The Bureau is delighted to announce that Palau has deposited its instrument of accession with the Director-General of UNESCO on 18 October 2002, and that therefore the Convention, as amended by the Paris Protocol (1982) and the Regina Amendments (1987), will enter into force for Palau on 18 February 2003. The first Wetland of International Importance designated by this small state in the Caroline Islands southeast of the Philippines, the fourth Contracting Party in the Oceania region, is Lake Ngardok (493ha, 07°31'N 134°34'E) - this is a small, natural, freshwater lake on Babeldaob island with some swamp vegetation and is the largest permanent freshwater body in Palau. It supports indigenous fishes representative of Palauan fish fauna and has a small breeding population of the CITES-listed estuarine crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*. The Ramsar site includes the entire protected Nature Reserve and catchment of the lake and thus also includes several streams and small areas of riverine marsh and freshwater swamp forest as well. The lake is particularly important to the small population of Melekeok State for control of floods and maintenance of water quality, and at least 11 indigenous bird species are supported as well, including the national bird, the Palau Fruit Dove or "biib" (*Ptilinopus pelewensis*). Palau has thanked Wetlands International - Oceania for its help in the preparation of both the accession and the site designation. The Ramsar Convention is very pleased to welcome Palau among its States Members. [13/12/02]

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