



## 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1-9 June 2015

Ramsar COP12 DOC.8

### Report of the Secretary General to COP12 on the implementation of the Convention

#### Background

1. This is the report of the fifth Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands and covers the implementation of the Convention from the closing of the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11) on 13 July 2012, until 1 March 2015. There are separate reports made by the Regional teams, the Communication team, and on finances by the Financial Officer of the Ramsar Secretariat.
2. Four other reports for this meeting of the Conference of the Parties provide additional perspectives about the progress made in the implementation of the Convention:
  - The report of the Chair of the Standing Committee;
  - The report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP);
  - The report on the Regional Initiatives;
  - The report of the Secretary General under Article 8.2 on the status of the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
3. The current Secretary General took over from the fourth Secretary General, Anada Tiega, in August 2013, and has only been able to make progress, based on the considerable work already achieved in the triennium by the Parties and Secretariat, International Organization Partners (IOPs) and other partners. Considerable work has been done since then to support the preparation and development of a new Strategic Plan for eventual approval by COP12, and to support the preparation of all other papers under your consideration. The preparations for the Standing Committee meetings and for COP12 were completed and for the first time, all papers were translated into French and Spanish for the 48<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee (SC48) and available in time.
4. From the review of the implementation of the Convention's 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan for 2009-2015 (hereafter called SP3), the main conclusion was that at a global level, the implementation of the last Strategic Plan can best be characterized as a work in progress. Clearly, a large number of core tasks of the Convention, such as identification of potential Ramsar Sites, wetland inventories, preparation of management plans, monitoring of Ramsar Site status, reporting on changes in ecological character, and reporting under the Convention continue to require regular attention and action.
5. At the same time, another key finding was the increasing sense of urgency amongst Contracting Parties, ever more conscious of the accelerating degradation and loss of wetlands and the increasing risk that reduced water availability will affect the economy and stability of the world.

Parties are conscious that responding to these threats requires urgent action to reverse loss and degradation, and to increase their engagement with drivers of wetland loss and degradation in order to prevent, stop and reverse degradation. Part of the solution will be through a mainstreaming of the multiple services and benefits of wetland values in public and private investments and decisions on the future of our wetlands.

6. The strategies of the 3rd Strategic Plan are copied below for ease of comparison and eventual references in the text:

**STRATEGY 1.1 Wetland inventory and assessment**

**STRATEGY 1.2 Global wetland information**

**STRATEGY 1.3 Policy, legislation and institutions**

**STRATEGY 1.4 Cross-sectoral recognition of wetland services**

**STRATEGY 1.5 Recognition of role of the Convention**

**STRATEGY 1.6 Science-based management of wetlands**

**STRATEGY 1.7 Integrated Water Resources Management**

**STRATEGY 1.8 Wetland restoration**

**STRATEGY 1.9 Invasive alien species**

**STRATEGY 1.10 Private sector**

**STRATEGY 2.1 Ramsar Site designation**

**STRATEGY 2.2 Ramsar Site information**

**STRATEGY 2.3 Management planning – new Ramsar Sites**

**STRATEGY 2.4 Ramsar Site ecological character**

**STRATEGY 2.5 Ramsar Site management effectiveness**

**STRATEGY 3.1 Synergies and partnerships with MEAs and IGOs**

**STRATEGY 3.2 Regional initiatives**

**STRATEGY 3.3 International assistance**

**STRATEGY 3.4 Sharing information and expertise**

**STRATEGY 3.5 Shared wetlands, river basins and migratory species**

**STRATEGY 4.1 CEPA**

**STRATEGY 4.2 Convention financial capacity**

**STRATEGY 4.3 Convention bodies' effectiveness**

**STRATEGY 4.4 Working with IOPs and others**

**STRATEGY 5.1 Membership**

7. This personal overview is based on the analysis of the status of wetlands today and the implementation of the Convention at national and regional levels, taking into account the national reports for COP12 and all other information mentioned above, while referring back to SP3. Progress will be considered with reference to the SP3 Strategies and the following four topics:

**I. Measurement of the status and values of wetlands**

**II. Communications and outreach**

**III. Helping countries by building capacity**

**IV. Partnerships with other organizations to achieve goals**

8. World population is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050, with every year more people seeking the same material benefits and services as more fortunate people, in a planet with finite resources. Pressure on wetlands is likely to grow as this happens and expectations increase.
9. The rate of loss of wetlands has continued at around 1% per year and that compares poorly with an annual rate of loss of 0.25% for forests today and, even in the 1980s, of only 0.33% per year. However, there has been no global action to stop the loss of wetlands, despite the reality that they supply our water and provide multiple services that we cannot do without. The time has come to tackle this issue and deal with wetlands, as we have already started with forests, and reduce their rate of loss.
10. What is clear is that the impacts of reducing water supply and availability will affect the economies and security of most people in terms of food security, water security and societal security. For this reason, water crises are rated as worst in class of all "Global Risks in Terms of Impact" (World Economic Forum Global Risks 2015 report). This tendency to see an increased importance for water can only increase in the current scenarios, and the steps taken up to today need to be built upon if we are to achieve wise use of all wetlands in the future.
11. Despite all the hard work done by Parties during SP3, and by partners and people under the CEPA plan [STRATEGY 4.1 CEPA], the understanding of wetland benefits has not grown in the public's mind. Wetlands are still equated with Wasteland. But wetlands are actually the source of sustainable development and play a vital role for humanity and for nature by providing all our water for drinking, cooking and washing, for agriculture, food, storm protection and flood resistance, and by providing other services such as carbon sinks, transport, leisure, and spiritual and cultural inspiration. Wetlands have important economic and non-economic values, and are the basis of all civilizations and our natural world.
12. The above studies show the loss and degradation of wetlands has continued at a 1% annual rate in the last 44 years and more, since the Convention was signed. Wetlands are still being degraded or lost at the same rate, due to our increasing demands for land and water for agriculture, economic development, urbanization and other domestic and industrial use, and the situation is worsened by climate change. The pressure on wetlands is increasing, while the understanding of the benefits they bring has not grown. Our role as the Wetlands Convention must be to assess our progress over SP3 and move forward to a new vision to stop, slow and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands and to prevent future loss and degradation.
13. All of us must learn to balance development against wise use, and we can help and support stakeholders to seize alternatives to destruction of natural infrastructure and show examples of good win-win practices. Within the Convention, we must ensure that wetlands are managed sustainably, stop their increasing loss and restore degraded wetlands so they can provide their natural benefits and services into the future.

## **I. Measurement of the status and values of wetlands**

### **SP3 STRATEGY 1.1 Wetland inventory and assessment**

#### **STRATEGY 1.2 Global wetland information**

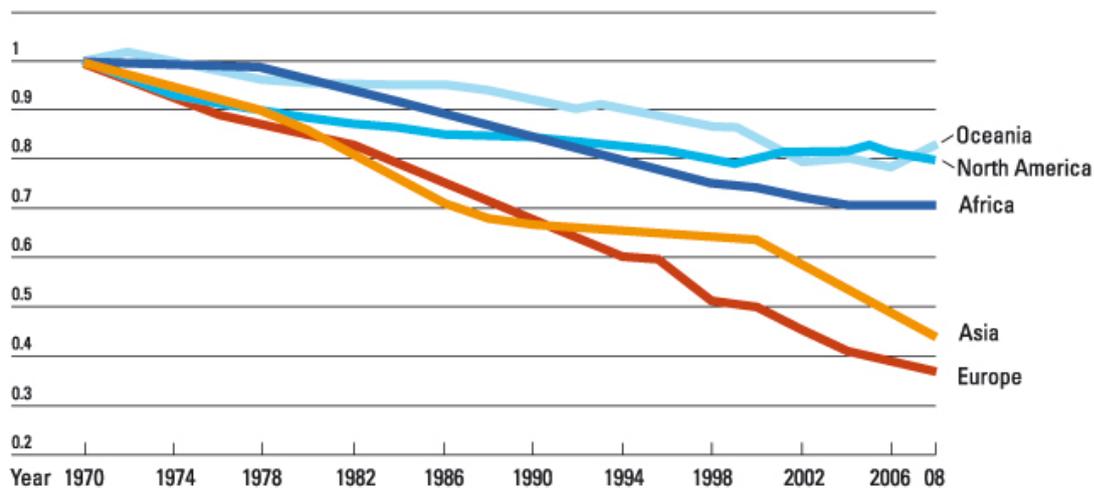
#### **STRATEGY 2.1 Ramsar Site designation**

14. The improved statistics for implementation of the Convention in SP3 show that the area of protected wetland has risen in the last 44 years to over 200 million hectares or a little less than

2% of the total land surface of the planet. This compares to the total estimated wetland area of nearly 10% of the land surface (approximately 13 million km<sup>2</sup> - Finlayson, 1999). This is a significant achievement but when it is measured against our progress to reach the objective of the Convention for the wise use of all wetlands, how do we score?

15. More data came out in 2014 that outlines the serious situation. The first report tells us that at least 64% of all wetlands have been lost since 1900 and 87% since 1800 (Davidson, 2014). In addition, the WWF Living Planet Report 2014 showed that 76% of wetland species populations have been lost over last 40 years, and that the situation is worse in wetlands than any other ecosystems, where 50% loss is the worst. Lastly, the new Wetlands Extent Index, developed with the help of the STRP, shows a 40% loss of wetlands between 1970 and 2008 in more than 1,000 surveyed sites.

**Figure 1: Wetland Extent Index, 2014**



16. From June 2012 to March 2015, the basic indicators of change in the Ramsar Convention can be seen in an increased footprint of the Convention:
  - 168 Contracting Parties, up from 160 in 2012;
  - 2,186 Ramsar Sites, up from 2,006 Sites in 2012;
  - 208.8 million hectares of Ramsar Sites, up from 192.8 million hectares in 2012;

### STRATEGY 5.1 Membership

17. At the close of SP3, the Ramsar Convention has 168 Contracting Parties with new accessions from eight countries: Andorra, Bhutan, Grenada, Kiribati, Oman, South Sudan, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. This is an increase from 2012 but there is still some way to go to reach universal membership. We need to bring on board four countries from Africa (Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia); nine from Asia (Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, East Timor, Kuwait, Maldives, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore); eight from Oceania (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu); two from Europe (Holy See and San Marino); and six from the Americas (Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines).

## **STRATEGY 2.2 Ramsar Site information**

### **STRATEGY 2.4 Ramsar Site ecological character**

18. Another part of the responsibility of Parties with Ramsar Sites, after designation, is to report on their status and indicate where there are risks to the ecological character of the Sites. For 57% of 2,186 Sites i.e. 1,238 Ramsar Sites, within the territory of 150 Parties, there is significant out-of-date or missing information. According to the Contracting Party rules for updating Ramsar Site information every six years, we are not completing the duties fully. 725 Ramsar Sites have had no updates for 12 years or more, and there are still 51 Ramsar Sites for which either the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) or an adequate map has never been submitted to the Secretariat since their designation.
19. At the same time, it is well known that some Parties only intend to provide their updates in the new RSIS in the 2012 revision format. Now that the new RIS has been launched in August 2014, it is hoped that the figures can be much improved in the future. The Secretariat will also follow up with those Parties that have not provided updates and work with them to support the completion of this important and obligatory action.
20. The general and continuing lack of regular updates is not in compliance with Resolution VI.13 and undermines the impact of the Convention. If information on a Site has not been updated according to the schedule, as prescribed by the Contracting Parties, any changes in its status cannot be known. This lack of information should be considered in the context of the loss of 1% of the world's wetland area every year, and the high percentage of World Heritage Sites under threat according to the IUCN World Heritage Outlook study (see paragraphs 21 and 22 below). Thus, there is a significant risk that the ecological character of many of these Sites may already be under threat. Given the large number of Ramsar Sites with outdated information, and the global challenge this represents for ensuring the conservation and wise use of Ramsar Sites, the Secretariat encourages Contracting Parties to consider other tools available today to better understand the state of Ramsar Sites, such as information on the status of World Heritage Sites.

## **STRATEGY 2.5 Ramsar Site management effectiveness**

### **STRATEGY 1.8 Wetland restoration**

21. In the case of the World Heritage Convention (WHC), the World Heritage Sites are reviewed independently by the World Heritage Centre and its advisory bodies – IUCN for natural heritage and mixed properties – which prepare comprehensive reports on their state of conservation, at six-yearly intervals. The IUCN World Heritage Outlook was additionally established in 2012 to provide an independent assessment of the state of conservation of all the 228 WHC natural properties across the world including those that share boundaries with Ramsar Sites. The IUCN World Heritage Outlook has published an assessment and all details of the process, methodology followed and Sites covered are available online at:  
<http://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/home>.
22. That IUCN study indicates, by extrapolation, that between 30% and 40% of the relevant Ramsar Sites are at significant risk and require immediate attention. If the figures for all Ramsar Sites were to be found in the same range, around 750 Ramsar Sites may be expected to be at significant risk of losing their ecological character. It is therefore encouraging that Parties are considering the merits of adopting a similar independent review process as IUCN's Conservation Outlook.

23. These statistics all show the breadth and severity of problems that wetlands face and we need to look coolly at the progress made by the Parties to the Convention and consider how to respond to a much faster rate of loss to wetlands than ever happened in forested lands in the 1980s. In response, and with justification, it is highly encouraging that the vision of the fourth Strategic Plan sets out the need to stop this dramatic and continuing loss of wetlands, to restore wetlands at scale and manage our wetlands better so they do not become degraded, and this is the route we must all follow.
24. In this context, the Bonn Challenge to restore 150 million hectares of degraded land by 2020, and the New York Declaration on Forests with its ambition to restore an additional 200 million hectares of degraded forest lands by 2030, are key. These figures have to include commitments for wetland area, and we need to set targets for restoration of wetlands that are reasonable and that Parties can agree upon, based on the best available data.
25. An alliance with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to work together on restoration of dryland and wetland could also be a helpful step, and with the support of the Parties, the combination of forces and funding sources could act as an added stimulus to the drive to restore wetlands to be able to deliver their ecosystem services again and bring the land back to a useful condition.
26. However, we need to recognize that statistics begin to be harder to publish when we want to tell the world about the extent and state of all the remaining wetlands because, after 44 years, there is still no reliable map or data of the area of all the types of surface wetlands and only a few can be said to be relatively complete, for example peatlands or corals. The area of all other wetland types is far less well known, while the extent of aquifers and groundwater remains even more challenging to measure accurately. The total area of surface wetlands was assessed as being upwards of 12.8 million km<sup>2</sup> (Finlayson, 1999), with doubts on the quality of data because wetlands, according to the Convention, cover such extensive areas of coastline, basin wetlands, flooded forest, seasonal wetland, rivers, streams, marshes, etc. Other studies give lower estimates of 10 million km<sup>2</sup>, (Lehner and Doll, 2004) but the definitions of wetland applied do not cover all the wetland types covered by the Ramsar Convention, especially all coastlines, including islands.
27. Measurement of wetlands' status and change is essential to inform action and influence change. We still lack a clear picture of the status of the world's wetlands and to find out how much wetland has been lost, Ramsar's own STRP is focusing on an assessment of the global state of wetlands with multiple partners. The work to be done builds on existing work including the Global Wetland Observing Systems (GWOS) and Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) and will allow us to map the state of the world's wetlands and wetland services as is needed as a baseline and to set aspirational targets for the world's wetlands.
28. One avenue being explored is the combination of data from different sources such as NASA, the Japanese Space Exploration Agency (JAXA), the European Space Agency (ESA), and the National Geomatics Center of China (NGCC), in order to gain a clearer view of the status of wetlands and wetland types around the world.
29. We are therefore collaborating with JAXA, which has been using LANDSAT data and its own radar data to classify all mangrove communities. Data has already been generated for insular and mainland Southeast Asia, northern Australia, Belize and the Amazon, but full global maps of all mangroves across a number of time intervals in the last 20 years should be available by 2016. This will allow any country to view the changes over time in mangrove cover and assess where

best it should invest in restoration or improved management of these resources for the undoubted benefits they provide for humanity in disaster risk reduction (DRR), fisheries, livelihoods, consolidation of coastlines, biodiversity and carbon capture.

30. In addition, there is better news that the European Space Agency (ESA), after mapping all Mediterranean wetlands, in cooperation with the Ramsar Convention, has started funding the Globwetlands III project, an Africa-wide mapping of all wetlands that will give invaluable information to all planners, scientists, practitioners and help in development efforts. ESA will make the details of the study using LANDSAT data and latterly SENTINEL available to all, and train some Parties in the use of the data. Once the mapping is completed in 2018, any African country will theoretically be able to view the dynamic state of their wetlands and use that in any work on wetlands and eventually at five day intervals, due to the increased capacity of the SENTINEL satellite data. However, significant upgrades of data handling capacity and built human capacity will be needed to take full advantage of these advances.
31. In addition, with such a full dataset available for Africa's wetlands, and its vast range of wetland types, it will be possible to use the same software and the freely available satellite data to map all the rest of the world with minimal extra effort and investment, and this opens up the possibility to have a full measurement of all wetlands globally, which would assist all of us to set targets for the future and make visible progress on increasing the extent of wetlands and their ecological character.
32. Other necessary steps in gaining more knowledge are to improve mapping and categorization of Ramsar Sites under protected area categories, and to move towards integrated management of sites with multiple international protected area designations (e.g. World Heritage Sites, Man and the Biosphere reserves, Global Geoparks and Ramsar Sites). We now have a project with the Province of Jeju, Republic of Korea to work out how best to work with sites with multiple designations and this will help Parties manage their globally important treasures and ensure that full attention can be given to keep their values intact.
33. On valuation of ecosystems, we know that "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity" (TEEB) for Water and Wetlands report of 2013, commissioned by Ramsar, has provided highly useful data on the value of wetlands ecosystems and the costs of their loss and degradation. Further work is now being done by UNEP at country level that will give more data on scenario analysis and help decision makers assess the impacts on wetlands of development options and help steer towards wise use of natural capital.
34. Another example of the work ahead on valuing wetlands is the task of promoting wetlands as "natural infrastructure" and collaboration with partners to explore the structured combination of green and grey infrastructure to give long-term sustainable solutions. Much work still needs to be done to convert engineers and planners to the cost-effective greener solutions, but this is a key tool in mainstreaming wetlands into development. This work is particularly important considering the role of wetlands in DRR. Investment in the future landscapes of countries needs to take on board the value of wetlands, such as intact mangroves, coastlines, coral reefs in giving resilience against natural hazards and climate change.
35. The idea of payment for ecosystem services (PES) has also caught fire with new solutions on how to provide the necessary quantity and quality of water for cities and industries by paying for sustained upstream basin management. The "Water Funds" in Latin America highlight the value of water and wetlands, and have some solutions on how to maintain reliable water supplies with growing populations. Likewise, the success of the Evian watershed management

and the Livelihoods Initiative show other ways to have fully fundable, commercially viable solutions in wetland restoration and management that lead to major improvements in livelihoods and food security. Such ideas have great potential and need to be replicated around the world, and the Convention should assist in this movement of good practice around the globe.

## **II. Communications and outreach**

### **STRATEGY 1.5 Recognition of role of the Convention**

#### **STRATEGY 4.1 CEPA**

36. Many people still do not realize the importance of wetlands to their lives, nor the threats they face. By reaching out to them with targeted messages, and with the support of local champions and global ambassadors, we can affect their idea of wetlands and stimulate interest and engagement. With the help of supporters, we are setting up public awareness campaigns with traditional and new media to increase awareness about wetlands among the youth and other target groups, and encourage local involvement and solutions. We need to explain the simple, clear message that wetlands are the source of water for us all, and that they are under threat. A campaign that attracts attention and sparks the imagination can make attitudes change and bring energies to focus on the future of our wetlands.
37. It is a fact that is all too easily overlooked that we spend more leisure and money on wetlands than any other ecosystem and devote most of our leisure time to wetlands, above and below the surface (i.e. coasts, beaches, coral reefs, ponds, streams, lakes, rivers, etc). We now need to know the value of investments on leisure in wetland and then find ways to reach the enthusiasts and those working to maintain healthy wetlands for their sport and engage them in the work of Ramsar.
38. I see that one critical step for the Convention to take now is to reach out to the wide world and get across messages that reach into hearts and homes and aspirations. Wetlands are relevant to all our lives and central to our future, but this is not a generally accepted fact which is known or internalized by most people. We already have key audiences to reach out to and this includes policy-makers, from the environment and water sectors and other related sectors, and wetlands practitioners and wetland managers.
39. We also have a need and ambition to reach out to youth since they need to be aware of their opportunities and responsibilities and what they can do to affect the future. We already have one great tool in our World Wetlands Day and, this year, it focuses on youth and on getting increased involvement of the public in wetlands issues by asking youth to take photographs of wetlands and make pledges on behalf of wetlands with prizes as an added stimulus. Special WWD2015 information sheets have been published online to help get young people to understand the basics of wetlands, and having this information tailored for specific audiences will define our approach to reaching out to the world. (Next year, we will have printed materials for those countries with more limited online capacities).
40. An Action Plan to implement all that is intended to be done by the Communications team and CEPA has been prepared and made available as an Information Document for SC49 and COP12. This principally covers actions by the Secretariat and support to the Parties for their CEPA actions. This includes the following items as it is important to show the broader work on communications that is often funded by non-Core funding. It is helpful to let the Parties know

that this tendency is likely to increase given the static budget from Parties for a communications team faced by increasing needs of the public and the demands of the new Strategic Plan. Increased work by the communications team is also foreseen if the planned Draft Resolution on the STRP is approved as the preparation of the output into briefing notes and policy papers from technical STRP people is seen as a key action for Communications in future.

41. We have also developed one-page factsheets that treat central questions in simple clear language that can reach our target audiences and many others. The first four topics are: “Wetlands – Why should I care?” “Wetlands – Wise use basics on site” “Wetlands – A global disappearing act” and “Wetlands – What can I do?” The continuing expansion of these factsheets will power up our outreach into social and traditional media and allow a large range of topics to be widely accessible and raise the profile of wetlands and the Convention.
42. In the coming year, we seek to source the preparation and launch of a publication, with Star Alliance support, on the “Ramsar Effect” in a region, that would show ten illustrated stories of why the Ramsar Convention is so important and useful to Parties, how it has helped people and nature, and the role of stakeholders. Each story would show the specific role of Ramsar in making positive changes happen, and display best practices in wise use management or restoration of Ramsar Sites and show how the normal developmental challenges for Ramsar Sites were positively resolved. Each “Ramsar Effect” publication would be made available through the web and in hard copy, and used to stimulate its replication around the world.
43. Equally important in our drive to increase knowledge about Ramsar and wetlands would be the preparation of a pilot “Ramsar Collection”: a folder with one-page summaries of each Ramsar Site, for a region of the world or for a country, which would give a set of stunning images, map and other key information on the Sites to act as a model for other countries or regions. Basic information on the area, and the animals and plants present would be visible to attract visitors and tourists and the attention of other sectors. Other highlights will cover how the Site is being managed and how it is integrated with local communities, with human interest stories showing how the Ramsar Site improves quality of life for local residents and delivers other important wetland services.

### **III. Helping countries by building capacity**

44. It is clear that Parties have found that there is a heavy burden deriving from the decisions and resolutions of the Convention and a consequent need to build capacity at different levels and get more support from the Secretariat. However, the Secretariat has maintained its size for many years despite an increase in calls on its time, and has not been able to respond more. For that reason, the Secretary General believes it is the right time to increase the strength of the Secretariat to respond to the increased call for help in meeting needs of Parties for technical support in using and updating the new RSIS, analysis, investigation and resolution of Article 3.2 files, helping in making regional initiatives happen and securing finance for regional and national initiatives, and provision of advice across the broad range of Sustainable Development Goals, as currently drafted.
45. In addition, we need to find out what our wetland professionals need to do their job better and deliver solutions and capacity development in response to their queries. We should reach out, through Parties and our Partners, to get in contact with the professionals and listen to their voices, as this has not happened before. Simple virtual surveys can help us understand the challenges faced and we can develop solutions with our broad range of partners.

### **STRATEGY 3.4 Sharing information and expertise**

46. We can help these wetland professionals to share their rich knowledge around the world of all aspects of wetlands management so that others have easy access to a network of other professionals that can respond to their needs. By building such a network, as proposed within the DR on STRP, we will find out more about the conditions that exist and the challenges faced by practitioners. Questionnaires to government officials and wetland professionals will allow us insights into priority issues that can be tackled by online courses, webinars, guides or manuals adapted to their regional realities and languages. There are already many courses provided and much material but it may not be accessible or visible or usable in that format. Building a network will help access the most relevant materials and a high volume of similar requests will make it possible to design and deliver at volume the right product out of universities, institutions, colleges, UNESCO, NGOs, etc. Another great benefit of such a Ramsar Wetlands Network is that we can listen to and transmit stories of best practice through the Communications team to the world through the media and increase information flow between countries and people.

## **IV. Partnerships with other organizations to achieve goals**

### **STRATEGY 4.2 Convention financial capacity**

#### **STRATEGY 3.1 Synergies and partnerships with MEAs and IGOs**

### **STRATEGY 4.4 Working with IOPs and others**

47. The Secretariat has been successful in making progress in fundraising and financial resource mobilization. New funds were secured in late 2014 and early 2015, in the following areas: a three year CHF 400,000 (EUR 388,000) commitment from the Mava Foundation to help revitalise and grow the work of a Ramsar Culture Network based on a modified proposal that was discussed at SC47; an initial six-month CHF 850,000 (NOK 7 million) commitment from the Government of Norway (NORAD) to invest in projects that are endorsed by Contracting Parties and implemented by partners, with a focus on restoring wetlands that provide water services for people living in areas of high population density; and a CHF 50,000 (NOK 400,000) commitment from the Government of Norway to help clean up and improve the categorization of Ramsar Sites in the World Database on Protected Areas. These new funding streams add to and complement existing voluntary support that is received from Danone Evian to support communications, Star Alliance to meet travel cost needs, and from the USA and Switzerland for the Wetlands for the Future Fund and the Swiss Grant Fund For Africa respectively.
48. As a Secretariat, our job is to support our countries and help them achieve the goals of the Convention, but many of these goals simply cannot be achieved by any one country or by any one organization. We need to work with, and through, many partners to bring in the wide diversity of skills and experiences needed, to help multiply local investments, bring in global strengths and reduce risks to the investments in wetlands. We see potential partners in our International Organisation Partners, in United Nations agencies and other Conventions, as well as private sector actors interested in water and wetlands. With such partners, as well as local and international NGOs, we can help to tackle key problems that affect our wetlands across the water and agriculture sectors. However, the ideas on needs for partnerships and modalities that are reflected here derive from the priorities set by the Parties in their National Reports and in the pre-COP12 regional meetings, and are directed at the mission of the Convention.

49. The need for partnerships works in both directions, as we seek partnerships with groups that are affecting wetlands in order to achieve their wiser use. Examples include engaging with the water supply and treatment industries, with the water and sanitation (WASH) sector, engaging in the governance of transboundary aquifers, or seeking increases in water productivity in agriculture. Our strategic plan needs to look at the drivers of loss and degradation of wetlands and to work with partners to find solutions and offer alternative models of a more sustainable development.
50. The Convention is fortunate in having an immediate group of Partners, the IOPs, with whom it already works; this group has great advantages for getting the aims of the Convention met by a set of colleagues that are all directed towards the same aims, but it is absolutely necessary to get their increased engagement in the future so we can achieve even more in concrete outputs and solid results, as their results have not been seen so visibly by the Parties in SP3.
51. The Secretariat surveyed Contracting Parties to support the monitoring of progress on implementation of Resolution XI.20 on 'Promoting sustainable investment by the public and private sectors to ensure the maintenance of the benefits people and nature gain from wetlands'. 32 Contracting Parties replied, and the findings were also discussed with interested parties and partners alongside the Regional Pre-COP meetings in Asia and Europe.

### **STRATEGY 3.2 Regional initiatives**

52. Another set of partners, with whom we need to collaborate more efficiently in order to create more synergies and impact as well as to help and support are the current set of 15 Regional Initiatives (four Regional Centres and 11 Regional Networks). The Secretariat needs to be more active in supporting these bodies and any future Regional Initiatives. There has been strong support given towards the Regional Centres, but the governance and structure of these Centres continue to cause difficulties in moving them towards self-sufficiency and full support from other Parties in the region. Such Centres should be key centres for the Convention to deliver capacity development in the region, but there is still considerable work to be done to achieve that goal.

### **STRATEGY 1.4 Cross-sectoral recognition of wetland services**

53. Another key area for partnerships is on the emerging Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The priorities and goals of the Ramsar Convention connect to, and are relevant for, a large number of the emerging SDGs. Water and wetlands can be seen in seven of the Goals and 27 of the targets, and the importance of wetlands has led to our full engagement with the large number of bodies, and the vast array of potential or current partners, gathered under the banner of UN-Water.

### **STRATEGY 1.7 Integrated Water Resources Management**

54. The current suggestion from the group to use our Wetlands Extent Index as one of the key indicators of the current version of the Water SDG 6.6 is, however, only a start, as we work to engage with many of the other indicators that look at the other values of wetlands for delivery of the full set of ecosystem services, including water delivery and management, water purification, carbon capture, livelihoods, biodiversity, DRR, and resilience against climate change. In this context, Integrated Water Resource Management is one theme that we wish to see well rooted in any version of the SDGs as this is the basis for all sound management of landscapes, and always includes the key role of wetlands.

### **STRATEGY 1.8 Wetland restoration**

55. Involvement of many other partners including IOPs is needed to tackle at scale the massive loss of wetlands over the last 40 years and the urgent need to work on restoration of wetlands. Already, there is a large volume of work going on to restore wetlands, but it is not necessarily directed at the highest priority sites and is not being supported by an International Wetlands Convention, nor is all the good work being added up to assess how actions can best support the restoration targets of the Bonn Challenge. These needs have led us to consider how best to respond to the challenges, and we have started to design a Global Wetlands Restoration Partnership that has received positive feedback and support from some Parties and is proposed for consideration by all Parties at the next COP. The current needs include developing a plan, consulting with Parties to incorporate all recommendations, building a coalition of partners and allies, securing pledges and commitments from national governments, and then launching and implementing it as an inclusive global initiative.

### **STRATEGY 1.10 Private Sector**

56. One partnership that has been continuing successfully for over 15 years is with Danone and Evian in a fully supportive relationship. To meet our joint needs for greater outreach and change of image, we have also been re-focusing the way we work together, and the products we are putting out, and have had a very positive response to these new ways of working. We will be working to see how to make a larger impact on the large audience of consumers that use their products, but one great example of that responsiveness was the decision of Evian to put a link to Ramsar on their new line of bottles. Collaboration has also led to our inputs in a wetland centre in Evian and will likely lead to inputs to the refurbishment of the factory, reflecting the important role of Ramsar in the Evian story.
57. Danone has seen a change in leadership in the year, but the commitment to Ramsar continues strongly and we are more involved in their policy-making processes and continue to work with them and IUCN on a new Water Management Tool for the company that will soon be made public as an example of best practice for other companies. Indeed, we see that the relationship between Ramsar and Evian and the good example is expanding to Danone's other water companies, but we can hope to transfer such good examples outwards to other companies. One good example is how a public-private organization has been set up in Evian to distribute the local taxes from all companies using the mineral water in Evian to support the wise use management of the Evian Impluvium.
58. Another interesting development has been our partnership with, and the coming of age of, the Livelihoods Venture, which could be described as a private sector development agency. Ten companies have invested over EUR 40 million in projects such as large-scale mangrove restoration, afforestation, and sustainable cookstoves, which all improve livelihoods for people in Senegal, India, Kenya, Guatemala, Burkina Faso and Indonesia. Projects benefit the local people and the land, while the companies earn the carbon credits from these carbon-positive actions. Ramsar has been involved in the process and would intend to be involved in the next stage where more companies will commit far larger sums to improving livelihoods of family farmers using similar approaches. We see that this type of innovation is key for increasing engagement with the private sector and capturing the goodwill of private sector companies and their employees to do good, while covering all costs of the operations. Replication of this example would be a very positive model to employ in working on wetland restoration where

the multiple benefits of such restoration can be monetized and costs spread across beneficiaries.

59. Following on from the above, some examples of the cooperation with other partners are covered below.

**i. Collaboration with IUCN**

60. Relations with IUCN have continued to be solid and supportive and have expanded in many technical areas such as in water, protected area management, World Heritage Sites, marine and coastal areas, and opportunities for expansion are being explored with the sections involved with fundraising, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), business and biodiversity. Indeed, the mutual advantages of collaboration are becoming more evident on the technical side.
61. High-level meetings are held twice a year to look at issues requiring attention and potential areas for cooperation. These have proved useful in signalling areas for improvement and recognizing success.
62. The support received from IUCN on human resources issues and the assistance given to renovate its offices has been well recognized, and appreciation given for the work carried out to place the Ramsar logo on the building to complement the flag and other signage that recognizes the status of Ramsar as sharing headquarters with IUCN, but the goal of greater visibility for Ramsar requires further work. The support for IT services has been less satisfactory, in the absence of a leader in IUCN, but this situation looks likely to improve steadily under new dynamic leadership.
63. Three issues continue to need further attention, and have been signalled in all the meetings in 2014. Firstly, a system is needed to ensure that IUCN consults the Secretariat, at the early stages and before putting in place any policies and procedures that affect Ramsar. This has lately been recognized after new draft proposals were circulated on travel policies and grievance procedures that had not been discussed with the Secretary General. It is expected that a system will be set up under the new Director General.
64. The delivery of financial services has been particularly unsatisfactory in 2014 and charges were originally increased from 2013, despite the levels of dissatisfaction expressed. Apparently, IUCN has been introducing a new financial system across the world and delayed introduction into Ramsar until 2014. From the start of the year until mid-September, no monthly accounts were provided, although this is a requirement under the 2009 "Services Agreement" between IUCN and Ramsar. The situation was brought to the attention of IUCN both in the March and October high-level meetings and in other discussions, but insufficient time and resources were committed to resolve the matter quickly. The matter was complicated with the departure of the Finance Officer (FO) in September after moving to 50% work in July, but the situation made budgeting extremely complicated and burdensome. The FO and SG have held meetings to discuss the IUCN service charges, mostly recently on 3 December, and the fees to be charged are still under negotiation.
65. Due to the lack of any information from IUCN on the status of budgets, it has been necessary to pursue a path of budgetary caution. When budgetary information was eventually made available, it was not feasible to use potentially available funds cost-effectively in the remaining two months, and so use of unspent funds will be decided upon by the Finance Subgroup.

66. With a new FO in place, one priority recognized by SC48 as a demand of the Secretariat is to renegotiate the 2009 “Services Agreement” between IUCN and Ramsar, in cooperation with the Management Working Group and in line with Resolution IX.24 on improving management of the Ramsar Convention. There is goodwill to improve the situation and a positive result is eventually expected as well as a satisfactory outcome for negotiation on the Services fee in 2014, but the process will be complex.

#### **ii. Collaboration with UNECE**

67. The SG and other staff have continued to attend all relevant UNECE meetings on transboundary waters, as the regional convention slowly moves towards a global convention. The expansion of this role is appreciated by many countries and the collaboration with UNECE is now growing with joint planning of events and discussions so that the transboundary issues are tackled consistently and well and include all aspects of wetlands appropriately. More remains to be done to ensure that the full potential of the relationship is realized, but counterpart UNECE staff and European countries present are all supportive of this collaboration, and our network of contacts around the world will be of assistance to UNECE as it expands the membership around the world. The formation of a Water Hub in Geneva by the Swiss will help to cement closer relations between all the bodies working in the water and wetlands arena.
68. As one outcome of the series of UN-Water meetings in Geneva, the closer collaboration with UNECE staff and the need to collaborate ever more closely with all the other international waters conventions was noted; this close work with UNECE continued through the year bilaterally and as part of UN-Water, where discussion of the text of the SDGs was collaboratively and supportively handled with all UN bodies present, and led to useful text that positions wetlands and water implicitly or explicitly in seven Goals and 27 Targets under the current Open Working Group draft.

#### **iii. Collaboration with UNESCO**

69. Relations with UNESCO have been steadily strengthening on water issues, with the SG’s attendance at Council and inputs to the preparation of the International Hydrology Programme in June and other meetings to extend our collaboration on groundwater issues in the Mediterranean to different regions with our support and GEF funds.
70. Follow up on the successful 2013 launch of the Ramsar Chair on Wise Use of Wetlands led to a visit to the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft and joint definition of the support that Max Finlayson will fulfil in this role for the first three years of the Chair with costs covered by Charles Sturt University and the UNESCO centre. The Ramsar Chair will give us support to prepare technical training material for distance learning for wetland managers and for policy work in close cooperation with the STRP and Secretariat and in response to actual needs.
71. Our cooperation with UNESCO on World Heritage Sites, Geoparks and Man & Biosphere (MAB) reserves has grown, in Paris, the Republic of Korea and Australia and here in Gland, as we work together to set up substantial equivalence in the way we deal with threats and challenges to sites and consider how we can achieve more by working in synergy at all times on our complementary missions. This was shown up well in the recent cases of Virunga and Cota Doñana and in discussions on the Great Barrier Reef. Indeed, we have also started on a joint Ramsar/IUCN/UNESCO project on how to manage sites that have double or triple designations under Ramsar, WHC or MAB. This is a new project with R.O.Korea funding for better management of internationally important sites and is a positive step.

72. In addition, the excellent work done by IUCN on the World Heritage Outlook with its independent assessment of 222 World Heritage Sites (including 49 Ramsar Sites) has been helpful in demonstrating the challenges faced by all our sites and the risks to the maintenance of their ecological character, and the need to consider more sources of information than national reports to ensure that the full picture of important sites is maintained forever.

#### **iv. Collaboration with UNEP**

73. The SG visited UNEP in Nairobi while attending the first meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly and we are following up the joint MOU that has been developed between our organizations. We should, as a Convention, carefully consider the potential for using the second meeting of the Assembly as an appropriate place to raise new issues and get an audience for a theme of global importance such as our strategies and goals to tackle loss and degradation of wetlands. UNEP welcomes inputs from the Convention on that idea.
74. UNEP-GRID has successfully developed our new Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) in close collaboration and we will continue to work with them on its refinement. Closer relations with the other UNEP centres in Cambridge (WCMC) and Nairobi will allow us to explore better the needs we have for big data and satellite analysis of the state of wetlands and of our Ramsar Sites. That deepening collaboration will likely lead to a large-scale project with NASA, JAXA and ESA *inter alia* for which we will jointly seek external funding.
75. We aim to further our collaboration with UNEP in all the areas of mutual benefit and in support of their normative work on wetlands and in their support for countries to internalize wetland issues into national planning on biodiversity (NBSAP). We are also working with the TEEB team in Geneva on economic valuation to follow up on receiving data from their five national-level valuations that include impacts on wetlands, and on the new developing study on the TEEB and Agriculture.

#### **v. Collaboration with UNDP**

76. The SG has helped build up relations with UNDP for Ramsar, and secured help for Ramsar colleagues and a promise to work together in planning the strategy for GEF 6 and include colleagues in meetings such as the GEF extended constituency workshops in 2015. We have access to information on their total portfolio of projects with relevance for wetlands and we are in a better position to inform countries of funds that are being deployed on the wise use of wetlands and help them in the rules and people to help in increasing that usage. We will use the information of funding as a basis to help get more wetlands-related people in more countries informed and involved in successful project preparation for different bodies. We have already started the process of securing meetings for all relevant regions so that each of the regional team members in Ramsar and UNDP know their opposite number and can work with them on policy and practice issues.

#### **vi. Collaboration with MEAs and other bodies**

77. It is helpful to see that the Parties are strongly supporting closer links with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), and have already adopted Resolutions X.11 and XI.6 for enhanced synergies with other Conventions. The Secretariat is working closely with the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) and ensuring that Ramsar's STRP is embedded in the work of the scientific bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions (through the CSAB meetings) and

especially in the IPBES, as it develops its system; the Secretary General has been supporting these needs in different meetings.

78. Attendance at the COPs for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) in 2014 are signs of our closeness and also address the need for enhancing synergies between MEAs. In developing our own Strategic Plan for 2016 to 2021, we have been able to take advantage of their experiences and achieve an exciting plan that addresses many of the Aichi targets together and allows us to work together on achievement of the eventual Sustainable Development Goals.
79. The Secretariat has also been involved in collaborations with the biodiversity-related conventions such as the MEA Information and Knowledge Management Initiative, and has been part of the project “Improving the effectiveness of and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions and exploring opportunities for further synergies” with UNEP.
80. The importance of the other key Convention on land use – UNCCD – has been fully accepted and we have started an alliance to work together on the Bonn Challenge to help restore 150 million hectares by collaboration to achieve wetland and dryland restoration.
81. The SG and Secretariat are always working to strengthen collaboration with the key actors in funding land use change and in sustainable development, and have held informal and set meetings to plan concrete actions to benefit wetlands with the World Bank, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, WHO, WMO, GEF, IFC, WRI, WWT, RARE, Wildlife Conservation Society and others. In addition, we held a key meeting in London to bring together our IOPs and a range of other organizations such as the Global Water Partnership, Wetlands International, WBCSD, IUCN, UNEP, UNESCO, and UNECE, to form new partnerships in communications and joint actions for wetlands.