

**5th European Regional Meeting
on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention**

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Keynote

**Wetlands and human well-being: the outcomes of the Millennium
Ecosystem Assessment and the Ramsar Convention**

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Text from the presentation slides:

The **Millennium Ecosystem Assessment** (MA) is an international scientific assessment designed to meet needs defined by users such as Ramsar and other Conventions. It focuses on ecosystem services, and the implications of current status and trends of these for human well-being. Products due to be finalised during 2005 include a data catalogue, technical assessment reports from four working groups (on conditions, scenarios, responses, and a suite of sub-global assessments); and Summaries for Decision-Makers. A conceptual framework has also been published. In addition there will be six “synthesis reports” for different end-user constituencies, including one focused on wetlands and the Ramsar Convention – *Wetlands and water: ecosystems and human well-being*. The findings of the MA show clearly the value of wetlands but also their serious decline, and make clear that maintaining these ecosystems is crucial for achieving a range of human needs, including those defined by the Millennium Development Goals.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is:

- an international scientific assessment conducted by 1000+ scientists from 100 countries,
- designed to meet a portion of the assessment needs of international conventions, private sector, civil society and others,
- focused on the consequences of changes in ecosystems for human well-being,
- undertaken at multiple scales (local to global),
- designed to both provide information and build capacity to provide information,
- expected to be repeated at 5-10 year intervals if it successfully meets needs.

A policy-relevant assessment is a social process to bring the findings of science to bear on the needs of decision-makers. It applies the judgment of experts to existing knowledge to provide scientifically credible answers to policy relevant questions.

Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. There are four kinds of ecosystem services: provisioning (goods, water, wood, genetic resources), regulating (climate regulation, disease regulation, flood regulation), cultural (non-material benefits), and supporting services (necessary for the production of other ecosystem services, e.g. soil formation, nutrient cycling, primary production).

Ramsar is one of the four conventions endorsing MA as end-users, together with CBD, UNCCD, and CMS. The Ramsar Secretariat, Standing Committee Chair and STRP Chair sit on MA Board, the Secretariat also on MA Executive Committee. STRP provided set of key Ramsar questions for MA to address; many 'Ramsar family' are authors of MA chapters.

The MA conceptual framework was published in book format in 2002: *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: A Framework for Assessment*.

STRP makes use of MA outputs: Working Group 2 reviewing "wise use" and "ecological character" definitions, and harmonising Ramsar terminologies, concludes that the MA conceptual framework provides the missing conceptual framework for "wise use" – and shows how and when to make interventions using Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks. The MA terminology for ecosystems and services provides simplified consistent terms for Ramsar use. STRP will make proposals for COP9 approval.

The MA has a number of Working Groups:

- Condition working group (current condition and historical trends of ecosystems)
- Scenario working group (consequences of plausible changes in primary drivers)
- Responses working group (what to do to enhance well-being and conserve ecosystems)
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MA Assessment Outputs are global: a framework for assessment, the MA data catalog , and the datasets being used in the MA.

In 2005, a number of Technical Assessment Reports (300-800 pages ea.) and Summaries for Decision-makers (SDMs) will be published, including a specific **Ramsar Synthesis Report** "*Wetlands and water: ecosystem services and human well-being*"- the key MA product for Ramsar use, prepared by team led by Max Finlayson (STRP Chair); Rebecca D'Cruz (former Ramsar Asia Coordinator) & Deputy Secretary General. It draws together key findings from all MA chapters. The draft report is currently out for consultation with Ramsar focal points, STRP, STRP NFPs, experts (deadline for comments 20 December 2004). The synthesis team will finalise the text during a meeting on 12-14 January 2005. STRP12 (1-4 Feb 2005) is invited to endorse the report that should be launched at COP9.

Key findings of the Ramsar Synthesis Report

Services provided by wetlands:

- inland wetlands are extremely important for people – they provide services worth an estimated US\$ 2-5 trillion,
- but despite this high economic value they have long been (and are still being) viewed by decision-makers as being of little value,
- so little priority given to maintaining their wise use,
- global hydrological cycle is fundamental to wetlands, and
- wetlands significantly influence the functioning of the hydrological cycle and supply of water to people, and the uses they make of it (e.g. irrigation, energy, transport & drinking).

Without wetlands we lose their services. Yet many wetland systems are deteriorating and this puts their services at risk:

- inland and coastal wetlands (& their biodiversity) are being lost at a faster rate than terrestrial systems,
- freshwater wetlands and mangroves: 2.5% loss per year,
- clearance & drainage for agriculture has been the principal cause of inland wetland loss worldwide,
- expanding human use of fresh water has led to less water being available to maintain the ecological character of many inland water systems.

Wetlands are crucially important to people:

- diminishing services from wetlands threaten well-being of individuals, local communities, entire states and the global community,
- >50% of the world's 500 major rivers are heavily polluted or are drying in lower reaches,
- the well-being of the many millions of people depending on these rivers has been affected or is under increasing threat,
- human health is closely linked to safe drinking water and sanitation... but:

Focussing only on Millennium Development Goals (MDG) delivery will jeopardise the capacity of wetlands to continue to deliver their vital services. On the other hand, focussing on maintaining sustainable wetland ecosystems can significantly contribute to poverty reduction, improved sanitation etc.

The Ramsar Convention has the approach and the tools to support delivery of the water and ecosystems agenda for the future. But to achieve maintenance of wetland ecosystem services it is essential for greatly improved cross-sectoral understanding, collaboration and action, e.g. on MDGs.