the Global Assessment on Peatlands Biodiversity and Climate Change, financed by UNEP-GEF and coordinated by the Global Environment Centre and Wetlands International. He went on to explain the distribution of, and services provided by peatlands. Peatlands are found in almost every country and cover a total area of about 4 million km², primarily in the boreal, subarctic and tropical zones. The services provided by peatlands include livelihood support, carbon storage, water regulation and biodiversity conservation. The main threats to peatlands include drainage for agriculture and forestry and associated peat fires, peat extraction, road construction, inundation, contamination and pollution.

With regards their role in climate change, he explained that peatlands are the most space-effective carbon(C) stocks of all terrestrial ecosystems: in the (sub)polar zone, peatlands contain 3.5 times, in the boreal zone 7 times, in the tropical zone 10 times more carbon per ha than other ecosystems. While covering only 3% of the world's land area, peatlands contain 550 Gt of carbon in their peat; this is equivalent to 75% of all atmospheric C, equal to all terrestrial biomass, and twice the carbon stock in the forest biomass of the world. Peatland drainage and fires are currently the largest single source of carbon released to the atmosphere from the land use sector.

Climate change scenarios suggest major changes in temperature, precipitation and other phenomena that will have significant impacts on peatland carbon store, GHG flux and biodiversity. The impacts on peatlands will be regionally differentiated – such as melting of permafrost; inundation and salinisation in coastal zones or desiccation in mountain and steppe regions. Human activities in many cases increase peatlands vulnerability to climate change. The most vulnerable peatland types (tropical peat swamp forests, permafrost, mountain and coastal peatlands) require urgent adaptation measures. An integrated approach to the management of peatlands is required, which includes:

- A wise use approach to integrate protection and sustainable use;
- Strict protection of intact peatlands;
- Optimising water management in peatlands (i.e. reducing drainage) – this is the single highest priority;
- Restoration of peatlands, which can generate immediate benefits;
- Effectively involving local communities in activities to restore and sustain the use of peatland resources;

- Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the emerging carbon market for peat swamp forest conservation and restoration – this can generate income for local communities;
- Ensuring that climate mitigation measures such as hydropower or biofuel production are not established on peatlands as these can have a serious negative impact on the ability of peatlands to store carbon, regulate GHG flux and conserve biodiversity.
- Developing plans for integrated peatland management at the local, national and regional level, as appropriate.
- Enhancing awareness and capacity, addressing poverty and inequity, and removing perverse incentives to tackle the root causes of peatland degradation.

ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative (APMI)

Established by the 10 ASEAN member countries in February 2003, this initiative is governed by the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy, which was endorsed the ASEAN Ministers in November 2006. Funds are currently being raised to support action for the first implementation period 2007-2011, and the preparation of National Action Plans is underway.

The objectives of the APMI are:

- To enhance understanding and build capacity on peatland management issues in the region;
- To reduce the incidence of peatland fires and associated haze in the region;
- To support national and local level implementation activities on peatland management and fire prevention; and
- To develop a regional strategy and cooperation mechanisms to promote sustainable peatland management.

Under the framework of the APMI, the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy 2006-2020 (APMS) has been developed. The APMS has 13 Focal Areas and 25 Operational Objectives, including inventory and assessment, capacity building and awareness; policies and legislation; fire prevention, control and monitoring; conservation of peatland biodiversity; regional cooperation; and actions to secure financing for the initiative.

Ms Minerva presented an update of the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP), adopted through Resolution VIII.17. The GGAP defines the main threats, problems, emerging issues and priorities for actions in peatland conservation, and provides an approach and methodology to address these, according to the following priorities:

- Knowledge of global resources
- Education and public awareness on peatlands
- Policy and legislative instruments

- Wise use of peatlands
- Research networks, regional centres of expertise, and institutional capacity
- International cooperation
- Implementation and support

The implementation of these guidelines is coordinated by the Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CC-GAP). CC-GAP has undertaken the following activities: evaluated the progress of GAP implementation; undertaken gap analyses on peatlands conservation and wise use activities; identified emerging issues and priorities for actions during the next triennium; and assisted countries with technical knowledge and awareness materials development (e.g. Wise use of mires and peatlands (2002), which provides information on peatlands for decision makers; Peatlands Wise Use Statement (2002), which provides a short overview of the wise use principles related to peatlands in all the Convention languages, and additionally in Finnish and Russian; brochure "Peatlands – Do You Care" (2005), which explains peatland functions and values, and identifies emerging issues on peatlands; and Global Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate change (2007).)

Emerging issues for peatlands in the Asian Region:

- Climate change causes peatland degradation and loss, especially in highlands, drained and coastal areas;
- Peatlands and water: highland peatlands as water sources, valley/coastal peatlands and flood mitigation;
- Peat fires;
- Peatlands and biofuel;
- Overgrazing in highland peatlands;
- Impact of mining on highland peatlands; and
- Lack of basic knowledge and public awareness.

Mr Sulistrianto presented an account of wetland management in Indonesia, with a focus on the management of peatlands. Indonesia has 40.5 million ha of wetlands. The National Wetland Policy in Indonesia has 5 main objectives:

- Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Wise use
- Based on benefit and Priority
- Community based
- Integrated management
- Good Governance

The vision adopted by the government for wetland management is "To safeguard the functioning of wetlands as a life support system, representing the wealth of current and future generations, and to manage it optimally for the community."

The mission is:

- To enhance water quality management for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands;
- To strengthen inter-sectoral and inter-regional coordination in managing and utilizing wetlands wisely and sustainably;
- To enhance awareness, capacity, and the active role of public community, private sector and the government in managing and utilizing wetlands wisely and sustainably;
- To enhance understanding among stakeholders for the wise and sustainable management and utilization of wetlands;
- To collate data and information, and to develop science and technology to manage and use wetlands wisely and sustainability, taking into account traditional wisdom; and
- To enhance and strengthen international and regional cooperation for the wise and sustainable management and utilization of wetlands.

He went on to describe the steps taken in-country to enhance networking on wetland management, and the legal and regulatory measures taken to ensure the protection and wise use of wetlands. He concluded by detailing some of the key challenges faced in managing wetlands in Indonesia, as follows:

- Wetland conversion: Many wetland areas are under threat from conversion to settlement/housing and farming lands. To address this, efforts are being made to get wetlands factored into development planning frameworks.
- Ineffective enforcement of laws.
- Institutional weaknesses in the wetland management system: unclear roles and responsibilities among stakeholders; lack of understanding among stakeholders of the importance of integrated planning; lack of human resources; and lack of coordination among stakeholders.

Summary report from the “International Conference on Managing Wetlands for Sustainable Development: Innovative Research and Lessons Learned, Effective Partnerships, and the Need for Co-Management, held on 9-11th January 2008, Trang, Thailand” by Wetlands International - Thailand

Attended by 200 participants representing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and America, the objectives of this conference were:

- To report research findings, new developments, interact and exchange experiences; and
- To discuss and identify opportunities for cooperation in wetland management, technology and policies for sustainable development

The conference provided a valuable opportunity to establish a database of knowledge, and enhance collaboration in wetland management. The conference also identified

opportunities for longer-term collaboration including training programs and joint-research projects between institutions.

PLENARY SESSION: WETLANDS AND HUMAN HEALTH

Introduction to the “Wetlands and human health” technical report prepared by the Ramsar STRP, by Ms Rebecca D’Cruz

She provided a report on the status of the preparation of the technical report on “Wetlands and Human Health” being undertaken by the STRP, and scheduled for delivery in 2008. In providing this mandate to the STRP, CPs recognized that the inter-relationships between wetlands and human health have not previously been considered and addressed under the Convention, but that such issues have great significance for livelihoods, poverty reduction and human well-being.

The overall frame for the work is ‘illness and wellness’. Thus the review covers:

- the ways in which wetlands can and do maintain or enhance human health and well-being through livelihood provision;
- relationships between wetlands and human sanitation;
- how and which types of wetlands negatively affect human health and well-being, and
- how these can be ameliorated with minimized damage to wetland ecological character (but also including trade-offs between ecosystem maintenance and human disease risks).

Amongst issues affecting human health which are covered by the report are:

- declines in water quantity and quality;
- water-related diseases;
- water-borne pollutants (chemical and microbiological);
- disease emergence related to small and large dams;
- increased land-use in marginal landscapes leading to closer disease contacts;
- implications of climate change for human health issues associated with wetlands (including drought and flood events);
- economic costs of human health aspects associated with natural disasters affecting wetlands;
- human nutrition and wetlands; and
- wetlands as sources of beneficial drugs (including for local communities).

Discussion: Elements for a COP10 draft Resolution on “Wetlands and Human Health”

Key points raised during the discussion were:

- The need to enhance linkages between the Ramsar Convention and the World Health Organization (WHO);
- South and West Asian countries face serious epidemics associated with shallow-water habitats e.g. diarrhoea and dengue.
- Upstream-downstream issues have to be considered in dealing with health impacts, but this requires proper legal and regulatory frameworks.

- Health of local people depends on good nutrition and healthy ecosystems.
- In the United Arab Emirates they face problems from eutrophication, algal blooms, and pollution from sewage discharges – these have to be addressed because they pose a health problem.
- The Ramsar Convention should work on developing bioremediation tools for the management of health impacts.
- The annual transboundary haze caused by the burning of millions of hectares of forest in South-east Asia poses a serious health risk; more than ½ million people were hospitalized during the 1997 fires. This should be addressed in the draft resolution on wetlands and human health.
- In an effort to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases, health authorities have destroyed vast areas of wetlands. Well-managed natural wetland systems are actually able to control the spread of water-borne diseases.
- In order for it to be effective, collaboration with WHO has to happen at all levels – at the global, regional, and national levels. The Ramsar Administrative Authorities should approach the people working on human health and water supply to ensure that wetlands and watershed management issues are taken into account in their policy and planning frameworks.
- There is a need to integrate wetlands and human health issues into the discussions on climate change impacts; this should happen first at the country-level before it can be fed into discussions at the global level.
- Wetlands provide an important wastewater treatment service, but thought needs to be given to the carrying capacity of wetlands to treat waste.
- Linkages should be made with FAO because there is a direct link between human health and nutrition. New diseases have emerged as a result of the change in people’s diet from the conversion of wetlands to agriculture, for example.
- The Ramsar Convention should work on coastal developments and their impact on marine health and human health, including the health-related effects of saline intrusion.

Presentation on the Iraqi Marshes by Mr Hasan Janabi, Advisor, Ministry of Water Resources, Iraq

He provided an update of the Iraqi Marshlands project, and began by explaining the importance of the marshlands in terms of its unique formation and the services it provides e.g. as an economic resource for local people, in climate regulation, cultural and historical heritage, and as a major habitat for biodiversity conservation. 5 million people depend directly on these resources and services. He went on to explain the threats facing the marshlands e.g. from draining, and water diversion and control projects.

The objectives of the restoration project include:

- Justice for displaced communities

- Economic development, and social & environmental rehabilitation
- Job creation and improvement of living conditions
- Ecological integrity and protection of life
- Preservation of archaeological and heritage sites
- Designation of the marshes as a national park recognized within international conventions

The restoration project has been successful in that:

- it is sustainable;
- it has achieved its objectives;
- it is compatible with the needs of local community and conforms to international standards; and
- it is an integral part of a regional/national plan of development

However, challenges remain in the following areas:

- Flooded areas
- Quality & availability of water
- Basic services
- Legislations and institutional framework
- Coordination

PLENARY SESSION: RAMSAR SITES

Presentation on information needs, data management and official reporting for Ramsar sites by Ms Alexia Dufour, Regional Affairs Officer, Ramsar Secretariat

She explained the information needs for new designations to the Ramsar List, and provided a detailed account of the information necessary to complete the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) and prepare the boundary map for each site. She also elaborated the needs as far as updating the RIS, every six years, as required by the Convention. She reported that of the 215 Ramsar Sites in Asia, 6 were still without an RIS, while updated RISes had yet to be submitted for another 70-80 sites. She called on the relevant CPs to take steps to address this shortcoming.

Presentation on detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character at Ramsar sites by Ms Rebecca D'Cruz

She explained the context of Article 3.2 of the Convention, through which each CP has agreed that it "shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference, and to report any such change, without delay, to the Ramsar Secretariat".

She went on to explain the definitions of "ecological character" and "change in ecological character", adopted by the Parties at COP9 (2005), as follows:

“Ecological character is the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterise the wetland at a given point in time.”

“Change in ecological character is the human-induced adverse alteration of any ecosystem component, process, and/or ecosystem benefit/service.”

Contracting Parties are expected at the time of designation to describe the site using the approved Ramsar Information Sheet in sufficient detail to provide a baseline for subsequent monitoring to detect any changes to these ecological and hydrological attributes. Contracting Parties should have put in place monitoring and risk assessment programmes for their Ramsar sites. They should also have established a mechanism by which the outcomes of these monitoring programmes, when they detect human-induced change or likely change in the ecological character of a site, will be reported to the national Administrative Authority responsible for the Convention. That Authority must then report such information, without delay, to the Ramsar Secretariat.

She concluded by explaining the role and functioning of the “Montreux Record”, which is the principal tool of the Convention for highlighting those sites where an adverse change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur and which are therefore in need of priority conservation action.

Local Conservation Groups & Wetland IBAs by Mr Simba Chan, BirdLife International Asia Division

He explained that Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) are organized, independent groups of voluntary individuals who work in partnership with relevant stakeholders, to promote conservation and sustainable development at Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and other key biodiversity sites. IBA LCGs in Asia started when the Asia IBA programme was launched 1996. Currently, there are 109 LCGs working in 80 IBAs (43 of which do not have protected area status) in Asia. This figure does not include LCGs in India and Japan.

Why Use the IBA LCG approach for wetland conservation?

- Many wetland IBAs lie outside the protected area system.
- Many wetland IBAs have insufficient resources for effective sustainable management by the government.
- Many wetland IBAs are surrounded by villages and their natural resources are used extensively by local people.
- LCG members live in or near the wetland IBA. They can conduct regular patrols and monitor biodiversity and threats at low cost. They can provide awareness about advantage of conservation and encourage their community members to become involved in the protection of their wetland and wildlife.

The IBA LCG approach can deliver benefits in four main areas:

- conserving biodiversity

- supporting rural livelihoods
- strengthening governance for natural resources management
- building grassroots civil society

He also touched on the link between IBAs and Ramsar sites: 1,111 wetlands IBAs in Asia meet the Ramsar criteria for designation as Wetlands of International Importance, however, very few IBA sites have been designated as Ramsar Sites. One possible reason for this is that local stakeholders do not understand the added-value of Ramsar designation; increasing the understanding and winning the support of local stakeholders is essential to address this limitation and enhance site conservation.

“Welcome to COP10” - Reception Dinner hosted by the Republic of Korea

FRIDAY, 18 JANUARY 2008

PLENARY SESSION: FINANCING WETLAND CONSERVATION

Trends in international environmental financing: implications for wetland conservation by Mr Joseph D’Cruz, UNDP-GEF with Ms Hitomi Rankine, UNESCAP

Mr D’Cruz outlined some key issues as follows:

- The Asia-Pacific region has rapidly-expanding economies, but incidences of rural poverty continue to be high.
- There is increasing demand for wetland ecosystem services.
- The challenge is to find sources of funding for wetland conservation and wise use.
- There is a need to develop a strategy for wetland financing, which combines and sequences sources of funding.
- The wetland community, as a group, needs to decide how to exploit financial sources in the region.
- The largest and most sustainable source of funds exists within countries; the wetland community needs to engage actively in national planning and financial planning processes to be able to tap this.
- It is very important for the Ramsar Administrative Authorities to talk to other agencies in the country, especially those which have more resources.

In the discussion session that followed, participants touched on the issue of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), and noted the following:

- The region is lacking behind other regions in the area of payment for ecosystem services (PES). Exceptions include some national and watershed level schemes.
- A lot of discussion ongoing about PES, but wetland ecosystem services are not yet in the picture.
- PES can potentially be a big source of revenue for wetlands.

- Interest in PES is mounting and the wetland community needs to engage actively in policy and methodology discussions relating to PES.
- PES schemes as a way to get funds – e.g. can work out PES at the local level which is then compensated by other users; models exist for this, e.g. for upstream-downstream wetland services and IWRM.
- The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) web site (<http://www.unece.org/>) has more information on this.
- UNESCAP has developed PES models and initiatives.
- Many mechanisms for PES exist in South Asia, but these have not been well documented.
- Important to understand the concept of PES, i.e. that wetlands provide services and we need to start making the case that these services have values and costs associated with them.
- Two things need to happen:
 - At the international policy level, we need to get the issue of wetlands and PES on the agenda for discussion; and
 - The Ramsar Convention has to give priority to this issue.

“Water schools” – an initiative by the Danone Group for the Ramsar Convention by Mr Christophe Lefebvre

He explained that the “Danone Evian Fund for Water” is a ten-year partnership with the Ramsar Convention, the main objectives of which are (a) Informing people about the Ramsar Convention; (b) Motivating and increasing awareness of decision makers; and (c) Educating and training actors. The Fund has been instrumental in providing support for the production of a range of communications tools, including the materials produced and disseminated for World Wetlands Day, and exhibition materials to raise awareness about the Convention and wetlands. The Fund also rewards best initiatives in support of wetland conservation through the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards which are given out every three years in conjunction with each COP. The “*Les Rencontres d’Evian*” is a series of seminars intended for Ramsar Administrative Authorities to build their capacity in the implementation of the Convention. The Fund also helps foster international cooperation by providing support to the East Atlantic Network, the East Asian-Australasian Waterbird Flyway Partnership and the Closed Seas Deltas Network. Training courses that have been organized include training in freshwater inventory techniques, cross-border cooperation, and Ramsar Site managers’ training.

The Fund also supports the implementation of water resources management programmes with local communities, such as a sustainable water resource management operation in North Cambodia for the health of populations and the development of village communities, and has facilitated the designation of quality water source protection zones, such as in the high altitude zones. Through its partnership with the WWF “Living Waters” programme, the Fund has supported initiatives in South America, Central Asia, West Africa and South-east Asia.

He then introduced a new initiative launched under the Fund - *Les écoles de l'eau* (water schools). The objectives of this programme are:

- Contributing to the management and restoration of wetlands for local economic development and the wellbeing of local populations.
- Promoting the transfer of know-how on sustainable wetland management and wise use of natural water resources.
- Encouraging wetland governance for equitable access to the natural resources.
- Promoting the involvement of local populations, and integrating capacity building into the wetland management process by training, education and awareness actions.

To-date, wetland schools projects have been launched at 3 Ramsar sites: Beung Khong Long lake in Thailand (with WWF); Jagadishpur reservoir in Nepal (with BirdLife International); and Jaaukanigas in Argentina (with WWF).

He concluded by informing participants about the criteria for project selection under the Fund, as follows:

- Ecological value of the project: biodiversity, habitats, ecosystem, landscape, etc.
- Economic value added by the project
- Social and cultural value added by the project
- Population involvement into the project
- Management skills for sustainable development
- Replicability of the management experience

How to develop financing mechanisms for Ramsar by Mr Tobias Salathe, Ramsar Secretariat

He explained the operation of the sole financial mechanism available under the Ramsar Convention – the Small Grants Fund (SGF) – which relies in voluntary donations from CPs and chronically has very few funds available, despite regular fund-raising efforts by the Secretariat. Since 2006, and after the Standing Committee has allocated all available funds to the best-rated project proposals, the Secretariat forwards all the proposals for projects that are eligible but do not receive funding under the SGF, to potential donors, whenever an opportunity arises. This has resulted in financing being secured for an additional 1-2 projects per year. He stressed that this is however, not a satisfactory situation.

He called on the participants to consider the following:

- discuss specific funding needs for wetland projects and activities in the Asia region;
- identify potential type of projects, programmes and activities most in need of funding;
- identify potential donors, partner organisations and funding sources in the private sector; and

- develop a proposal for the next triennium, possibly to be finalised at COP10.

Discussion: How to increase our financial capacities

The Convention needs to develop incentive measures, especially for local communities, to encourage them to be involved in wetland conservation initiatives. Such measures exist within other conventions e.g. GEF has a Small Grants Fund specifically for community-based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs. At the local community level, assistance may be available from bilateral/multilateral donors. From a donor perspective, it is useful to be able to secure co-financing from other sources and to show a good track record of work.

There is increasing interest in financing for ecosystems and some of the services they provide, e.g. water. But the link between wetlands and water has not been clearly made. We need to do more work in terms of raising awareness about wetland ecosystem services. This is the responsibility of all those involved in Ramsar work, and should be done at all levels. There is a corresponding need to develop a communications strategy linked to fundraising.

On the need to develop financing mechanisms for Ramsar in the Asia region,

- Other regions have specific financing mechanisms, e.g. Wetlands for the Future (Americas) & Swiss Grant for Africa, but none in Asia.
- Funds in the Small Grants Fund (SGF) not sufficient, and is a voluntary contribution under Ramsar, not part of the core budget.
- Priority for funding has been for Ramsar sites or potential Ramsar sites, whereas the Convention calls on parties to promote the wise use of ALL wetlands.

Working towards an “Asia Endowment Fund”

- To consider developing a proposal for the next triennium which details:
 - Specific funding needs for priority wetland projects and activities in the region; and
 - Potential donors, partner organizations and funding sources available within the private sector.
- Key message: The Asia region and the Ramsar Convention in general, need to take funding more seriously. Perhaps it's time the Convention developed its own financial mechanism.

PLENARY SESSION: PREPARATION FOR COP10

Presentation by South Korea on preparations for COP10 by Mr Hwang Suk Tae, Task Force for Ramsar COP10, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea

He explained about the preparations underway in the Republic of Korea for COP10, which will take place at the Changwon Convention Center (CECO) in Changwon City, from 28 October 2008 to 4 November 2008 (8 days). COP10 will be hosted by the

Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea. Approximately 1,500 participants are expected, comprising delegates from around 160 Contracting Parties, international organizations, and representatives of NGOs.

The organizational structure for the COP comprises the following:

The Ramsar COP10 National Committee, which comprises central & local government officials, wetland experts, and NGOs;

The Ramsar COP10 Preparation Task Force Team, which includes the Central T/F Team and the Gyeongnam T/F Team; and

The Ramsar COP10 Preparation Advisory Group, which comprises wetland experts and NGOs.

He went on to provide detailed information about the conference venue and associated facilities, including allocation of space for side events and exhibitions, and provisions for side trips and visits to wetland sites. He encouraged participants to access the web site at: www.ramsar2008.go.kr which will be operational from May 2008, to get detailed information and regular updates.

He also explained about the planned Ramsar Regional Centre for East Asia which will be established in Gyeongnam, the host province of COP10. The Centre will run programmes aimed at capacity building, participatory action research, and dissemination of information, knowledge, and experiences in East Asia Korea. He called on CPs from the Asia region to strongly support this initiative.

He concluded his presentation by explaining the process for developing the Changwon Declaration, to be adopted on the final day of the COP. The objectives of the Declaration are: (a) To identify the urgent challenges to sustainable management of wetlands and to call for enhanced efforts by parties to address these, and (b) To provide a vision for the effective and efficient management of wetlands. The draft of the Declaration will be submitted to the Standing Committee Sub-group on COP10 for consideration during its meeting in early June 2008. He called on Asia CPs to provide their active support and feedback on the draft once it has been prepared.

Presentation on the COP process by Mr Tobias Salathe

He explained that, within the Ramsar Convention, COP 'decisions' are formally referred to as "Resolutions" or "Recommendations"; however, in recent COPs, only "Resolutions" have been adopted.

Only the Standing Committee or a Contracting Party can submit a draft Resolution (DR) to the COP. The Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP) drafts scientific & technical Resolutions and guidance, while the Secretariat assists the Standing Committee in drafting administrative, policy and procedural Resolutions. All these must then be approved by Standing Committee before COP consideration. The Standing Committee

can decide to not submit a DR and/or its annexes to COP. During the COP itself, the Standing Committee (acting as the Conference Committee) may, exceptionally, agree to bring forward an “Emergency Resolution” on an unforeseen or emerging issue. He went on to explain the structure of a resolution, and outlined some guiding principles for Draft Resolutions (DRs).

He also explained that, at the COP itself, CPs will receive three different kinds of documents: (a) Draft Resolutions - only DRs (and their annexes) are subject to negotiation and adoption by Parties at the COP; (b) Information papers – these provide background information, rationales etc. supporting topics which are the subject of a DR or implementation progress reports: Secretary General, Standing Committee & STRP Chairs, regional and global implementation reports derived from Parties’ National reports. Information papers are not discussed at the COP; and (c) COP Rules of Procedure – this is adopted at start of each COP.

The timelines for the development and submission of COP10 DRs are:

- STRP meets (14th session) 28 January – 1 February 2008 to finalise its work on DRs and guidances to go to COP10.
- Standing Committee meets: 26-29 February (36th session) and 2-6 June (37th session).
- All COP10 DRs must be approved by Standing Committee at its 37th session in early June 2008.
- All documents for Standing Committee must be with the Secretariat 40 days before the meeting, i.e. at the latest by 24 April.

After Standing Committee approval in June 2008,

- All DRs (and annexes) are final-edited by the Secretariat and translated into the three official Convention languages - English, French, Spanish
- All DRs are provided formally to Contracting Parties 3 months prior to the COP. i.e. by 27 July to permit time for national consultations and preparation of delegation briefings
- Final circulation (of some Information Papers etc.) may be closer to COP.

He concluded by explaining the *modus operandi* of the Ramsar COP, including official participation, the process for negotiating and approving Resolutions, and mechanisms to resolve disagreements between Parties on the contents of draft resolutions.

Presentation of the New National Reporting format by Ms Alexia Dufour, Regional Affairs Officer, Ramsar Secretariat

She explained that National Reports are a very important instrument under the Convention in that they serve as a tool for Contracting Parties to measure progress with regards implementation of the Convention at the national level; and allow the Secretariat and STRP to monitor and assess the implementation of the Convention,

identify and capture lessons learnt, and identify priority needs and challenges to advise future actions.

She went on to describe the new National Reporting format in detail. She reminded Parties that the deadline for submission of the national reports for COP10 was 31 March 2008, and that each National Report should be accompanied by a letter from the Ramsar Administrative Authority in the country. She concluded by explaining how the information contained within the national reports would be analysed and used to develop the regional overviews for COP10.

Presentation on the forthcoming Asian Wetland Symposium by Ms Viet Hong, Viet Nam Environmental Protection Agency

She explained that the AWS is a regional forum, convened to provide a single platform for discussions on issues, approaches and priorities in wetland management in the Asia Region. The first AWS was held in Otsu and Kushiro, Japan in 1992; the second in Penang, Malaysia in 2001; and the third in Bhubaneswar, India in 2005. Outcomes from the AWS have provided valuable guidance to the Ramsar COP5, COP8, and COP 9. In recognition of the valuable contribution afforded by the AWS, Resolution IX.19 (COP9, Uganda, 2005) "Requests Contracting Parties to facilitate the support to and participation in the Asian Wetland Symposium by a wide range of stakeholders, including but not limited to local governments, NGOs, the private sector, and local communities."

The 4th AWS will be held in Hanoi, Viet Nam, from 22-25 June 2008, hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Viet Nam. Co-organizers of the event are the Ramsar Centre Japan and IUCN-Vietnam, while funding support is provided by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan, Wetlands International, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF), Japan, and the Hokkaido River Disaster Prevention Research Center, Japan.

The theme of the 4th AWS is "Wetlands – the heart of Asia". Discussions will focus on 8 broad themes:

- Creating healthy wetlands and effective wetlands management
- Transboundary cooperation in wetlands management
- Wetlands and sustainable agriculture
- Integrating wetland conservation into development
- Wetlands and sustainable livelihoods
- Education for wetlands
- Cultural heritage and wetland management
- Climate change and wetlands

A special session will feature the wetlands of Viet Nam. More information on the AWS2008 is available at: www.aws2008.net. She concluded by extending an invitation to all participants to join them at the AWS2008.

Presentation on the Pakistan Wetland Conservation Programme by Dr Richard Garstang, National Programme Manager/Chief Technical Advisor, WWF Pakistan

The Pakistan Wetlands Programme is managed by the Federal Ministry of Environment of Pakistan. He explained that there are more than 225 significant natural wetlands in Pakistan and that there is not one wetland that is not, at least seasonally, utilised by human communities. The development and implementation of the Pakistan Wetlands Programme is funded by the UNDP-GEF and implemented by WWF-Pakistan. Some key features of the Planning Phase include:

- Adopted the Ramsar Convention's international definition of Wetlands.
- Utilised the Ramsar Convention's standards for the identification of globally important wetlands.
- Set up a Pakistan Wetlands GIS and utilised the data dictionary of the Asia Wetlands Inventory.
- Followed a strongly consultative process in project formulation, effectively sidestepping provincialism.
- Incorporated a strongly integrated approach in the Programme design.

The objective of the Programme is "To conserve globally significant wetlands *biodiversity* in Pakistan while alleviating poverty", and it aims to do so by:

- Creating and maintaining an enabling environment for effective and sustainable conservation of natural wetlands at federal, provincial/territorial and local levels.
- Implementing sustainable wetlands conservation at four representative sites that will serve as replicable models for subsequent nationwide wetlands conservation initiatives.

He went on to describe in detail the Programme's activities as well as highlights and achievement of the Programme to-date.

PLENARY SESSION: DISCUSSION ON THE ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO THE ASIA REGION FOR COP10

This session was chaired by Ms Nirawan Pipitsombat, as one of the representatives from the Asia region on the Ramsar Standing Committee. Participants raised the following points during the discussion:

- COP10 offers a great opportunity to focus on important issues in the Asia region. Need to use the opportunity to focus on key habitat types, e.g. peatlands, and intertidal wetlands; need to share experiences and work towards a better understanding of the conservation issues and identify solutions.
- With the accession of more countries from West Asia, this will add a new dimension to the work of the Convention in Asia – arid and semi-arid wetlands.
- Many resolutions have been adopted by the Convention; we need to convert these into actions by improving the existing guidelines and developing action plans.

- Management of transboundary wetlands is a critical issue.
- Capacity-building is a critical need in the region.

Proposed Draft Resolutions from Contracting Parties in Asia

The representative of the Republic of Korea, Mr Hwang Suk Te, presented a proposal, supported by the Government of Japan, for the submission of a draft resolution (DR) on rice paddies for adoption at COP10. In the discussion that followed, participants identified the following elements which should be addressed in the DR:

- Recommends that Parties with rice-growing cultures recognize the importance of rice paddies as a wetland ecosystem type, including its biodiversity value.
- Requests the STRP to take into account rice paddy systems when developing type-specific management guidelines.
- Call on Parties to list more Ramsar sites with rice paddy habitats.
- Management of rice paddies at the national level rests with the agricultural sector; there should be more consultation between the Ramsar authorities and the agricultural sector at national level to ensure that the conservation value of rice paddies is taken into account in management planning.
- We need to explore entry points which can help strengthen the proposed resolution so it brings in new aspects and is applicable globally.
 - Since COP8, there has been substantial discussion on wetlands and agriculture; this could be a useful way to advance the discussion about rice paddies.
 - Rice paddy systems are under-represented on the Ramsar List.
 - One of the key elements of the Convention is building new partnerships. We need to find ways to show other sectors why they should be working with us. Suggest that the proposed DR highlight the specific value of rice paddies and the ecosystem services that it provides.

The meeting endorsed, in principle, the submission of this DR.

Regional representatives to the Ramsar Standing Committee

Ms Nirawan Pipitsombat chaired this session and called on CPs to give consideration to the nomination of representatives from the Asia region to serve on the Ramsar Standing Committee in the next triennium (2009-2011), and inform their respective national delegations about this. The final selection of these representatives will have to be made during the regional breakout sessions at COP10.

Plenary session: Presentation and adoption of the main conclusions and recommendations from the Asia Regional Meeting

Participants deliberated the draft “**Conclusions and Key Recommendations from the Asia Regional Meeting**” and provided suggestions for improvement. The decision was taken that these suggestions would be reviewed and incorporated into the final version, to be approved by the Government of Thailand, as host of the meeting, and as one of the

representatives from the Asia region on the Ramsar Standing Committee. The final document will be made available to all participants as well as to members of the Ramsar Standing Committee, and posted in the Ramsar web site.

CLOSING CEREMONY

Ms Nirawan Pipitsombat officiated at the closing of the meeting. She thanked all the participants for their active participation, and acknowledged the hard work of the Ramsar Secretariat and members of the Organizing Committee to make this meeting a success.

Annex 1: Overview of STRP products for COP10

A. Draft COP10 Resolutions

- “Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept”
[Note. As for COP9 (Resolution IX.1), it is anticipated that this will be a short draft Resolution covering adoption of the various guidances listed in section B below, with each of these guidances provided as an Annex to the draft Resolution]
- “Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention”
[Note. As for COP9 Resolution IX.2 this will provide the STRP work plan 2009-2011 tasks and proposed priorities]
- “Wetlands and human health”
- “Wetlands and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza”
- “Wetlands and agriculture”
- “Wetlands and climate change”
- “Global waterbird flyways”

Possible:

- Wetlands and extractive industries. [new task]
- The application of response options from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) within the Ramsar Wise Use Toolkit
- Ensuring better future utility and availability of Ramsar’s scientific and technical guidance
- “Revisions to the *modus operandi* of the STRP” [STRP on-going review task]
- “The conservation and management of urban wetlands”

B. Guidance for Contracting Parties

- Harmonized guidance on describing wetland ecological character and data needs and formats for core inventory, ecological character, and the Information Sheet on Ramsar wetlands
- A framework and guidance for detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character
- Guidance for the implementation and reporting of indicators of effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention.
- Guidance for the delineation and mapping of wetlands
- Responding to future HPAI risk scenarios for wetlands and waterbirds
- Consolidated guidelines for wetlands and river basin management

Possible:

- Supplementary guidance on the application of biogeographic regionalization schemes for Ramsar site designation. (for inclusion on the Strategic Framework for Ramsar site designation)

Anticipated COP10 scientific and technical Information Papers

- Rationale for describing wetland ecological character and its harmonization with core inventory and the RIS for Ramsar site designation
- Data & information needs and management for Ramsar sites and other wetlands
- Issues and options concerning detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character
- The global use of terminologies concerning ecosystem services
- The relevance of response options in the Millennium Ecosystem assessment for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention
- Progress in developing a framework and guidelines for wetlands and agriculture - the work of the GAWI partnership
- Review of utility of COP scientific and technical resolutions and guidelines, and their availability

Possible:

- Examples of effectiveness indicator assessments
- Update on global situation concerning HPAI
- Issues arising from the effectiveness of the application of fish Criteria 7 and 8 for Ramsar site designation
- Needs for restructuring the *Strategic framework and guidelines for Ramsar site designation*
- Environmental flows and water law (may be issued as *Ramsar Technical Report*, depending on STRP14 view)

Ramsar Technical Reports

- Population estimates and 1% thresholds for the application of Criterion 9 for Ramsar site designation
- Biogeographic regionalisation, and the distribution and gaps in Ramsar site designations for wetland types
- River basin management critical path application case studies
- Wetlands and water quality
- Environmental flow determination and implementation
- Determination of environmental water requirements for estuaries, coastal and near-shore wetlands [carry-over from 2003-2005]
- Determination of environmental water requirements for rivers [carry-over from 2003-2005]
- An assessment of wetlands and agriculture interactions [(joint publication with IWMI)
- Wetlands and human health
- The current status of wetland wise use for the wetlands covered in the original "Towards the wise use of wetlands" 1993 case studies Ramsar report.
- Methods for the vulnerability assessment of wetlands [carry-over from 2003-2005]
- Wetlands, water, biodiversity and climate change [new task] (joint publication with CBD Secretariat)

Possible:

- Environmental flows and water law (may be issued as COP10 Information paper, depending on STRP14 view)