The Ramsar Convention was featured in three events yesterday during the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok, Thailand. In a morning session, Ramsar was in charge of one of the sessions of the Global Synthesis Workshop on Wetlands, water, health and livelihoods. Paul Mafabi, Uganda Wetlands Inspection Division, chaired this session aimed at highlighting the importance of wetlands as benefits and services providers for people, as well as their important contribution to poverty reduction schemes and strategies.

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, gave a brief overview of the challenges and key issues concerning wetlands and water conservation, and explained the role of the Ramsar Convention in these respects. David Molden, from the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), stressed the water-food dilemma and the need to co-manage water for food and the environment. At the end of his presentation, Mr Molden presented IWMI's Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture as a major information tool for water, food, livelihood and the environment. Mario Ramos from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) presented the GEF projects related to inland waters as well as experiences and lessons learned from these projects. The last speaker was Khizer Omer, from Aga Khan Planning and Building Service, Pakistan, who explained Aga Khan's Water and Sanitation Extension Programme, an integrated and community-based water sanitation programme in Pakistan. The participants then had 20 minutes to examine a series of posters and learn more about wetlands' importance for water, health and livelihoods through a showcase of case studies from the Mekong River basin, Mauritania and Cameroon. More than 80 persons participated in this event co-organized by IUCN Water and Nature Initiative, the Ramsar Convention, and IWMI.

In the afternoon, the Ramsar Convention was also the point of attention of a Sponsored Workshop on "Managing water resources from the Ramsar Convention". The session was chaired by the
Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, Peter Bridgewater, who opened the gathering by describing the issues addressed by the Convention as the challenges ahead, including the incorporation of the broader water issue in the Convention’s scope. Ernesto Enkerlin, from Mexico's CONAMP (Commission on Protected Areas), explained the relationship between Mexico and the Ramsar Convention and the recent experience of the country with the Convention with the designation of 34 sites for WWD2004 and the organization of Ramsar's Regional Meeting for the Americas Region some weeks ago, and he looked forward to the Fourth World Water Forum to be held in Mexico in 2006. H.E. Mok Mareth, Minister of Environment of the Kingdom of Cambodia, explained the Cambodian experience with wetlands, stressing how important these ecosystems are for the country, not only for natural aspects but also for cultural issues. Frank Riboud, Chair and CEO of the DANONE Group, was present at this meeting through a video intervention in which he explained the importance of the DANONE/Evian Fund for Water for both the Ramsar Convention and the DANONE Group. Sebastià Semene, Ramsar's Convention Development Officer, complemented Riboud's intervention with a more detailed presentation on the ongoing DANONE/Evian Fund activities and the importance of partnerships with the private sector for conservation. Joyce Namde, from the US State Department, completed this vision with a brief presentation on the Gillette Company-Ramsar partnership. Around 40 participants attended the session, providing an interactive discussion concerning the challenges the Ramsar Convention is facing.

Finally, Ramsar's day at the WCC ended with the screening of the award winning movie "The Turtle People". Surabhi Sharma's film won the Ramsar/MedWet award for the best film on water and wetlands during the EcoCinema Festival 2004, last June in Rhodes, Greece.

The sessions clearly underline the importance that the Convention has in the conservation and sustainable development debate, and showed strong support for a continued broadening of the base of the Convention so as to be able to deliver better benefits for Contracting Parties.

In other news from the WCC, Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson has been participating in the Commission meeting of the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management, contributing a presentation about the current work of
the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in reviewing and redefining definitions of Ramsar's wise use and ecological character concepts and the utility of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's Conceptual Framework for Ecosystems and Human well-being as a Ramsar Framework for Wise Use. He also presented these ideas and a preview of the key conclusions of the MA Ramsar Synthesis Report on wetlands, their services and human well-being, in a workshop organised by Paul Mafabi (Uganda) on "Contribution of wetland ecosystem to peoples' incomes and livelihoods in Uganda", in which important messages about wetland valuation and the importance of understanding and explaining to decision-makers the great value, for many reasons, of Ugandan wetlands has helped to secure their future, with the vital support of the local communities which depend upon them.