Representatives of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam recently met in Bangkok to discuss the objectives and work plan of the newly established Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI). IBRRI was approved by the 52nd meeting of the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee (SC 52) in June 2016 as one of the four new Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs). This brings the total number of Ramsar Regional Initiatives globally to 19.

Regional Initiatives can be established at the initiative of Contracting Parties to support the effective implementation of the Ramsar Convention, also called the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and its Strategic Plan. In particular, RRIs support cooperation and capacity-building on wetland-related issues in specific regions or sub-regions. The initiatives give the contracting parties a platform for collaborating with technical experts and representatives of intergovernmental bodies, Ramsar International Organization Partners, NGOs, local communities and the private sector.

Under the guidance of the five contracting parties, and with IUCN Asia acting as the secretariat for the initiative, IBRRI will aim to support the effective implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the five countries by supporting the coordinated implementation of the objectives of the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention.

The first IBRRI Coordination Meeting was held on 9 December 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand, to discuss IBRRI objectives and work plan. IBRRI governance mechanisms, as well as cooperation potential with other Ramsar-related programmes and initiatives in the Indo-Burma region (see report) were also part of the discussions. The meeting was attended by Ramsar National Focal Points and/or other representatives from the five countries.

“The Ramsar national focal points and Ramsar implementation partners from the five countries have a lot to learn from each other on Ramsar Convention implementation. Until now, we have had very few opportunities to interact and work together through a structured approach. IBRRI will fill this gap and will result in a better conservation of wetlands in the region; it will also give a stronger voice to the Indo-Burma Region in international Ramsar meetings,” said Dr Srey Suleang, Director, Department of Freshwater Wetlands Conservation, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia and first chair of the IBRRI.

Raphael Glemet, Senior Programme Officer, Water and Wetlands, IUCN Asia, said, “IUCN is delighted that this new regional initiative has been launched and very much looks forward to serving as the secretariat for IBRRI.”