

Agenda item 14

**Progress report on regional initiatives
and approval of their financial arrangements for 2007**

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to consider and advise on issues raised in the progress report on regional initiatives endorsed in Resolution IX.7, agree and approve arrangements for the allocation of core budget funding for regional initiatives for 2007, and confirm the procedure for the intersessional submission of any further regional initiatives for its consideration.

1. This paper provides a report of progress with regional initiatives endorsed by the Contracting Parties through Resolution IX.7 as being within the framework of the Convention or recognized as having the potential to become operative within the framework of the Convention. It also provides summary tables of funding requests by the regional initiatives to be allocated from the core budget line “3. Support to regional initiatives”.
2. In Decision SC34-21 the Standing Committee specified that final approval of 2007 allocations will be subject to the receipt by the Ramsar Secretariat, by 15 January 2007, of satisfactory financial reports on the use of the 2006 funds allocated. These financial reports will be provided to the Subgroup on Finance as an Addendum to this paper.

Regional networks endorsed by COP9 - progress in 2006 and plans for 2007

(Resolution IX.7: Annex I.A.i)

a) West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WacoWet)

2006: Ramsar funding of 60,000 CHF was earmarked for 2006. This sum was not disbursed, because the initiative was not yet operational. However, during the year, Benin and the Secretariat developed an implementation plan and budget.

2007: A Ramsar Secretariat visit to Benin is planned for early 2007, to officially launch the initiative. Ramsar funding of 59,700 CHF is requested for 2007 (**Annex I**). No funding request forecast for 2008 yet.

b) ChadWet and NigerWet

2006: Among the key achievements of the two initiatives figure the preparation of a National Wetland Policy by Niger and the confirmation by the Councils of Ministers of the Niger Basin Authority and the Lake Chad Basin Commission that “Ramsar subregional networks should be developed, using the overlap of Ramsar Sites/GEF pilot sites as starting components for NigerWet and ChadWet.” Nine pilot projects have started in 2006 in the Niger Basin and four in

the Lake Chad Basin. They will lead, *inter alia*, to the designation and management of a network of Ramsar sites in the region.

2007: A mid-term review meeting is scheduled to take place in March 2007 in Niger, to evaluate the implementation of the two initiatives. No Ramsar funding is requested for 2007.

c) Partnership for Asian-Australasian Migratory Waterbirds

2006: A working group was established to draft the partnership agreement text, as well as its implementation strategy. In April, the partnership agreement document was circulated to all 22 national governments along the Asian-Australasian flyway, as well as to other partners. About twenty partners, including the governments of Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Republic of Korea and the USA, officially endorsed the agreement, and the partnership was launched in Indonesia on 6 November, followed by the first meeting of the partners (7-9 November 2006). The meeting took a number of decisions, most importantly to set up a secretariat and thematic advisory groups and to develop national annual implementation plans. National government partners committed 83,000 USD to support the operational costs of the secretariat.

2007: The partnership secretariat will further develop the initiative and make it fully operational. Ramsar Secretariat guidance will be sought. No Ramsar funding is requested for 2007.

d) High Andean Wetlands Strategy (HAWS)

2006: Ramsar funding of 20,000 CHF has been provided. A workshop on financial aspects of the HAWS was held in Chile on 8-11 May 2006. It was attended by over 75 participants, representing eight countries of the Western Hemisphere, five NGOs, and several private sector representatives. The workshop reviewed the priority needs identified in earlier agreements, with a focus on strategic planning, data content management, and capacity building. The participants identified a comprehensive, prioritized matrix of scientific and capacity building needs for the HAWS. The event was also devoted to reviewing and finalizing a GEF project proposal, targeted to reach audiences that include policy makers, academics, nongovernmental organizations, and leaders of civil society. One of the key aims is to strengthen the capacity of institutions to better manage High Andean wetlands in more sustainable ways taking in account local, national and regional factors. This regional project will also address the problem of habitat and land degradation, loss of ecosystem goods and services, and climate change adaptation by mainstreaming sustainable management practices into national development policies and management techniques. The project will increase resilience to the adverse impacts of climate change of vulnerable countries, sectors, and communities.

2007: The next meeting of the HAWS steering committee is planned for May 2007 in Venezuela. Ramsar funding of 22,000 CHF is requested for 2007 (**Annex II**). No request for 2008 is yet forecast.

e) Pacific Island Wetlands Initiative

2006: A series of capacity building activities have been carried out in the region, and national Ramsar committees were set up in five Ramsar Party island states. Fiji joined the Convention as its 152nd Party. Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Marshall Islands are currently assisted with the designation of new Ramsar sites. The National Environment Service of the Cook Islands is currently reviewing the Ramsar accession documents, while the Ramsar Oceania officer

continues to provide guidance how to complete the accession procedure. In July 2006, a Ramsar mission provided assistance to Tonga to prepare its accession to the Convention. Its pre-accession Ramsar SGF project was finalized and a daily counterpart identified to progress with the remaining accession activities. Preparatory activities for accession have been re-invigorated for Kiribati, with full government support pledged to assist the process. Ramsar assistance has also been offered to the non-Parties Niue, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to commence initial planning and considerations for national accession preparations.

2007: The Ramsar Secretariat officer in Samoa will provide continued assistance to the development of this initiative, in particular through a Ramsar site managers workshop (in partnership with IUCN and Australia), the review of the regional wetlands directory for Oceania (1993) as a basis for national wetland inventories, and a targeted economic evaluation of climate change impacts on inshore coastal fisheries and economic benefits of conservation practices in mitigating such impacts. Ramsar funding of 60,000 CHF is requested for 2007. A detailed budget and work plan will be submitted to the Secretariat by 15 January 2007, to be included in the Addendum to this paper.

Regional centres endorsed by COP9 - progress in 2006 and plans for 2007

(Resolution IX.7: Annex I.A.ii)

a) Central and Western Asia Wetland Centre in Iran (RRC-CWA)

2006: Ramsar funding of 20,000 CHF has been provided for the strategy development by a consultant and a workshop to fine-tune and adopt the strategy, originally foreseen to be held in December 2006, now taking place in early February 2007. The Department of Environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran appointed Dr Asghar Fazel as the coordinator for the Centre.

2007: The draft strategy document is currently considered by the parties in preparation of the workshop in early February 2007. Ramsar funding of 69,000 CHF is requested for 2007, and a request of 70,000 CHF is forecast for 2008 (**Annex III**).

b) Western Hemisphere Wetland Center in Panama (CREHO)

2006: Ramsar funding of 80,000 CHF has been allocated. The Center undertook an impressive number of activities to strengthen capabilities for wetland management in the Western Hemisphere. This included the organization, facilitation and/or participation in workshops, seminars and international meetings, the provision of technical assistance and training, holding of specific media events, and the establishment of a Web site and electronic newsletter. Details can be found in the attached progress report (**Annex VI**), also available in Spanish.

2007: The activities of CREHO will continue as approved by its international board of directors. Ramsar funding of 80,000 CHF is requested for 2007, and an equal request is forecast for 2008 (**Annex IV**).

Regional initiatives with the potential to operate under the Convention – progress in 2006 and plans for 2007 *(Resolution IX.7: Annex I.B)*

a) Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA)

No activities in 2006 have been reported to the Secretariat.

b) Himalayan Initiative

2006: After COP9, a framework agreement was finalized and circulated to the nine countries to be involved: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Three countries have endorsed it so far, the others are still carrying out consultations. In June 2006, two workshops were organized in India. The first was to launch an EU-funded project on wetland inventory and capacity building for Bhutan, China, India and Nepal. It was followed by a regional forum on the development of the Himalayan Initiative. This strengthened the initiative further and confirmed a wide range of commitments by the participating countries to deliver the objectives of the framework agreement.

2007: The next meeting of the initiative will be hosted by Kyrgyzstan in 2007. A Ramsar funding request for 2008 is possible.

c) Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI)

2006: With financial support by the Groupe Danone, the Secretariat was able to bring together key experts for the 6th Evian Encounter, on 15-17 November 2006, to build on the achievements of the first phase of the CWI and develop a way forward and new programme of action. Ministerial focal points of all Carpathian countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) and experts from the Carpathian Ecoregion Initiative (CERI), the UNEP/GEF Danube Regional Project (supporting the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River), and the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme participated. They encouraged the secretariats of the Ramsar and Carpathian Conventions to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to provide a framework for cooperation and to guide further cooperation for the CWI. The signature took place during the high-level segment of COP1 of the Carpathian Convention, on 13 December 2006 in Ukraine.

2007: The Evian Encounter identified a number of key issues to be developed through the CWI during the years 2007 and 2008. The CWI intends to submit a progress report of its activities to SC36, accompanied by a Ramsar funding request for 2008.

d) Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet)

2006: Norway reported to COP9 on the successful launch of NorBalWet to establish a communication network for exchange of information and experiences, thereby enhancing multilateral and transboundary cooperation by embracing a problem-oriented and practical approach to improving wise use and conservation of wetlands, in particular the network of Ramsar sites and other protected areas. The Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management invited the Ramsar Administrative Authorities of the other Nordic countries (Denmark and Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Sweden) and their Baltic neighbours (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Baltic regions Karelia, Kaliningrad, and Leningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation) to participate in this initiative. In May 2006, Sweden organised a seminar on restoration of mires and wet forests. This was followed in September 2006 by a conference on the restoration of deltas, lakes and rivers in Norway.

2007: Estonia will be chairing NorBalWet in 2007 and intends to organize a regional meeting focusing on coastal wetlands. No Ramsar funding requests are foreseen. NorBalWet aims to

produce a report on its activities to SC36, in order to be endorsed as a regional initiative operating within the framework of the Convention.

e) The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) (Resolution IX.7: Annex II)

2006: Ramsar funding of 26,000 CHF was allocated. An extraordinary meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) took place in Albania on 11-12 June 2006. It adopted detailed terms of reference for the initiative, established a MedWet steering group, expressed deep concern about the fragility of the current financial circumstances of the MedWet secretariat, recognized the urgent need to resolve the governance and legal status of the secretariat, and requested an independent evaluation of financial matters and governance of the MedWet operations. The steering group, chaired by Italy, met for the first time at the Ramsar Secretariat in Gland on 7 December 2007. Detailed reports and further information are available at www.medwet.org, also in French.

2007: The steering group aims to have the independent evaluation completed by early March 2007 and will meet at the end of this month to prepare for the 8th meeting of MedWet/Com, to be held in Rome on 10-12 June 2007. The budget adopted by COP9 (Resolution IX.7 Annex II) provides for Ramsar funding of 15,499 CHF for 2007 and 10,849 CHF for 2008 (**Annex V**).

Review of core budget allocations for regional initiatives 2006

3. According to Resolutions IX.7 and IX.12 (COP9), core budget allocations were approved for 2006 as listed below. As no budget and work plan was presented for the West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WacoWet), no disbursement was made. Standing Committee is invited to approve moving the amount not disbursed for activities of this initiative in 2006 to the funds to be allocated for activities in 2007.

	Allocated for 2006 (CHF)	disbursed in 2006 (CHF)
MedWet Initiative	26,000	26,000
West African Coast (WacoWet)	60,000	nil
High Andean Strategy (HAWS)	20,000	20,000
Ramsar Centre Iran (RRC-CWA)	20,000	20,000*
Wetland Center Panama (CREHO)	80,000	80,000

* disbursement to be completed in early 2007 (including the costs of the February 2007 workshop)

4. Standing Committee 34 considered the matters raised in DOC.SG34-21 and its Addendum and decided in April 2005 (Decision SC34-21) to:
- b) agree that final approval of 2007 and 2008 allocations be subject to:
 - i) confirmation or otherwise by each regional initiative by 31 October 2006 that they are requesting core funding for 2007 and 2008, and the amounts requested; and
 - ii) for 2007, receipt by the Secretariat not later than 15 January 2007, and transmitted to the Subgroup on Finance, of a satisfactory financial report on the use of the 2006 funds allocated. This would be in line with the terms of paragraph 14 of Resolution IX.7.

5. The Secretariat will submit financial reports on the use of the 2006 Ramsar funds by the four regional initiatives that received such support to the Subgroup on Finance prior to its meeting on 12 February 2007. This will be in the form of an Addendum to this paper.

Approval of core budget allocations to regional initiatives for 2007

6. In Resolution IX.7 paragraph 9, the Parties agreed that the levels of financial support for 2007 and 2008 will be determined by the Standing Committee based on recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance. Resolution IX.7 paragraph 13 also authorized the Standing Committee, within the global allocation for the triennium of the Convention core budget line “3. Support to regional initiatives”, to reallocate funding, if considered appropriate, depending on shifts in priorities and needs in response to requests from initiatives.
7. At the beginning of 2007, and in line with the allocations outlined in Resolution IX.12 on “Financial and budgetary matters” for the triennium 2006-2008, Ramsar core funds available for 2007 and 2008 amount to a total of 541,572 CHF, as detailed below:

in CHF	2006 disbursed	2006 not disbursed	2007	2008
3. SUPPORT TO REGIONAL INITIATIVES				
a) Regional networks (cooperation)	46,000	60,000	102,382	179,190
b) Regional centres (training & capacity-building)	100,000	nil	100,000	100,000
Sub-total	146,000	60,000	202,382	279,190

8. Of these sums, Resolution IX.7 Annex II approved allocations to the MedWet Initiative of 15,499 CHF for 2007 and 10,849 CHF for 2008. Allocations for 2007 to other initiatives need to be decided by SC35. The following regional initiatives, endorsed by Resolution IX.7, are requesting Ramsar core budget allocations, as detailed in the budgetary tables provided in Annexes I-V:

in CHF	funding requested for activities in 2007	funding request forecast for 2008
West African Coastal Wetlands (WacoWet)	59,700	?
High Andean Strategy (HAWS)	22,000	?
Ramsar Centre Iran (RRC-CWA)	69,000	70,000
Wetland Center Panama (CREHO)	80,000	80,000
Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet)	15,499	10,849
Pacific Island Wetlands Initiative*	60,000	?
Total	306,199	?

* detailed budget proposal to follow in the Addendum to this paper

9. During its meeting on 12 February 2007, the Subgroup on Finance will have to consider the financial reports on expenditure of funding received in 2006 by the High Andean Strategy (HAWS), the Ramsar Centre Iran (RRC-CWA), the Wetland Center Panama (CREHO), and the MedWet Initiative.
10. The Subgroup on Finance will need to make proposals to SC35 on how to allocate funds for regional initiatives in 2007. These should take into account the experiences with the

disbursement of the funds requested for regional initiatives in 2006. As the requests for funding (306,199 CHF) amount to more than the sum budgeted for 2007 (262,382 CHF, including the unused allocation of 2006), the Subgroup will need to suggest specific amounts to be allocated to each initiative, depending on reported and planned progress and the capacity of each regional initiative to actually implement the activities during 2007 for which the funds are required.

Submission of further regional initiative proposals

11. In Resolution IX.7, the Parties authorized the Standing Committee to approve, between meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, qualified initiatives which have zero financial implications for the Convention's core budget.
12. Among the regional initiatives recognized by Resolution IX.7 (in Annex I.B) as having the potential to operate under the Convention, it is anticipated that the Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet) will request such approval with a progress report to be submitted to SC36.
13. Two additional regional initiatives, announced by Contracting Parties during COP9 as being under development (Resolution IX.7 paragraph 6), have subsequently provided updated information to the Secretariat, as follows:
 - a) **La Plata/Paraguay-Parana Wetlands System Sustainability Programme – Neotropics**

At the III Ramsar Pan-American meeting held in November 2004 in Merida, Mexico, representatives of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay met to discuss possible cooperation options to guarantee sustainability of the wetland systems in the Plata/Paraguay-Parana basin. In August 2005 a follow-up meeting took place in Poconé, Brazil, where governments, NGOs, and local community representatives met and adopted the Poconé Declaration. In September 2006 a meeting took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and it was agreed to follow a similar approach to the one which was followed in preparation of the High Andean Strategy, establishing a contact group, and drafting a sustainability strategy for the Basin. It is expected that the next meeting will take place in Buenos Aires, in the first half of 2007. A full report is available in Spanish upon request.

b) Black Sea Wetlands Initiative (BlackSeaWet) - Europe

The 4th European regional Ramsar meeting in 2001 unanimously supported the call for support to the BlackSeaWet project proposal elaborated by Wetlands International, formulated by Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine. In 2006, Wetlands International undertook to update this proposal with the aim to establish within 18 months the foundations for the launch of a strategic regional initiative to catalyze the conservation and wise use of Black Sea coastal wetlands. The project is to be launched in 2007 to establish public endorsement, donor awareness, and approval of a BlackSeaWet vision and portfolio of activities, and to lay the foundations for civil society engagement. Wetlands International informed the Secretariat that it intends to submit, by 15 January 2007, a proposal, using the format provided to Parties prior to COP9.

14. In line with Resolution IX.7 paragraph 13, Standing Committee may want to reallocate funding, in response to possible requests to SC36 from the Himalayan and Carpathian Wetland Initiatives, and possibly others, aiming to operate already before COP10 under the Convention.
15. Any other submission of proposals for new regional initiatives, notably those already mentioned in Resolution IX.7, should follow the procedures, and use the format, provided to Parties prior to COP9.

Annexes

- I. WacoWet Ramsar Budget
- II. Estrategia Regional de Humedales Altoandinos
- III. Ramsar Regional Center for Central and West Asia (Iran)
- IV. CREHO Budget 2006 – 2008
- V. Budget for the operation of the MedWetCom and Coordination Unit of the MedWet Initiative
- VI. CREHO report: Main Activities . . . January-September 2006