

EVIAN ENCOUNTER 2004 Meeting Report

**Wetland Conservation and Wise Use
in the Himalayas – Hindu Kush – Pamir – Alay and the Mekong River Basin**

1 - 5 November, 2004, Hotel Royal, Evian, France

The Evian Encounters are an important component of a Ramsar Convention project financed by the Groupe Danone, owner of the Evian Mineral Waters Society. The Encounters, of which this was the fifth since 1998, are designed to bring together high-level officials of the Convention's Contracting Parties, along with the Convention's NGO International Organisation Partners and other relevant international organizations, so as to discuss in an informal atmosphere the current approaches and challenges in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The 2004 session was devoted to countries in the Himalaya-Hindu Kush-Allay region and Mekong river basin. As the Himalayas function as Asia's water tower, the roof of the world, and with unique cultural and ecological values, they are a real global focus for action. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat has been pleased to see a regional initiative emerging from the collective effort of the countries in the region, with the support of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and WWF International, as well as individual experts. This Evian Encounter 2004 meeting provided the opportunity for a valuable further step in consolidating the initiative, and to define its *modus operandi*, so as to support effective regional cooperation on the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the Himalayas' shared watersheds and river basins.

The report which follows focuses on the discussion and conclusions of the meeting, so as to record the issues and agreements on future directions and activities decided during the Encounter. We have not included the excellent detail of the presentations by each of the participants, since these were made available on CD-ROM to all participants during the Encounter.

Opening statements and discussions

The first session of the Encounter was opened by Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, who warmly welcomed participants and set the scene by stressing the importance of taking an integrated approach to managing the world's water towers.

Christophe Lefevbre (Coordinator of the Danone Evian Ramsar Fund Programme and International Affairs Officer of the French Coastal and Lake Shore Conservancy) explained the activities of the Danone Evian Fund for Water in support of the Ramsar Convention implementation process around the world, work which focuses on communication, public awareness educational and training activities.

Each participant briefly summarised their role, responsibilities and areas of expertise, and shared their expectations from the Encounter. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

Douglas Taylor (Wetlands International) stressed the importance of undertaking a wetland inventory process so as to provide a sound basis for policy implementation in the development regional activities such as the proposed Himalayan Initiative.

Nick Davidson (Deputy Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention) reminded participants of the mission and main objectives of the Ramsar Convention, and its particular focus on practical and technical implementation of conservation and wise use; underlined the Convention's recognition of the importance of international cooperation for its deliver; and described the guidance for developing regional initiatives adopted by Contracting Parties at the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP8, Valencia, Spain, 2002). He used the example of the Convention's Mediterranean Wetland Initiative (MedWet) to describe how this initiative had been developed progressively since 1991, and then outlined the elements of the guidance adopted by COP8 in the Annex to Resolution VIII.30 concerning regional initiatives under the Convention – which should be considered in establishing any such initiative. Peter Bridgewater urged all participants to take fully into account during their discussions these important lessons about the regional initiatives.

Margarita Astralaga (Senior Advisor for the Americas, Ramsar Convention Secretariat) shared her experiences with development of a regional initiative in Central and Latin America on conservation and wise use of High Andean wetlands as strategic ecosystems for conservation of biodiversity and poverty alleviation, which was endorsed by COP8. She urged the need to establish a regional strategy for any initiative, which should be designed to implement the initiative's vision and goal, and that initiatives should develop progressively and that large, resource-expensive administrative and governance structures should not be created before the initiative has resources for beginning on-the-ground implementation, such as through donor-funded projects. Another key early stage is to review national situations (policies, implementation mechanisms etc.), and what is known about the role and value of high altitude wetlands in each country. Summarising the national situation, such as that reported by Tajikistan concerning high-altitude wetlands, provide valuable sources of information to share in the development of a regional strategy.

Concerning developing coordination and governance mechanisms, Margarita Astralaga outlined how these are being approached in the High Andean Initiative, whereby the coordination role will be shared sequentially between different organizations in different countries from time to time. This helps to increase the sense of network ownership and involvement by all stakeholders. The initiative partners did not want to have a formal Secretariat in the initial stages, since firstly it entails unnecessary bureaucracy, and second that the limited resources available to initial phases of an initiative should go primarily into the project implementation. A full regional coordination role should be developed only as and when the initiative expands with more support, including funding. This model has been followed by the MedWet Initiative, which started with project-based coordination and has progressively developed over 13 years to its present structure with a funded Coordination Unit which also supports further project development, and an advisory MedWet Committee.

Two further issues were raised in the discussions: a) how to set the 'downstream altitudinal limits' for high-altitude wetlands; and b) to what extent the initiative should include linkages with the downstream parts of the river basins originating in the Himalayas region.

Concerning downstream definitional limits, the Deputy Secretary General pointed out that what can be considered mountain wetlands and ecosystems is not as simple as a standard altitudinal limit, since the distribution of mountain ecosystems is also influenced by latitude and climate. He and Douglas Taylor recommended taking a pragmatic approach through assessing the functionality of different wetlands within the 'mountains to the sea' river basins, and focussing on those upper wetlands acting as providers and regulators of downstream flows, so maintaining downstream wetlands. In other words, those areas where local communities are acting as 'guardians' of the water sources, hence maintaining wetland and water services to downstream 'users'.

It was recognised that to avoid the risk of 'dilution' of the Himalayas Initiative it should focus on these upper basin areas, where the local communities are often amongst the poorest, but that that the initiative should also seek to draw more attention to the upstream-downstream links and the need for downstream users to recognise better that they are dependent for their continuing water and wetland services on the high-altitude 'guardian' communities, and encourage better linkages and support to the guardians from downstream users.

Guanchung Lei (Senior Advisor for Asia/Pacific) reviewed progress achieved by Himalayan Mountains Wetlands Conservation Initiative. He explained the complexity and diversity of ecosystems involved in the region, the strong religious and cultural attachment to them nature, and drew attention to the impact of climate change on glaciers. He stressed that the participation of the Mekong River Basin countries in this meeting demonstrates the basin-scale recognition the impact of changes happening in high-altitude ecosystems on downstream basins. The evolution of the initiative had started with the Urumqi workshop, through the Kathmandu and Sanya workshops and now this Evian Encounter. The main outcome of the Sanya workshop was unanimous recognition of a need for regional facility in form of an open partnership between country members. The objectives of the initiative established at the Sanya workshop include: inventory and collection of information, regional cooperation and sharing of knowledge, valuation of high-altitude wetlands, the impact on downstream and daily life and overall sustainability, enhancing capacity to manage wetlands, designation and management of transboundary Ramsar sites; CEPA to develop a common vision to increase awareness of the values of ecosystems, and the development of wetlands policies. A number of proposals have been developed including for wetland inventory (for EU funding by WI and ICIMOD), management of high-altitude lakes (ICIMOD), and regional network development and capacity building (WWF and Danone). A WWF/Danone training workshop will be held in June 2005. Guangchun Lei also presented a comparative analysis of the design of the Himalayan Initiative against the guidance annexed to Resolution VIII.30, and identified a number of gaps in the design of the Initiative, which needed further discussion during the Encounter.

Contracting Party presentations

China

Kun Lei made a presentation on the progress with Ramsar Convention implementation in China, with the focus on high-altitude wetlands. High-altitude systems cover nearly one-quarter of China, at the average altitude of 3,500 m amsl. The key priorities within the National programme in the Himalayan Region include establishment of upland wetland nature reserves, restoration and master-planning for specific wetlands, and international cooperation. Mr Lei presented Nick Davidson and Guangchun Lei the Ramsar Information Sheets for nine new Ramsar Site

designations being made by China. The presentation was concluded with confirmation of the full support of China to the objectives of the Himalayan initiative.

Yousaf Qureshi from Pakistan requested help in identifying useful examples of community involvement in the conservation and management of wetlands. Mr. Kun Lei responded that China has begun to realise the importance of community participation but that as yet the overall process is still dominated by governmental decisions due to the lack of awareness and economic constraints. Dr. Xu Jianchu of ICIMOD mentioned example of two sites. One is near a UNESCO World heritage site where there has been established a committee with active public participation; and the other in the Tri rivers area where some level of involvement of civil society has taken place, but this area proved to be far too large to achieve full engagement, and the community participation was almost invisible to the government. The Deputy Secretary General suggested that priority should be given at an early stage of the initiative to community participation issues.

India

Siddarth Kaul stressed the significance of high-altitude wetlands as a source of freshwater and a role of wetlands in general in recharging groundwater, the impact of climate change as a pressing problem on high-altitude wetlands, and underlined that this regional initiative is a vital step forward to address these issues. He noted that research & development should support policy and management activities. He outlined that his expectations from the Encounter were: a confirmation of the need for the regional initiative, but stressed that before its full launching all countries can make a start already through exchanges of personnel and data, cooperation on transboundary sites, and considering ways and means of establishing a regional support facility.

Kyrgyzstan

Avazbek Arynov outlined the two main current issues concerning Kyrgyz wetlands. The first concerns the size of Lake Issyk-kul as a designated Ramsar site. This was been originally designated by the former Soviet Union to include the area of the entire lake. During the re-designation process by the Kyrgyz Republic in 2002 on its accession to the Convention, the site area was restricted to a cluster of 12 nature reserve around the lake. After receiving a letter of concern from the Secretariat about such a drastic Ramsar site boundary restriction the State Forestry is now reconsidering the case. The second issue is a recent reduction in the legal level of protection status of the high-altitude lake Chatyr-Kul. This wetland received a 2003 Ramsar Small Grant Fund project for preparation of the Ramsar Information Sheet for the designation of the lake. After receiving expressions of concern from the Ramsar Secretariat, the government is now reviewing the case based on the recommendation of the State Forestry Service to restore the full protection status of this unique high-altitude lake.

Thailand

Santi Boonprakub described progress in Ramsar implementation by Thailand. The key issues concern developing further stakeholder involvement in planning and participatory management, based on good experiences of this process in the Krabi Estuary and Nong Bong Kai Non-Hunting Area pilot areas; and improving linkage between local, regional and national levels in planning, management and implementation.

Tajikistan

Kokul Kasirov recognised the challenges faced by Tajikistan for Ramsar implementation, notably the lack of resources and capacity. A particular difficulty is that Russian is not an official Convention language, noting that at least 15 Contracting Parties in the region operate in Russian language and there is limited language capacity for the convention official languages. He also urged the organisation of a training workshop regarding the Convention and its implementation for Central Asian countries. It was noted that such a workshop could form part of a future Ramsar Small Grant Fund proposal which could be submitted jointly by Central Asian Parties, and which might include also proposals to increase English-language capacity within the countries. [Note. The issue of increasing the number of official Convention languages has been kept under regular review by the secretariat and Standing Committee, and at present remains a capacity and resource limitation issue. However, the secretariat strives to ensure that amongst its staff are speakers of other languages such as Russian, Chinese and Arabic so as to facilitate communication and support to Contracting Parties in which such languages are more widely spoken than the official Convention languages.]

Nepal

Laxmi Prasad Manandhar described the wetlands conservation and management activities underway in Nepal, noting that whilst Nepal is rich in biodiversity its wetlands are facing increasing socio-economic and biophysical pressures.

Bangladesh

Abdul Mutaleb summarised the status of wetlands in Bangladesh, and focussed on two designated Ramsar sites: Tanguar haor and Sundarbans, covering the main activities of the Ministry of Environment and Forests for the management and conservation of these two unique wetlands ecosystems. The Sundarbans is a transboundary wetland shared with India, and some collaboration at local level has taken place in terms of conservation efforts for the Bengal tiger population and public awareness campaigns with local communities - but political barriers remain to full-scale international cooperation. Dr Kaul suggested that there are further opportunities for collaboration in relation to exchanges of personnel and information on other wetland topics. The DSG mentioned that there is increasing activity developing for the designation of transboundary wetlands as Ramsar sites in several parts of the world, and that the Secretariat is developing briefing notes for Contracting Parties on appropriate approaches and experiences in such designations, and noted that for the first time two Parties (Belgium and Luxembourg) have jointly designated an internationally important transboundary wetlands as a Ramsar site.

Pre-accession country presentations

Bhutan

Raling Nawang Drukdra described his country's high biodiversity, and noted the human population of Bhutan is only 700,000 people. The Government policy for biodiversity conservation is to keep at least 60% of natural areas undisturbed. This is being achieved thanks mainly to the efforts of local communities, who attach strong cultural and religious beliefs to wetlands and nature in general. However, implementing capacity is low, and when Bhutan joins the Convention it would expect some support for capacity-building. Bhutan has transboundary wetlands areas with India and with China, and attention to these will be another priority for the country after its accession to the Convention.

Lao PDR

Mr Boribun Sanasisane expressed the will of his government to join the Ramsar Convention. An RIS has already been prepared drafted for a candidate first Ramsar site, and further promotion and awareness activities in the government are being developed, including through a current Ramsar Small Grants Fund project so as to accelerate the accession process. Being one of the member countries of the Mekong River Basin Commission, Lao PDR has been involved in the development and implementation of many programmes and projects related to wetlands, which continue to be subjected to many threats and pressures, notably increasing human population pressure, and urbanisation/development of wetlands.

Myanmar

Mr Tin Tun explained the audience that Myanmar has got a long history of forest management dated back 1859 but realises that international cooperation is indispensable for long-term effect. Myanmar is a home for many types of wetlands including high-altitude ones and all play an important role in lives of people. In 2004 Myanmar finally decided to accede, having recognised the importance of conservation and wise use of wetlands resources. The key issues in the implementation process will be stakeholders participation and international cooperation. [Note. Since the 2004 Evian Encounter Myanmar has advised the secretariat that it has transmitted its accession papers to UNESCO, which acts as the Convention's legal depository.]

First day concluding remarks

Margarita Astralaga (Ramsar Secretariat) provided some thoughts and feedback on the day's presentations and discussions. She especially noted Thailand's experience in successfully developing participatory approaches to wetland management, an approach which is very transferable to implementation by other countries, and she recognised the approach as a lesson learned for consideration by Neotropical countries in their forthcoming Americas COP9 regional meeting as a priority aspect to be incorporated in the High Andean Initiative.

Drawing on her experience with the development of the High Andean Initiative, she urged the Encounter to take several issues into account in their discussions about the development of the Himalayan Initiative:

- Undertaking a systematic analysis of on-going projects (since many donors are interested in high mountain ecosystems), and it is important to keep track of on-going activities in this area so as to identify the gaps and overlaps and also to know which donors to approach for potential support for further development and future implementation of the Initiative.
- Development of a regional strategy as a way to ensure a common vision and common approach to the issues of high-altitude wetlands. It should provide the direction of where to go with all planned and ongoing activities. By identifying the national priorities, the priorities for all regional countries could be set.
- The governance structure of the High Andean Initiative is very simple, whereas the proposed setup for Himalayan Initiative is complicated and without giving a clear

indication how/where to find resources - a simple step-by-step approach is more suitable at the early stage of initiative development.

International Organisation presentations

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

Xu Jianchu presented the ICIMOD's perspectives on mountains in the Himalayan and other regions. He stressed the complexity of the issues involved and the challenges which need to be addressed by policy and decision-makers.

Mekong River Commission (MRC)

Chumnarn Pongsri described the objectives and work of the MRC, and in particular the technical environmental work which he oversees in his capacity of director of the MRC Environmental Division. Integrated Water Resource Management applied within the river basin is a key principle of the agreement between the countries of Lower Mekong river basin.

WWF International

Denis Landenbergue (WWF Fresh Water Programme) introduced the activities of his programme in relation to supporting development of integrated river basin management (IRBM) initiatives and increasing capacity in countries for Ramsar site designations and management around the world, and shared the key lessons learnt from this experience. There are a wealth now of different terminologies and approaches, including basin-scale network commissions, authorities and other transboundary organisations tackling basin-scale water resource and land-use planning and management. It was recognised that there is no single model that fits all, since the approach should be always context-based, depending on for example the key ecosystems, population demographics and economies of the particular basin. Initiatives have begun for different reasons and with different priorities: the MRC had an initial focus on hydropower generation and then gradually recognised the importance of an integrated and international approach; the Lake Chad Basin Initiative has focussed on addressing land-use issues; and the Niger Basin Initiative with the designation of protection areas – an approach which has been endorsed by the heads of state of the nine countries participating in the Niger Basin Authority. The nine countries have also reached agreement on a shared vision and have adopted a Memorandum of Understanding through which they commit to not undertake development activities without the preliminary agreement with other potentially affected countries in the basin. The Mekong Basin Commission countries address such issues through identifying three levels of impact: minor impact, for which no preliminary agreement is needed, a medium-level impact, which requires prior consultations, and a significant impact which necessitates an agreement being reached between all countries prior to any development.

It was suggested that a useful future action could be to call a workshop, under Ramsar Convention auspices, to bring together representatives from various basin commissions and initiatives to share experiences and profile different approaches and solutions. Nick Davidson noted that there might be opportunity for such a mechanism as part of development of a capacity-building programme on wetlands and water issues in Africa being currently developed by the Ramsar International Organisation Partner group to, through and after COP9.

University of Fribourg

Martin Beniston reviewed current scientific understanding of climate change, and in particular its current impacts and future scenarios for mountain ecosystems especially in the Himalaya. Although some predictions have a degree of uncertainty, there is now strong consensus that climate change is occurring, and will certainly continue to occur in the future, with rising temperatures leading to widespread rapid melting of glaciers, and likely shifting of monsoon rainfall patterns taking place. This is likely to increase water stress in some river basins and there are also major problems developing in the upper catchments from flash floods from glacial lake outflows as glaciers retreat. The importance and issues of mountains ecosystems have not been properly considered in intergovernmental processes (where the focus has been largely on forests): for instance, at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 it was put on the agenda the last minute.

Wetlands International (WI)

Douglas Taylor described the development of wetland inventory opportunities and initiatives in the Himalayan Mountain Region as Wetlands International's proposed contribution to the initial phase of the Initiative, developed from the available Asian Wetland Inventory methodology, which is a multi-scalar approach from landscapes to individual wetlands. A joint WI/ICIMOD pilot project proposal has been submitted for funding to the European Union to undertake wetland inventory for high-altitude wetlands in China, India, Nepal and Bhutan. Several other country participants in the Encounter expressed interest in such a project being extended to cover other countries in the region.

Developing a Himalayan regional initiative

The general consensus amongst the countries of the region on the need for a regional Himalayan wetlands initiative was re-affirmed.

Discussion on further development of the Initiative focussed on developing a regional strategy for delivery of the common vision; the geographical and altitudinal (high altitude and downstream) scope and focus; identification of additional key objectives to those developed by the Sanya workshop; simplifying coordination and governance structures, and the next steps towards Ramsar COP9, including priorities for project development for initiating implementation.

Developing a Regional Strategy for Himalayan wetlands

It was agreed that a **Regional Strategy** is needed to identify how to deliver the common **Vision** for the Initiative (which itself also needs to be developed), and the Initiative's **objectives**. It should set the context within which to set priorities, and to develop regional projects.

The key **priority issues** which, from the countries' perspectives, would benefit from regional action and which should be identified in the Strategy were identified as: climate change impacts and adaptation responses; approaches to enforcement of legislation; engaging participatory involvement of all stakeholders; empowering high-altitude wetland custodian communities through incentives and education and awareness and capacity building; development of policy and management plans; inventory and assessment; cultural values of wetlands; traditional knowledge, including traditional medicine; hydrological aspects in management of wetlands, the role of wetlands in groundwater recharge and aquifers; the role of wetlands in poverty alleviation and wealth generation; engaging improved awareness of wetland values and services at local

government level; promoting downstream and upstream linkages; and addressing common issues of ecological safety (wetlands-related disasters).

In support of the Strategy, it was agreed that an early step in the Initiative should be to undertake a **systematic analysis of relevant ongoing projects and Initiatives** in the regions, and to undertake a “Key gaps analysis”, and to then identify donors interested in supporting work on the topics relevant to the initiative priority issues.

Participants established a working group to develop a draft Regional Strategy for consultation. [Note. This group met on the day following the Encounter to initiate its work.] The Strategy document should be very simple as a broad framework of directions and it should be endorsed by the governments of the region covered by the Initiative. Some of countries could act as initial sponsors for specific activities, where these are in line with the national priorities.

Confirming the Objectives of the Initiative

The Encounter confirmed that the Initiative objectives developed at the Sanya Workshop were appropriate, but three additional objective topics were identified and which should be addressed at a regional scale through the Initiative:

- Community-driven participatory management (building especially from Thailand’s experiences);
- Valuation of wetland ecosystem services as a tool for informing decision-making; and
- Linking upstream – downstream – upstream livelihood support

A description of each of these objectives needs to be developed and added to the suite of ‘Sanya workshop objectives’.

Defining the geographical scope of the Initiative

Over-expanding the scope of the Initiative, at least in its initial phases, has a strong risk of spreading the activities too widely and thinly to be effective. It was agreed that the focus of the Initiative should be on the broad Himalayan region high-altitude wetlands and water management. As and when appropriate, the Initiative should establish working links and joint projects with basin-scale initiatives in the region (e.g. with the Mekong Basin countries through the MRC) and seek to encourage others, so as to address the “upstream-downstream-upstream” linkages issue in particular.

Phasing the development of the Initiative

Noting that in its early stages the MedWet Initiative was about scientific and technical implementation – a programme of demonstrable actions before developing governmental involvement at the policy support level was sought - an early phase of the Himalayan Initiative could most effectively focus on scientific and technical aspects, such as the proposed WI/ICIMOD inventory programme.

Applying a phased approach to the development of the initiative, the first phase should be to develop a common vision and a strategy which describes the way to go towards achieving this vision. High Andean countries’ first steps were through building on an existing small basin initiative, as a mechanism for stimulating expansion of the initiative.

Gaining political support and initiative authorisation

There was general agreement that a regional initiative agreement - 'Himalayan Initiative Framework Agreement' should be drafted for endorsement by national governments, provisionally at the Ramsar Asia regional meeting in February 2005 in India.

Developing coordination and governance mechanisms

The Encounter discussed the Himalayan Initiative in the light of the experience of the progressive development of the Ramsar Convention's Mediterranean Wetland Initiative (MedWet) and the issues emerging from the development of the High Andean wetlands initiative, noting that a coordination unit for MedWet was not financially feasible at the outset – rather the function was first delivered through initial and progressive donor-funded project coordination. With the maturing and growth of MedWet, a coordination unit was later established and which is financed from several sources: ongoing projects overheads; generous support of the host country (Greece) where the MedWet Coordination Unit office is based; additional annual contributions from all Mediterranean Ramsar Parties; and an allocation from the Ramsar core budget line for the regional initiative for 2002-2005. It has taken some time to establish such a structure and secure these funds. Similarly, the Medwet advisory committee was created subsequent to the initial development of the initiative, and its meetings still need to be funded through additional voluntary contributions from donor countries in the regional and elsewhere.

The Encounter recognised that the Himalayan Initiative should have a simple and evolving governance and coordination structure at first, and then develop this as and when resources become available, and to focus on initially developing and funding some initial projects to start delivery of priority objectives.

Participants identified the following issues and opportunities concerning developing coordination and governance for the Initiative:

- Potential donors are unlikely to be interested in funding the establishment of secretariats, coordination units and other bureaucratic mechanisms – rather, any project funding would need to be for on-the-ground implementation. However, initial development of coordination could be done through such project mechanisms and overheads.
- The role of technical advisory committee could be played by a working group of collaborating countries and organisations participating in the Initiative.
- The Ramsar Secretariat could, resources and capacity permitting, assist in guiding initial coordination – but in line with Resolution VIII.30 the Ramsar Secretariat should not perform the coordination function for the Initiative.
- To facilitate initial networking, communication and dissemination of materials, the Ramsar secretariat could assist in establishing an email listserve for participants in the Initiative development.
- Wetlands International and ICIMOD could act as technical advisors for the initial

phase for project development and implementation, as demonstrated through their wetlands inventory pilot project proposal.

Resourcing development of the Initiative

Participants identified the following issues and opportunities concerning developing funding and capacity for the Initiative:

- The situation in Himalayan region is very different from that of MedWet, since there are no donor countries in the Himalayan region – so any donor funding will need to come from outside the region covered by the Initiative.
- Existing and/or completed projects and mechanisms relevant to the Initiative should be identified and used to build upon as much as possible as initial contributions to implementation, and so as to demonstrate the added value of the Initiative. Examples identified by participants include an existing wetland education centre already constructed in Kyrgyzstan, and a similar development in Pakistan. Opportunities for such development can and should be identified through the Strategic review of projects and initiatives in the region.
- As far as possible existing and imminent projects should be used to profile and demonstrate that implementation of some of the Initiative's objectives are attracting donor funding support. Notably, the current Danone/WWF project will support further networking and capacity building in the coming year, including through its planned technical workshop in June 2005. Likewise the Wetlands International/ICIMOD inventory proposal, if funded, would demonstrate an important kick-start to that objective of the Initiative.
- The June 2005 workshop provides an opportunity to plan a technical and scientific programme, including preparation of a list of brief project concepts (and summaries of current projects) relevant to the delivery of each of the Initiative's objectives.
- A multi-country regional project, designed to support further development and initial implementation of the initiative, should be developed as a priority.

Participants considered that it would be helpful to seek the recognition of the Ramsar Convention at COP9 for support for further development of the Initiative. Two options exist for COP9 support: endorsement of the Initiative and encouragement for its further development (i.e. as was done for the High Andean initiative by COP8); or such endorsement plus a request for financial support for the start-up of the Initiative from a core budget line for 2005-2008 for regional initiatives.

This matter should be further discussed at the Asia regional COP9 preparatory meeting in India in February 2005, taking into consideration the following points:

- There may be strong 'competition' for any such core budget line established by COP9, and any initiative considering making such a request should decide first if it is sufficiently mature and developed in its approach as to be able to use such resourcing as seed funding to yield maximum added-value – and to be able to demonstrate this by 2008. It may therefore be more appropriate for the Himalayan Initiative to seek

COP9 endorsement, and use this endorsement to support project proposals for initial funding – and then subsequently to consider requesting an allocation of core convention funds.

- The Ramsar Secretariat anticipated that so as to make a coherent proposal to COP9, the Standing Committee will request any regional initiative seeking COP9 endorsement and/or funding to provide sufficient information about its approach and capacity for it to be assessed against each aspect of the guidance Annexed to Resolution VIII.30, i.e. for the Standing Committee and COP to establish if the proposed initiative is suitable to be recognised as a Ramsar regional initiative.
- Any requests concerning budgetary issues will need to be considered by the Standing Committee Sub-group on Finance, in relation to its consideration of proposed 2005-2008 Convention budget, during the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2005.
- Any requests for core budget line support would need to be accompanied by a clear breakdown and explanation of what such an allocation will be used for, and how it relates to any other available funding and/or funding being sought.
- Rather than Contracting Parties submitting a large number of separate draft COP9 Resolutions on different regional initiatives, it is anticipated that the Standing Committee will urge such Parties and initiatives to submit to them elements of the proposed Resolutions, such that the COP may receive and consider a single consolidated draft Resolution on regional initiatives. This would be in line with the intent of Resolution VIII.45 concerning ways and means of streamlining and simplifying consideration of scientific and technical issues by COP.

An Action Plan for the Initiative development towards COP9

The following action plan and timeframes of further development of the initiative was agreed at the meeting:

November 2004 to February 2005

- Develop a draft Regional Framework Initiative Agreement (Working Group: GL (Ramsar Secretariat), China, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, WWF)
- Prepare draft Initiative proposal, *including a summary Strategy (and very brief summary of current implementation activities relevant to the objectives of the Initiative) & description against each element of COP8 VIII.30 Guidance*
- Identify any Ramsar Core budget line request to be made.

9-12 February 2005

- Discuss and agree draft Initiative documents and future approach during the Asia regional COP9 preparatory meeting in India.

By end of April 2005

- submit request for Himalayan Initiative COP9 support to Standing Committee and its Finance Sub-group if funding is to be requested)

June 2005

- Standing Committee will consider all regional initiative requests and will prepare its advice to COP9, provisionally in the form of a “Regional Initiatives” draft COP9 Resolution.

June 2005:

- Ramsar Technical Workshop (supported by Danone/WWF) in India – develop technical project and implementation ideas (workshop plans to be discussed by end of 2004 between WWF India and India Ministry)

7-15 November 2005:

- COP9 and COP9 Budget Committee considers all regional initiative proposals.

Cooperation with other regional initiatives

The Participants of the Evian Encounter 2004 requested that the following message be transmitted to the participants of the Americas COP9 regional preparatory meeting (Merida, Mexico, November 2004).

The participants considering the development of the Himalayas regional initiative:

- Are appreciative of the advice and experience concerning the development of the High Andes initiative presented to them by the Ramsar Secretariat’s Senior Advisor for the Americas; and
- Suggest establishing and maintaining an exchange of information and experience between the initiatives in their further developments to COP9 and beyond so as to identify common interests and understanding

Acknowledgements and thanks

The participants of the Evian Encounter 2004 wish to express their gratitude to the Danone Group and the Evian Water Company and their staff for their support through the Danone/Ramsar project which permitted the holding of the Encounter, and to the staff of the Royal Hotel, Evian for ensuring the smooth running of the meeting and for providing a most conducive atmosphere for their valuable and important debates concerning enhancing wetland conservation and wise use in the Himalayas – Hindu Kush – Pamir – Alay and the Mekong River Basin region.
