The 8th Asian Wetland Symposium was held in Saga, from 7 to 11 November, to discuss the importance of wetland conservation and their wise use in sustainable development. 450 participants from 25 countries attended the Symposium, including mayors of Japanese towns where three Ramsar Sites are situated, representatives from the local community, NGOs and scientists.

The Ariake Sea in Kyushu Island (southern Japan), supports some 40% of the tidal-flats in Japan and over hundreds of years, the local communities have developed means for sustainably farming their coastal resources, such as through fisheries, seaweed production and shell-fish collection. These tidal-flats are also important for biodiversity, especially waterbirds. As result, three Ramsar Sites have been designated, i.e. Arao-higata, Higashiyoka-higata and Hizen-kashima-higata.

The first Asian Wetland Symposium was organized 25 years ago and since then it has been organized approximately once every three years. The 8th meeting was an opportunity to involve a new generation of young people. A Youth Session for students and young wetland researchers was organized to encourage them to continue to be involved in wetland conservation.

During the Symposium, colourful stalls were set up outside the plenary room selling local wetland products from the Ariake Sea and from the Ramsar Sites. These included organic rice, seaweed, and local specialities such as dried mudskippers and eel gobies for food.

For the first time representatives from the Pacific region attended the meeting. These were the manager from Fiji’s first Ramsar Site (Upper Navua Conservation Area) and Fiji’s Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) network. The aim was to promote cooperation between the Asia and Pacific regions because of similarities in the issues that their wetlands face and to build on the cooperation between the two regions that already exists.
The Symposium was organized by Ministry of the Environment – Japan, Wetlands International – Japan, Ramsar Center Japan and the Japan Wetlands Society.

Local products from the Ariake Sea

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