



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

## *International cooperation*

In the context of international cooperation, the Ramsar Convention has a central role to play, providing the single most important framework for intergovernmental cooperation on wetland issues. Article 5 of the Convention on Wetlands establishes that “the Contracting Parties shall consult with each other about implementing obligations arising from the Convention especially in the case of a wetland extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where a water system is shared by Contracting Parties. They shall at the same time endeavour to coordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.”

In order to assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of this obligation of the Convention, in 1999 the Conference of the Parties adopted the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19). The Guidelines cover the following areas:

- Managing shared wetlands and river basins
- Managing shared wetland-related species
- Ramsar working in partnership with international/regional environment conventions and agencies
- Sharing of experience and information
- International assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands
- Sustainable harvesting and international trade in wetland-derived plant and animal products
- Regulation of foreign investment to ensure wetland conservation and wise use.

In adopting the Guidelines, the Conference called upon Contracting Parties to give special attention to identifying shared wetlands, river basins, and wetland-dependent species and to cooperate with other Parties in their management; to harmonize the implementation of the Ramsar Convention with that of other treaties; to increase the number of site twinning arrangements; and to raise the level and effectiveness of international development assistance programmes directed at the long-term conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

### **Cooperation with and between Contracting Parties**

By setting international standards for wetland conservation and providing an international forum for discussion of global wetland issues, the Ramsar Convention facilitates a continuous flow of information on wetland matters between Contracting Parties.

The Secretariat functions as the focal point for contacts among Contracting Parties by:

- organizing and co-organizing regional meetings and technical workshops, as well as meetings of the COP;
- facilitating multilateral conservation initiatives, such as the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) and others.

## **Transboundary wetland conservation**

Individual action by States may be insufficient for the conservation and management of wetlands because many wetlands and watercourses cross national boundaries; many wetland species are migratory; coherent management of wetlands often requires collaboration and exchange of experiences between countries; and development assistance is often required for wetland conservation actions in developing countries.

Recent examples of international cooperation over shared wetlands and water systems in relation to Ramsar sites and the Ramsar Convention include:

- The creation of the Prespa Lakes Transboundary Park by Albania, Greece, and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, inaugurated on World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2000.
- The momentum towards collaboration in the management of the Polesie wetlands shared by Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine, begun in May 2002.
- The efforts of the member States of both the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger Basin Authority, with assistance from WWF International and financial support from the Global Environment Facility, to designate each of their parts of these large catchments as Wetlands of International Importance and work toward their collaborative management, especially in the framework of memoranda of cooperation signed between the Ramsar Secretariat and both the LCBC and the NBA in November 2002.
- The “Trilateral Ramsar Platform” for the Morava-Dyje Floodplains, signed by Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia in August 2001 – for their assistance in this project, the NGOs **Daphne** in Slovakia, **Distelverein** in Austria, and **Veronica** in the Czech Republic jointly received the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award in 2002.

## **Transboundary Ramsar sites**

Increasingly, Ramsar Contracting Parties are designating their new and existing Ramsar sites as **Transboundary Ramsar sites**, meaning that an ecologically coherent wetland extends across national borders and the Ramsar site authorities on both or all sides of the border have formally agreed to collaborate in its management, and have notified the Secretariat of this intent. Recent examples include the just-mentioned Trilateral Ramsar Site Floodplains of the Morava-Dyje-Danube Confluence trilateral designation in June 2004 (Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia); the Vallée de la Haute-Sûre, bilateral designation in March 2004 (Belgium and Luxembourg); the Domica-Baradla Cave System, designation in August 2001 of ‘Baradla Cave System and related wetlands’ (Hungary) and in February 2001 of Domica (Slovakia); and the Upper Tisza Valley, bilateral designation in December 2004 of ‘Felső-Tisza (Upper Tisza)’ (Hungary) and Tisa River (Slovakia).

## **Transboundary species conservation**

Many species of migratory birds follow flyways (migratory routes) along which are situated wetlands that they use as resting and feeding areas. To achieve the effective conservation of such species requires cooperation between States sharing wetland systems or situated along a flyway. The Secretariat works to facilitate such cooperation.

Recommendation 4.12 of COP4 (1990) recognizes the flyway concept for the conservation of wetland bird species, and encourages Contracting Parties to: 1) participate in internationally coordinated waterfowl surveys; 2) enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements for the conservation of migratory waterfowl; and 3) cooperate with other

Parties situated along the same flyway with regard to financial assistance and the sharing of expertise.

Several cooperative flyway programmes have been developed for the management of shared wetland species or the conservation of individual species. Leading examples are:

- the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (1986) among Canada, the United States and Mexico;
- the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network established along the east and west coasts of North and South America in 1985;
- the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, AEWA (1996), established under the aegis of the Convention on Migratory Species;
- Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (1996); and
- the East Atlantic Flyway initiative launched by Friends of the Earth–Spain (1997).

The Secretariats of the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with a view to enhancing synergy between the two treaties. A three-way joint work plan between Ramsar, CMS, and AEWA was signed in April 2004.

### **The twinning of Ramsar sites**

Resolution 4.4 (1990) calls upon the Secretariat to encourage bilateral and multilateral agreements for the twinning of wetland sites, within the framework of the Ramsar Convention. The agreement signed in 1992 between the governments of France and Romania, concerning the twinning of the Camargue and the Danube Delta, was one of the first of its kind involving sites on the Ramsar List, and the “Steps For the Future” twinning by the cities of Narashino, Japan, and Brisbane, Australia, for the Ramsar sites Yatsu Higata Tidal Flat and the Boondall Wetlands at Moreton Bay, is one of the most recent.

The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008 calls for “twinning and/or networks of transboundary wetlands and wetlands sharing common features, as an important mechanism for sharing knowledge and providing training opportunities,” with a global implementation target for 2003-2005 of “at least 75 twinning arrangements to be in place and reported to the Bureau [Secretariat] for Web publicity on the Ramsar Web site.”

## **Regional cooperation and initiatives**

### **The Medwet Initiative**

Resolution VIII.30 (2002) provides *Guidance for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands*, based upon the successful example of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, or MedWet. MedWet is a coordination mechanism for wetland activities in the Mediterranean Basin, designed to involve all major stakeholders – its goal is “to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of Mediterranean wetlands, as a contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and to sustainable development in the region.”

MedWet owes its origins to an international conference in Grado, Italy, in February 1991. The MedWet1 project (1992-1996), funded by the European Union, began building the collaborative MedWet network and developed regional methods and tools. MedWet1 culminated in a major Conference on Mediterranean wetlands (Venice, Italy, June 1996), at which the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy, based on the first global Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention, was endorsed.

In the same year (1996), the Ramsar Convention, under whose guidance the MedWet Initiative had been developed, established the **Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com)**. MedWet/Com meets annually and guides the strategic direction and implementation of the Initiative; it includes representatives of 25 Mediterranean nations, the Palestinian Authority, the European Commission, intergovernmental conventions and UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the wetland research centres Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre (EKBY), Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat in France, Sede para el Estudio de los Humedales Mediterraneos (SEHUMED) in Spain, the Centro de Zonas Húmidas, Instituto de Conservação da Natureza (ICN) in Portugal, and the Agenzia regionale per la protezione ambientale della Toscana (ARPAT) (Italy).

In 1999 MedWet became a formal inter-regional structure for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution VII.20) and serves as a model for regional wetland cooperative structures elsewhere. A **MedWet Secretariat** was established under the Ramsar Secretariat -- it comprises the MedWet Coordinator (who reports to the Secretary General) and four colleagues based in Athens, Greece, with the support of the government of Greece, and it is assisted by the "MedWet Team" of five well-known research and conservation institutes (EKBY, SEHUMED, Tour du Valat, ICN, and ARPAT). (See [www.medwet.org](http://www.medwet.org).)

### **Other regional initiatives**

Following on from the success of MedWet, in the *Guidance for the development of regional initiatives* (2002) the Parties encouraged the proposal of additional initiatives for endorsement and possible financial support. A good beginning was made in Resolution IX.7 (2005), *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, whereby the Parties formally endorsed a number of initiatives as **regional or subregional networks for capacity building and cooperation** – namely, West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WacoWet); ChadWet; NigerWet; 'WSSD Type II Partnership for the conservation and sustainable use of sites of international importance for migratory waterbirds in East Asia, South East Asia and Australasia (The Partnership)'; Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands; and Regional initiative for the protection and wise use of wetlands for the Pacific Islands – and two others as **regional centres for training and capacity building**, to wit: the Ramsar Regional Center for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO), inaugurated in Panama in January 2004, and the Ramsar Regional Center for Training and Research on Wetlands in Western and Central Asia in Iran (RRC-CWA), launched in Ramsar, Iran, in March 2005.

In addition, Resolution IX.7 recognized a number of other initiatives as having potential for operating within the Convention framework and authorized about 200,000 Swiss francs in financial support for MedWet, WacoWet, RRC-CWA, the High Andean Strategy, and CREHO, to be reviewed by the Standing Committee annually.

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