

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

---

4-8 December 2004, Yerevan, Armenia

Workshop A Introduction

**National Wetland Policies and Committees –  
how efficient are they to further the implementation of the Convention  
on national level?**

*Gerhard Sigmund*

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria

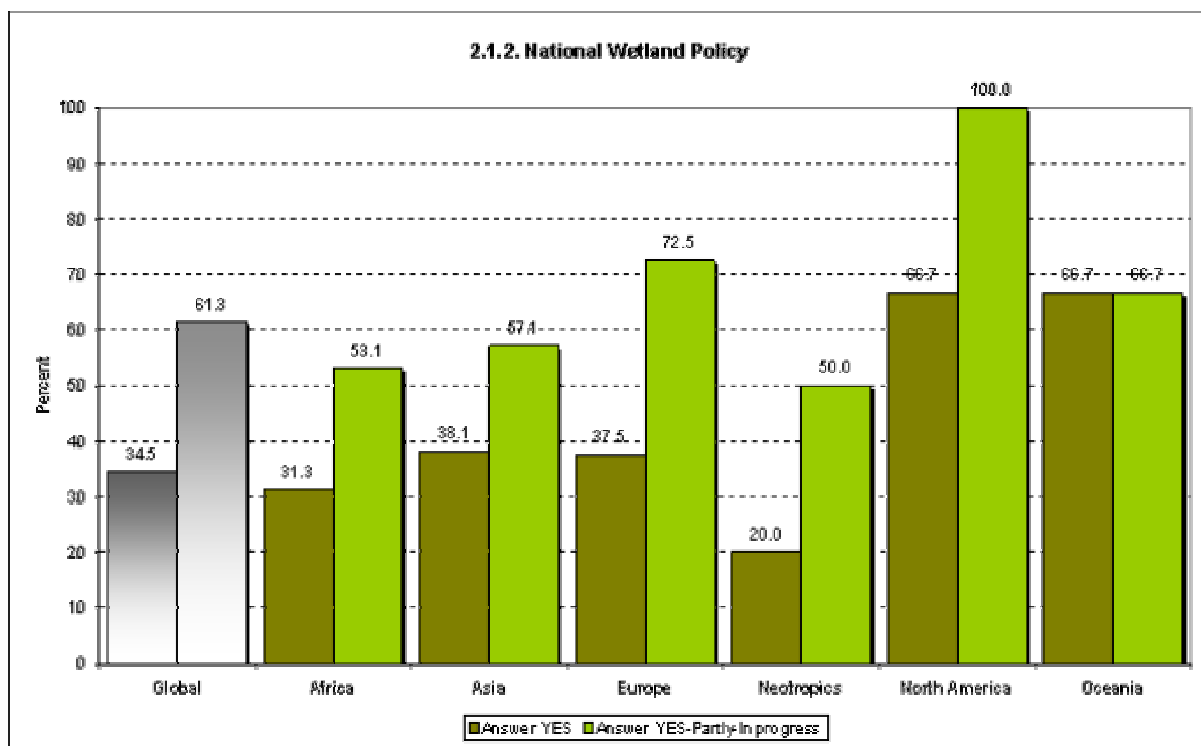
**National Wetland Policies**

Developing and implementing National Wetland Policies has been a key subject for the Ramsar Convention from the beginning of the convention's history until today. Although already the first Ramsar COP in Cagliari, Italy, 1980 was *convinced, that the establishment of comprehensive national policies would benefit the wise use of wetlands*, (Recommendation 1.5.) the vast majority of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention has not yet established such a National Wetland Policy.

COP3 in Regina, Canada 1987, recommended to use the “guidelines on wise use” for the establishment of wetland policies; and COP4 in Montreux, Switzerland 1980, reiterated this call on CPs to formulate National Wetland Policies as an important step towards facilitating conservation and wise use of wetlands. Also COP5 and COP6 highlighted this subject in Recommendations 5.7 and 6.9 before, the CPs adopted at COP7 in San José, Costa Rica 1999, specific “Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies”.

Nevertheless, two years later, when CPs made their national reports for COP8, only modest progress has been made by Parties since COP7 in the development of National Wetland Policies or equivalent instruments, in spite of the fact that at COP7 the Parties adopted a Resolution and specific guidelines on this matter. In addition, the series of indicators derived from the National Reports for this activity area may be providing a distorted picture of general progress. It turned out that there are not more than 38 % of Contracting Parties in the European Region confirming having a national wetland policy in place.

The following tables show a comparison between the global situation of National Wetland Policies and Committees and the situation in the various Ramsar Regions, among them the European Region. They were compiled by the Ramsar Secretariat on the basis of National Reports for COP8.



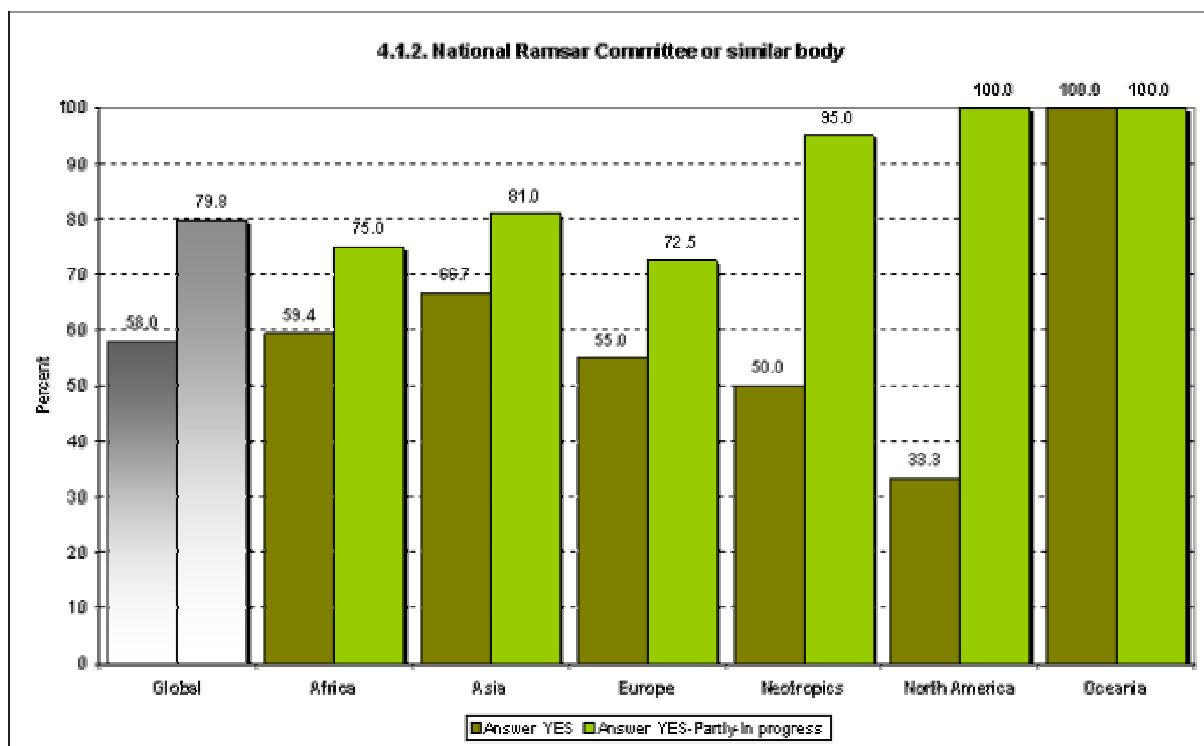
**Note:** For the indicator above, « Partly » means there is not a National Wetland Policy as such, but it is integrated in other conservation policies

If that matter has remained priority for a long time, why are there not more countries introducing national policies? Are CPs not sufficiently convinced of the benefits of such policies? Do they not have sufficient resources for establishing them? Or do they have other instruments to cover wetland strategies? Apparently the lack of capacities and resources is preventing some or more countries to work on a national policy for the time being.

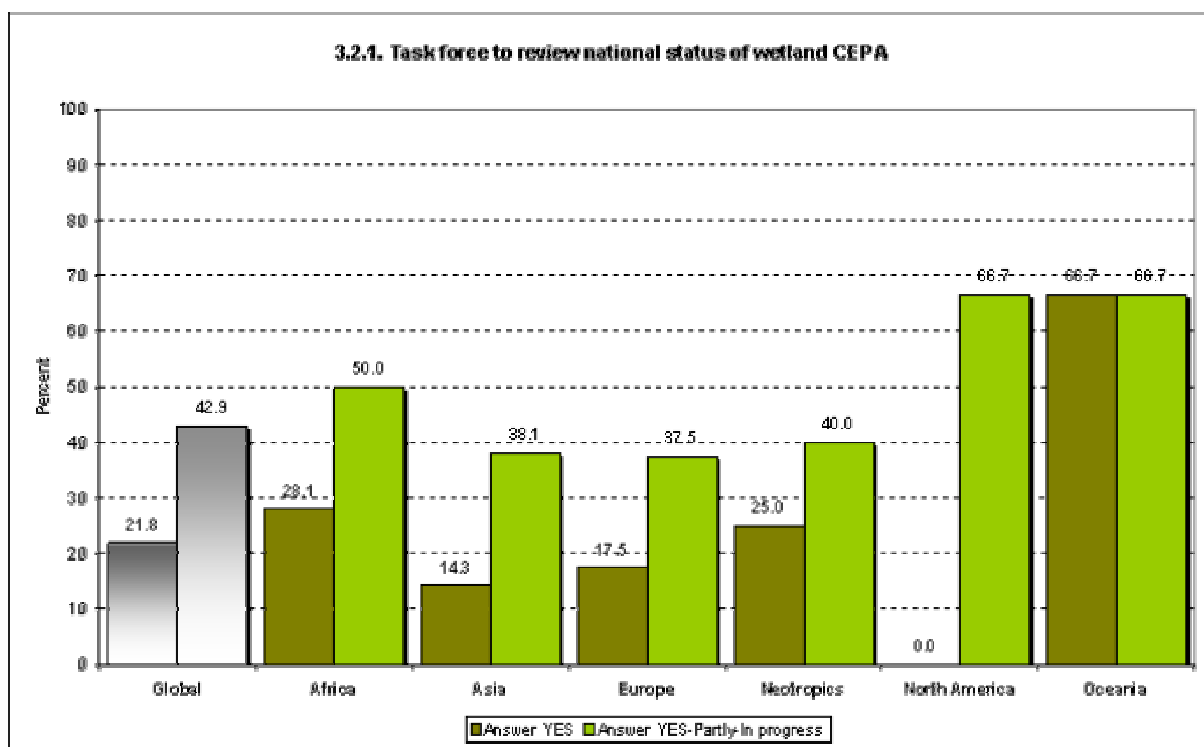
In this workshop we want to find indications to give an answer on the discrepancy between the confirmed interest of CPs during COPs and the actual results reported by CPs.

### National Ramsar Committees

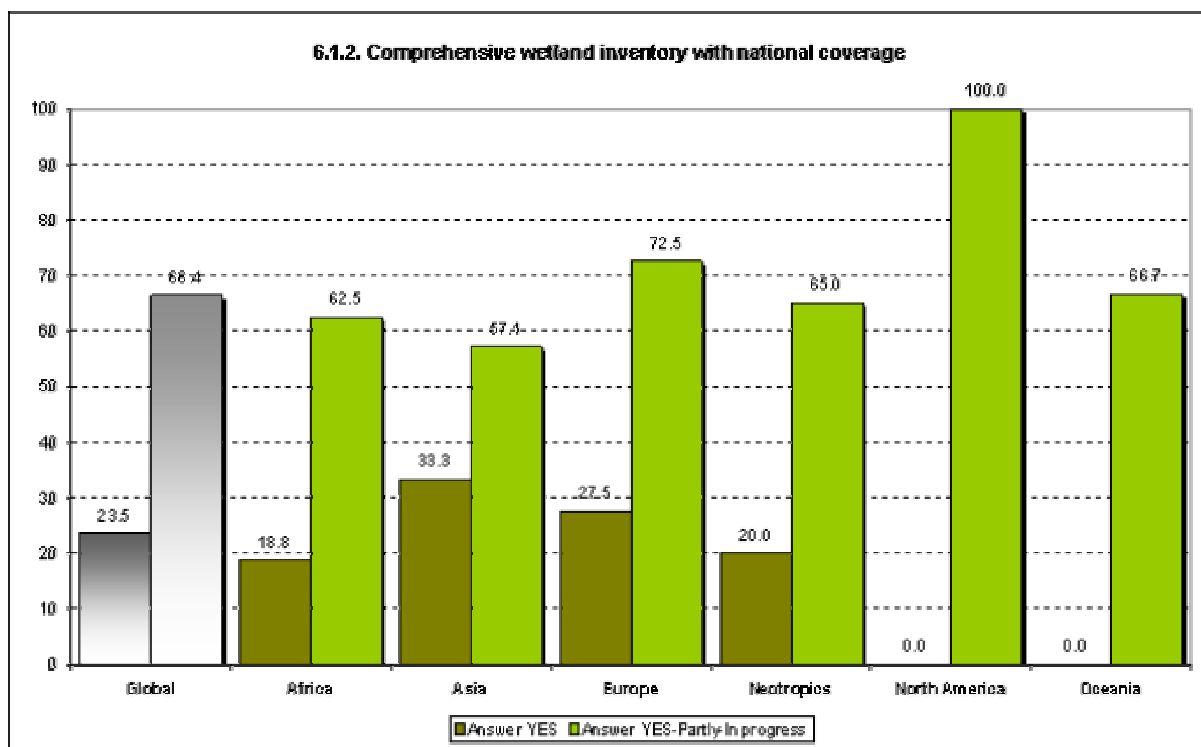
Interestingly, the community of Ramsar states discovered the potential and importance of National Coordination committees only just 22 years after the signing conference, during COP5 in Kushiro, Japan 1993, when a comparatively short Recommendation (5.7) was adopted, in which CPs *consider that national committees can provide a useful means within individual CPs and encouraged CPs to establish national committees according the needs of each CP, to provide a focus at national level for implementation of the Convention, involving GOs and NGOs.*



The review of National Reports for COP8 showed that 55% of European CPs run a “National Ramsar Committee” but only 28% of the European CPs have wetland inventories. CPs had nominated only 50% of the number of new Ramsar sites comparing to the number they pledged during COP7. Only 18% of European Ramsar CPs have a task force to coordinate Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) activities.



Despite the fact that more than 60% of all European wetlands got lost during the last 100 years, only 43% of the European CPs have integrated wetland Policies into broader planning and management policies, from local to national scales, and only 28% have completed the identification of wetland sites in need for restoration or rehabilitation!



The figure below shows that CPs do not really put emphasis in finalizing their national wetland inventories. Exactly this instrument, however, can serve as a necessary basis for CPs to become aware of measures that need to be taken and the need to prepare suitable national policies.

It can be assumed, that putting some more weight into the elaboration of national Ramsar coordination committees would be helpful to improve this picture. A national Ramsar committee can serve a variety of functions and benefits. It can be operated in a way that makes it attractive to participate, as we will hear in various presentations.

During this workshop we intend also to shed more light on the possible reasons that hinder CPs from establishing National Ramsar Committees in their countries. We want to analyze whether the reasons lie in CP's reservations because of their fear of possible bureaucracy linked to such committees, or if there is simply not enough awareness on the possible benefits of national coordination? May be different reasons exist in various European countries? The workshop tries to identify them as far as possible, in order to produce specific recommendation for COP9.

National Wetland Policies and National Ramsar Committees have a relationship. In Europe, there are some good examples of both working together in a harmonized way.



New Partnerships – here a representative of the Austrian Federal Forests explains forward-looking, new perspectives to the Austrian Ramsar Committee, meeting in October 2004.

In some key presentations we want to learn from the experiences made in Austria, Great Britain, Moldova and we hope to receive more statements from other countries on the subject during the discussion.

We also want to learn which steps have to be taken to find the optimal way in creating a National Wetland Policy and discuss the question which legal character such instruments should receive. Is it better to work in a flexible way, without a binding strategy document that serves as guidance? Or is it more helpful to have a national wetland strategy adopted at high administrative or legal level? What experience can you contribute to this questions?

It is essential for the successful implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2005 (Resolution VIII.25) to focus even more on the meaning of wetland policies and national wetland committees in view of filling Ramsar's Wise Use Concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with life. A European Regional Meeting a year in advance of COP9 forms a good opportunity to take up this subject again.