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Workshop A

**The national Ramsar committee in Austria – a federally structured
country**

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Texts of the presentation slides:

The National Ramsar Committee in Austria was founded in 1989 as a Task Force for Wetland Conservation and Management in Austria. It serves as a driving force for the national implementation in Austria, which joined the Convention in 1983. The Committee has 1 – 2 meetings per year, each of them in another Austrian Federal State.

Organisation

Austria consists of nine Federal States with their own governments. This means nine delegates of the official Nature Conservation Authorities. The chairman acts as speaker and common representative of the Federal States. Furthermore participate in the Committee: one delegate of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, the STRP National Focal Point (University of Vienna), the governmental CEPA National Focal Point (Environment Ministry), the non-governmental CEPA National Focal Point (League for Nature Conservation), a delegate from the Austrian Federal Forests, and several experts and NGO-delegates (WWF, ÖNB, Birdlife,...).

Agenda

The work of the Committee is prepared by the Federal Ministry and its Chair. The Federal States report on the situation in their respective Ramsar sites. The Federal Ministry reports on international wetland strategies and developments and on transboundary Ramsar projects. STRP and CEPA focal points and NGOs report on matters concerning them. This provides a forum for presentation and debate about main issues of common interest (e.g. wetland inventory, protection measures).

Linked to the meetings of the Committee are excursions to regional Ramsar sites, where technical explanations on their ecology and management are provided.

Some activities of the Committee

The National Ramsar Committee launches new Ramsar site designations, it assesses possible changes of the ecological character in existing Ramsar sites, initiates the Ramsar Outreach Programme, coordinates inventory and other projects, promotes best practice wetland projects, discusses the building, management and financement of Ramsar information and training centres, deals with the Austrian Wetland Strategy, and prepares the Austrian National Report for the Ramsar COPs.

Financing

The Committee has no own budget. The costs of personnel and project financing are covered by the budgets of the Federal Ministry and the individual Federal States. NGOs, agriculture, forestry and water administrations contribute to the financing of specific projects.

Austrian Wetland Strategy

A technical bureau for landscape protection was commissioned with elaborating an „Austrian Wetland Strategy“ by the Austrian Federal States and the Ministry of Environment. An important basis were comprehensive interviews with all involved key persons in order to achieve intensive cooperation with experts, NGOs and governmental bodies.

The goals of the Strategy are to secure the physical expansion and ecological quality of wetlands, to improve wetland quality and quantity, and to implement the wise use principle.

The Strategy is based on the following principles: broad *participation* of stakeholders, land owners and land users during planning and implementation, *cooperation* with NGOs, government institutions, lobbyists, property owners and technical experts, and *efficiency* through careful planning, permanent controlling and monitoring.

The Strategy aims to secure conservation of all wetlands trough research, maintenance and care, information, convincing, and pooling of efforts.

The National Wetland Strategy was approved by the National Ramsar Committee. Its main elements have been harmonized with the Austrian Biodiversity Strategy. It contains the most important principles for Ramsar action in Austria. It stresses the effective protection and management of Ramsar Sites as being very important.

Seventeen Ramsar sites in Austria

Twelve of the Austrian Ramsar sites are in the Alps, five in the lowlands. There are five riverine Ramsar sites, one contains a lake and one contains a lake delta. Nine sites contain mires and peatbogs. One covers a karst area.

Five Austrian Ramsar sites are situated on transboundary wetlands shared with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Switzerland and Germany. One site is a trilateral

Ramsar site (Morava-Dyje-Danube). One site is a bilateral Ramsar site (Lake Neusiedl-Fertö). Two more bilateral Ramsar sites are planned.

Conclusions

National teamwork brings benefits. National Wetland Committees are a suitable instrument for Ramsar implementation at national level. Cooperation results in better project quality (wetland data and Ramsar site management). National Wetland Committees can help in questions of project financing. National Wetland Committees are the floor to discuss practical problems in implementation. They help to prepare Reports for the Standing Committee and the COPs. They assist at the designation and promotion of new Ramsar sites. They are a commitment of the Contracting Party for a good Ramsar achievement.