

**Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in general,
and of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002 in particular,
during the period since the National Report prepared in 1995
for Ramsar COP6 and 30 June 1998**

Contracting Party: Belgium

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority

Full name of the institution:

Name and title of the head of the institution:

Mailing address for the head of the institution:

Name and title (if different) of the designated contact officer for Ramsar Convention matters:

Mailing address (if different) for the designated contact officer:

Telephone: Fax: Email:

Belgium : *Management Unit of the North Sea Mathematical Models (MUMM)*
Jan Haelters
Gulledelle 100
B-1200 Brussel
Telephone : 0032-(0)2-773.21.11 Fax : 0032-(0)2-770.69.72
Email : mummjh@camme.ac.be

Flanders : *Institute of Nature Conservation (Ministry of the Flemish Community)*
Eckhart Kuijken, director
Kliniekstraat 25
B-1070 Brussel
Telephone : 0032-(0)2-5581801 Fax : 0032-(0)2-5581805
Email: eckhart.kuijken@instnat.be

AMINAL Afdeling Natuur
Koen De Smet, director
Graaf de Ferraris-gebouw
Emile Jaqmainlaan 156 bus 8
1000 Brussel
Telephone : 0032-(0)2-5537684 Fax : 0032-(0)2-5537685
Email : koen.desmet@lin.vlaanderen.be

Wallonie : *Ministère de la région Wallonne*
Direction générale des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement
(Division de la Nature et des Forêts - Direction de la Nature)
Jacques Stein
Avenue Prince de Liège 15
B-5100 Namur
Téléphone : 0032-(0)81-321260 Fax : 0032-(0)81-321277
Email : V.Joniaux@mrw.wallonie.be

Bruxelles : *Institut bruxellois pour la gestion de l'environnement*
Machteld Gryseels
Téléphone : 0032-(0)2-7757561 Fax : 0032-(0)2-7757679
Email : mgr@ibgebim.be

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 1

To progress towards universal membership of the Convention.

- 1.1 Describe any actions your government has taken (such as hosting regional or subregional meetings/consultations, working cooperatively with neighbouring countries on transfrontier wetland sites) to encourage others to join the Convention.

Neighbouring countries have all joined the Convention. Mais le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg a présenté sa première zone Ramsar en 1998. Depuis plusieurs années, à l'initiative du groupe "Sud" de la Commission spéciale de l'Environnement de l'Union économique Benelux, des démarches étaient entreprises afin d'encourager le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg à ratifier la Convention de Ramsar; le but était de pouvoir proposer à la convention un site Ramsar transfrontalier concernant un cours d'eau : la Haute-Sûre. Ce projet transfrontalier sera vraisemblablement déposé durant l'année 1999.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 2

To achieve the wise use of wetlands by implementing and further developing the Ramsar Wise Use Guidelines.

- 2.1 Has a National Wetland Policy/Strategy/Action Plan been developed, or is one being developed or planned for the near future? If so:

a. What are/will be its main features?

b. Was it, or is it, intended that the Policy/Strategy/Action Plan be adopted by the whole of Government, the Minister responsible for Ramsar matters or through some other process. Please describe.

c. How does it relate/will it relate to other national environmental/ conservation planning initiatives (e.g., National Environmental Action Plans, National Biodiversity Action Plans, National Conservation Strategies)?

As wetland conservation in Belgium is mainly a competence of the regional authorities, no specific National Wetland Policy/Strategy/Action Plan has been developed. Only the North Sea has remained a matter of the federal government.

(a) A new law concerning the protection of the North Sea is being prepared by the federal ministry responsible for marine environmental protection. This MMM (Marien Milieu Marin) bill reflects the current policy of the Federal Government in the area of marine environmental protection and nature conservation in the North Sea. It was approved by the Cabinet on 25 July 1997. The new law will provide for:

- *the obligation for all users of the marine environment to take account of the principles of prevention, precautionary approach, sustainable management, compensation for damage and the polluter-pays principle;*
- *the creation of marine protected areas of five possible types:*
 - *integral nature reserves*
 - *directed nature reserves*
 - *special protection areas*
 - *areas closed for certain activities*
 - *buffer zones*
- *the effective protection of a number of species;*
- *the prohibition of introductions of non-indigenous species or genetically modified organisms;*
- *ship traffic schemes to preserve protected areas;*
- *contingency planning for accidental pollutions as well as a regime of compensation and restoration;*

- a procedure of environmental impact assessments and studies for activities subject to a licence or authorisation;
- enforcement through a reinforced control and high penalties.

(b) The Belgian Government has initiated the approval/ratification procedure of the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the protocol. A bill on the establishment of an exclusive economic zone in the North Sea is in preparation.

- 2.2 If a policy is in place, how much progress has been made in its implementation, and what are the major difficulties being encountered in doing so?
- 2.3 If a Policy/Strategy/Action Plan is in place, is the responsibility for implementing it with :
- a. a single Government Ministry,
 - b. a committee drawn from several Ministries, or
 - c. a cross-sectoral committee?

Please provide details.

- 2.4 For countries with Federal systems of Government, are there Wetland Policies/Strategies/Plans in place, being developed or planned for the provincial/state or regional levels of Government?
Yes

As nature conservation is a regional matter since 1980, the development of Wetland Policies and Plans (with exception of the marine environment) is the responsibility of the three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region.

a. Flanders:

Although no specific Wetland Strategy or Plan has been developed, a new Decree Concerning the Conservation of Nature and the Natural Environment - adopted by the Flemish Government in October 1997 - is a considerable progress in a better and more efficient nature conservation policy in Flanders, including the conservation of wetland areas. The basis of this decree is the development of a Flemish ecological network, a concept launched and strongly recommended by the Institute of Nature Conservation.

The Decree also stresses that the Flemish Government may take all necessary nature conservation measures in a number of designated areas, including Ramsar sites.

The Decree defines the Flemish Ecological Network and requires that 125,000 ha to be designated for the Network within 5 years and that managements plans be produced for these areas (Article 17). It lists the types of habitats that can be designated under the Network (Article 20). Hydrological management measures to be taken for these areas include the following:

- *reduction of drying up threats for these areas, the restoration of natural areas that have been dried up, and the management of watercourses for the conservation and rehabilitation of their natural richness, in a way that areas outside the Network do not undergo disproportionate effects (Article 18).*
- *The Flemish Government determines the projects, plans or activities that take place in the Network, and the projects, plans or activities of direct hydrological effect on areas of the Network, for which the initiator or the watercourse or the water harnessing manager concerned is required to carry out hydrological studies, in collaboration with the Institute of Nature Conservation, including the ecological effect, with a view to take effective measures and to achieve a better balance of effects with the present and potential natural elements (Article 19).*
- *The preservation, restoration and/or balancing of the hydrological regime with natural elements of high natural quality, especially water quality, water quantity and the natural structures if watercourses and their peripheral areas in a way that the surrounding areas*

outside the Network do not undergo disproportionate effects (Article 25, para. 1,2).

- The protection of groundwater infiltration areas (Article 25, para. 1,3).

The Decree also provides for the designation of 150,000 ha of “interweaving natural areas” within 5 years, where measures are to be taken “to encourage and optimise natural richness” and incentives are to be applied “in favour of biological diversity” (Article 27). It also defines natural reserves and the types of activities allowed in them (Section 3).

The Flemish Ecological Network will be gradually integrated in the new physical planning map for Flanders (“Structuurplan Vlaanderen”) and functional relations with the draft Decree on Physical Planning (1998) are established.

b. En Région wallonne

En 1989, le Gouvernement wallon a adopté un arrêté de protection des zones humides d'intérêt biologique. Cet arrêté a permis à l'heure actuelle de désigner 19 ZHIB (Zones Humides d'Intérêt Biologique) pour une superficie de 730 ha. A partir de janvier 1999, une personne sera chargée spécifiquement de la finalisation de plusieurs dizaines de dossiers ZHIB en attente de désignation, en ce compris de nombreux tronçons de cours d'eau. La principale difficulté de la mise en oeuvre de l'arrêté ZHIB réside dans la nature du propriétaire de la zone. Sauf quelques initiatives privées spontanées, les ZHIB sont sur terrain appartenant aux pouvoirs publics.

En 1999, un Programme d'Actions pour la Nature sera finalisé; un chapitre sera spécifiquement consacré aux zones humides et viendra conforter l'arrêté de protection des zones humides d'intérêt biologique adopté en 1989 par le Gouvernement wallon.

Cet arrêté a adopté la définition de Ramsar pour qualifier les zones humides. L'intérêt biologique de ces zones est soumis à l'avis du Conseil Supérieur Wallon de la Conservation de la Nature. Toutes les espèces animales et végétales y sont protégées (sauf celles qui relèvent des lois sur la chasse et sur la pêche). Des mesures de gestion sont prévues dans l'arrêté de désignation des ZHIB.

c. Région de Bruxelles-Capitale

Il n'y a pas de politique spécifique mais la protection des zones humides fait partie de la politique globale de Conservation de la Nature; la protection des zones humides constitue même une priorité vu leur vulnérabilité en milieu urbain.

En ce qui concerne les eaux de surface, le projet "Maillage bleu" vise à développer une gestion intégrée, durable et écologique des cours d'eau, ainsi que la réhabilitation des zones humides en général.

- 2.5 Has a review of legislation and practices which impact on wetlands been carried out, and if so, has this resulted in any changes which assist with implementation of the Ramsar Convention? Please describe these.

a. Flanders

A Liquid Manure Action Plan has been in force since 1995 and deals with the use of fertilizers. This Plan should result in a better water quality and an improvement of wetland habitat. An evaluation and revision is planned for end 1998.

b. Wallonia

c. Brussels

- 2.6 Describe the efforts made in your country to have wetlands considered in integrated land/water and coastal zone planning and management processes at the following levels:
- national
 - provincial
 - local

a. Flanders

For all major river basins, special committees have been established for integrated water management, combined with aspects of land use, conservation and recreation. Within these committees, all Flemish administrations of water, land and nature management, provincial and local authorities and NGO's are represented. There is however not yet a Decree that provides a legal framework for these committees.

b. En Région wallonne

Au niveau régional, des contrats de rivière ont été mis en place afin d'aboutir à une gestion intégrée soit des cours d'eau, soit des bassins hydrographiques. Les contrats de rivière visent toutes les catégories de cours d'eau et mettent en place un partenariat composé de tous les gestionnaires des cours d'eau, des administrations régionale, provinciale et locale, des ONG, ... De son côté, le Service de la Pêche étudie la problématique des unités de gestion piscicole par le biais de bassins-pilotes (ressources alimentaires, biodiversité, état des populations de poissons,...). Enfin, à la suite d'une décision du Comité de Ministres de l'Union économique Benelux relative à la libre circulation des poissons, des programmes sont mis en place afin de lever tous les obstacles à la circulation des poissons, migrateurs et non migrateurs, dans les cours d'eau de Wallonie.

Au niveau local, des Plans Communaux de Développement de la Nature sont mis en place sur fond de réseau écologique et de partenariat des acteurs. Dans la stratégie globale, les zones humides font fréquemment l'objet de groupes de travail et d'actions spécifiques.

c. Brussels

Other: see New Decree on Nature Conservation (2.4)

- 2.7 Have there been any publications produced, or practices documented, which could assist other countries to promote and improve the application of the Ramsar Wise Use of Wetlands Guidelines?

If Yes, please provide details and copies.

- 2.8 Noting COP6 Recommendation 6.14 relating to toxic chemicals and pollution, please advise of the actions taken since then "to remedy and to prevent pollution impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands" (Operative paragraph 9).

a. Flanders

- Waste water treatment is considered as a priority within the environmental policy of the Flemish Government, with special efforts for the construction of sewage discharge systems and water purification plants. This has led to a considerable improvement of the water quality of some of the major rivers in Flanders as the Schelde and the Yzer.

- *The Liquid Manure Action Plan (see 2.5) also sets water quality standards. An evaluation of the plan is foreseen in 1998.*

b. Région wallonne

Une Société Publique pour la Gestion de l'Eau (SPGE) a été créée afin de rassembler les moyens nécessaires à une épuration de toutes les eaux usées d'ici 2002.

2.9 Describe what steps have been taken to incorporate wetland economic valuation techniques into natural resource planning and assessment actions.

2.10 Is Environmental Impact Assessment for actions potentially impacting on wetlands required under legislation in your country? *Yes*

a. Flanders

In internationally protected areas (SPA, Ramsar) and in green areas on the Flemish physical planning maps, an Environmental Impact Assessment is needed for all actions that can cause changes in vegetation or water levels (Decree on the Environment 1995).

b. Wallonia

c. Brussels

2.11 Is wetland restoration and rehabilitation considered a priority in your country? *Yes/No.*

If Yes, describe the actions that have been taken to identify wetlands in need of these actions and to mobilise resources for restoration or rehabilitation.

Nature restoration and nature development at local level are encouraged by the Flemish and Walloon Government (see also 7.6).

2.12 Describe what actions have been taken to “encourage active and informed participation of local communities, including indigenous people, and in particular women, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.” (refer to Actions 2.7.1-4 in the Strategic Plan).

2.13 Describe what actions have been taken to “encourage involvement of the private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands” (refer to Actions 2.8.1-4 in the Strategic Plan). Has this included a review of fiscal measures (taxation arrangements, etc.) to identify and remove disincentives and introduce incentives for wetlands conservation and wise use? *Yes*

If yes, please provide details.

a. Flanders

The Flemish Government gives financial support to 4 private nature conservation organisations to acquire and manage nature reserves (50 % of acquisition costs, part of management costs). At present, 121 private nature reserves have been officially recognised, totalling 3743 ha. (situation June 1998). A great number of these reserves concern wetland habitat of national and international importance. Beside these private reserves, also 30 State Nature Reserves have been established, totalling about 3651 ha.

b. Région wallonne

Le Gouvernement wallon octroie des subventions pour l'acquisition et la gestion des réserves

naturelles respectivement à 5 et à 7 associations privées de Conservation de la Nature. A ce jour, 86 réserves ont été agréées par le Gouvernement wallon (985 ha). En outre, 64 réserves naturelles domaniales couvrent 6.149 ha. Toutes ces réserves comptent une majorité de sites correspondant à la définition des zones humides.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 3

To raise awareness of wetland values and functions throughout the world and at all levels

- 3.1 Is there a government-run national programme for Education and Public Awareness in your country which focuses on, or includes, wetlands? Yes/No? If yes, what are the priority actions under this programme and who are the target groups? (Refer also to question 9.4)

a. Flanders

In two Ramsar areas, the Blankaart reserve and the Kalmthoutse Heide, nature visitor centres have been established by the Flemish government. The visitor centre on the Blankaart at Woumen (Diksmuide) is however not operational yet.

b. Région wallonne

Dans le site Ramsar de Harchies sont installés un centre de recherche, un espace d'exposition-conférence et un Centre Régional d'Initiation à l'Ecologie (CRIE) axés sur la problématique des zones humides. Le Parlement wallon adoptera prochainement un décret sur les CRIE dont une des missions consistera à sensibiliser les jeunes et les adultes aux zones menacées et vulnérables, dont les zones humides.

- 3.2 Describe the steps taken to have wetlands issues and Ramsar's Wise Use principles included as part of the curricula of educational institutions. Has this been at all levels of education (primary, secondary, tertiary and adult)? Please give details.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 4

To reinforce the capacity of institutions in each Contracting Party to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.

- 4.1 Describe the mechanisms in place, or being introduced, to increase cooperation between the various institutions responsible for actions which can have an impact on the conservation and wise use of wetlands. If one of the mechanisms is a National Ramsar/Wetlands Committee, please describe its composition, functions and *modus operandi*.

Although a national Ramsar Committee has not been established yet, the first contacts between federal, Flemish and Walloon administrative services have been made and a first meeting is planned for the end of 1998.

4.2 Of the following, indicate which have been undertaken:

a. a review to identify the training needs of institutions and individuals concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands Yes/No? If yes, please indicate the major findings of the review.

No

b. a review to identify training opportunities for these people both within your country and in other countries. Yes/No?

No

c. the development of training modules or a training programme specifically for wetland managers. If yes, please give details.

No

d. people from your country have gained wetland-related training either within or outside the country. Yes/No? If yes, please give details.

Scientific programs on biodiversity training courses exist, which include wetland matters.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 5

To ensure the conservation of all sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).

5.1 Of the Ramsar sites in your country, how many have formal management plans:

- a. being prepared?
- b. fully prepared?
- c. being implemented?

Please indicate in the attached table of Ramsar sites which sites these are and what category they fall into.

- Vlaamse banken: No management plan aims strictly at the conservation of this area. To avoid damage to the environment from certain human activities however, some prevention measures have been taken under international policies as the MARPOL73/78 Convention (prevention of marine pollution from ships) and the EC's Common Fisheries Policy.

- The Ramsar areas 'De IJzerbroeken te Diksmuide en Lo-Reninge' and 'Schorren van de Beneden-Zeeschelde' make part of so called 'Ecological Impulse Areas'.. For these areas, management and action plans have been developed by the Flemish regional environment administration. Parts of these Ramsar areas (eg. the Blankaart private nature reserve and 'Paardenschor' at Doel) are also designated as nature reserves for which management plans have been made.

- For the nature reserve 'Kalmthoutse Heide' - including the Ramsar area - a management plan is developed and is gradually implemented.

- Les marais de Harchies ont un plan de gestion en cours d'application.

5.2 Of the management plans referred to above, which ones have included a monitoring scheme or programme to allow changes in ecological character to be detected? Please indicate this in the

attached table of Ramsar sites also.

In most of the Ramsar areas, several groups of animal and plant species are monitored as part of national, regional or local monitoring programs. Especially they are covered during the International Waterbird Censuses of Wetlands International.

1. Vlaamse Banken:

- *An extensive study of bird populations in the RAMSAR area is continuing. A new 5-year project started in 1997: "North Sea seabirds and marine mammals: pathology and ecotoxicology" .. It is funded by the federal authority. Other studies in the area (e.g. benthos studies) are also in progress.*
- *A network has been established to record bird and mammal strandings in the shore area, to collect corpses, conduct necropsies, pathological and toxicological analyses and to determine the cause of death. A brochure on what to do in case of strandings of marine mammals or seabirds has been distributed among coastal communities, local authorities and volunteers.*

2. Blankaart area and IJzerbroeken

- *An extensive monitoring project of wintering and breeding birds populations is continuing at the Institute of Nature Conservation.*
- *On the Blankaart lake, fish populations, plancton and water vegetation have been studied as a part of a 'biomanipulation' project to improve the quality and transparency of the water.*

3. Zwin area

- *Especially waterbirds - both breeding and non-breeding - are counted on a regular basis.*

4. Schorren van de Beneden Schelde

- *An extensive monitoring project of wintering and breeding bird populations is coordinated by the Institute of Nature Conservation.*
- *Other studies include benthic organisms and saltmarsh vegetations.*

5. Kalmthoutse Heide

- *A detailed census of breeding birds - funded by the Flemish nature administration - is planned for 1999, 10 years after the last total census.*
- *There are also monitoring-programs for vegetations and butterflies.*

6. Marais de Harchies

- *La surveillance est permanente pour certains paramètres : qualité de l'eau, faune, flore, roselières.*

5.3 Has there been a change in the ecological character (either positive or negative) at any of your Ramsar sites or is this likely to occur in the near future? Yes. If Yes, please give details.

1. De Vlaamse banken

- *In the area, the extent of sport fishery, especially of illegal sport fishery with fixed nets, has decreased, probably due to the efforts of the Marine Fisheries Service and MUMM. Recreational beach fishery which is also using fixed nets has reached a level that requires*

urgent action by the responsible authorities. Some measures have already been taken to reduce the effect of this fishery, which is especially popular at the western part of the Belgian coast.

- Recreational activities are still increasing. The yacht harbour of Nieuwpoort continues to grow; an increasing number of sailing ships, and to lesser extent motorboats has its mooring here.
- A survey of the population density, and the possibilities of harvesting the Trough shell (*Spisula subtruncata*), known to be an essential food source for the wintering common scoters, has been done. If such a fishery is ever practiced in Belgium, it will have to be managed appropriately. For the moment this fishery is not allowed in Belgian territorial waters.

2. De IJzerbroeken te Diksmuide en Lo-Reninge (including Blankaart Lake)

- In general, water levels are kept very low in this area, mainly for agricultural purposes. After the large floods in 1993/94 and 1994/95, sluice systems and a pump station in the Ramsar area have been renewed and modernised in 1997 and 1998, allowing a better and faster evacuation of flood water to the river Yzer and the North Sea. As there are no legal agreements about minimum water levels in the area (including the Ramsar area), there is serious concern that these measures will have negative effects on the frequency and the proportion of floodings in the floodplain area and will lead to a further degradation of wetland habitat. Therefore, a ministerial decision about minimum water levels in the Ramsar area is very urgent to reverse the ecological degradation of wet grasslands, marshlands and the aquatic habitat itself.
- The construction of the highway 'A19', as is indicated on the original rural planning maps (1968-1974), has been deleted by the Flemish government in the new physical planning maps. There is however a high pressure from certain groups (industry, tourism) to alter this decision and to construct the highway as was originally planned (which should divide the Ramsar site in two parts).
- Bad water quality is still a major problem in the Ramsar area, despite considerable progress in waste water treatment. Intensive agricultural practices in and around the Ramsar area are responsible for very high amounts of nutrients. Although there are some restrictions on the use of fertilizers in the area in function of the production of drinking water, the problems with nitrates remain very high. The bad water quality in the Blankaart lake is also a great problem for the lake restoration project that has started in 1992. A successful biomanipulation (fish removal to increase zooplankton population and suppress phytoplankton biomass) is probably not possible without a drastic decrease of nutrient levels. This requires additional measures in upstream areas (e.g. ecological management of ditches and rivulets, modification of agricultural practices along the rivulets that feed the lake and the sanitation of the remaining, isolated sewage drainages). The possible effects of high level of pesticide residues in the water on a regrowth of the water vegetation are still unclear.

2. Schorren van de Beneden Schelde

The ecological effects of the construction of two container terminals at the border of the Ramsar area are not clear yet, although major changes in bird populations did not occur on a short term. The construction of a third container terminal and a new tidal dock, in combination with a further deepening of the Zeeschelde estuary during the coming years, will however be responsible for an additional pressure on the ecological values of the estuary, including the 3 mudflat- and saltmarsh areas that form the Ramsar site.

3. Zwin area

Silting up of mudflats and saltmarshes of the Zwin reserve is still a major problem, and no long term solution has been found yet. A Belgian/Dutch commission is still studying the matter.

4. Kalmthoutse Heide

There were no major changes in the ecological character of the Ramsar site during the last years, although there are still problems with excessive recreation, lowering of water tables and the effects of large fires a few years ago.

*One of the original criteria to include this large nature reserve was the presence of an important nocturnal roost of Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) but numbers of this species decreased considerably during the last decade (also outside the Ramsar area).*

5. Marais de Harchies

Conservation et développement des milieux d'intérêt majeur (roselières) et impact positif sur les populations de rousserolle turdoïde et de gorgebleue.

- 5.4 In the case of Montreux Record Ramsar sites where the Management Guidance Procedure has been applied, what is the status of the implementation of the MGP report recommendations? What is the expected time-frame for removing the site from the Montreux Record?

The Ramsar site "Schorren van de Beneden Schelde" has been placed on the Montreux-list because of possible negative influences of the construction of a container terminal at the very border of the Ramsar site. The Flemish government is waiting for reply on her specific answers to the deterioration of the site.

- 5.5 For those countries referred to in COP6 Recommendations 6.17.1-4, "Ramsar sites in the Territories of Specific Contracting Parties", please provide advice on the actions that have been taken in response to the issues raised at that time.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 6

To designate for the Ramsar List those wetlands which meet the Convention's criteria, especially wetland types still under-represented in the List and transfrontier wetlands.

- 6.1 Has a national inventory of wetlands been prepared for your country? Yes/No.

If no, are there plans for this to be done? Yes/No.

Where a national inventory exists please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept and what information it contains.

a. Flanders

At Flemish regional level, the Biological Evaluation Map includes a full cover of all types of habitats, based upon detailed legend units. The Institute of Nature Conservation is updating and publishing these data.

b. Région wallonne

Un inventaire des zones humides a été élaboré dès 1989 et est régulièrement actualisé. Il compte plus de 300 sites en cours de désignation officielle. Il peut être consulté sur le

site <http://www.rw.be/dgrne/sibw>. On y trouve la localisation et le contenu biologique (flore, faune, habitats).

- 6.2 Does there exist a list or directory of “important” wetlands for your country or region? Yes/No.

If yes, please provide details of when it was finalised, where it is kept, what criteria for “important” were used, and the types of information it contains.

a. Flanders

An updated list has been prepared by the Institute of Nature Conservation of all wetlands that are internationally important for waterbirds, using the 1 %-criterion. The Flemish High Council of Nature Conservation advised the Minister to extend the existing List of Ramsar sites by including these sites.

- 6.3 If it is known, please provide an estimate of the area of wetlands in your country at present and any information on rates of loss or conversion to other activities.

If this information is available, please indicate what definition of “wetland” was used.

a. Flanders

The Biological Evaluation Map (see 6.1) gives an idea of the total area of different habitats in Flanders. As most habitat types are only recorded as part of a larger complex of several habitats, only a range of the habitat surface can be given (an absolute minimum and maximum surface).

| <i>Habitat type</i> | <i>Min. surface (in ha)</i> | <i>Max. surface (in ha)</i> |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Wet heath</i> | <i>3243</i> | <i>6315</i> |
| <i>Dry heath</i> | <i>5787</i> | <i>10450</i> |
| <i>Marshes (reedbeds, ...)</i> | <i>4060</i> | <i>11802</i> |
| <i>Woodland marshes</i> | <i>3252</i> | <i>7080</i> |
| <i>Brackish lakes or ponds</i> | <i>300</i> | <i>470</i> |
| <i>Eutrophic lakes or ponds</i> | <i>3240</i> | <i>5130</i> |
| <i>Fish ponds</i> | <i>890</i> | <i>1270</i> |
| <i>Deep waters</i> | <i>3560</i> | <i>3880</i> |
| <i>Saltmarshes</i> | <i>260</i> | <i>390</i> |
| <i>Mudflats</i> | <i>570</i> | <i>720</i> |
| <i>Wet semi-natural grasslands</i> | <i>11100</i> | <i>14240</i> |
| <i>Intensified semi-natural/wet grasslands</i> | <i>16000</i> | <i>22280</i> |
| <i>Dune vegetations</i> | <i>1260</i> | <i>2840</i> |

Figures about losses of natural or semi-natural habitats are not analysed yet.

b. Région wallonne

Dans le cadre d'un inventaire permanent des habitats lancé en Région wallonne en 1998, il sera possible dans les années à venir d'obtenir ces renseignements.

- 6.4 Have any actions been taken in response to the COP6 Resolutions and Recommendations that Contracting Parties should give priority to listing Wetlands of International Importance which:
- meet the criteria for fish habitat (Resolution VI.2),
 - meet the 1% criterion for waterbird populations using data provided by the International Waterfowl Census (Resolution VI.4),
 - are subterranean karst or cave wetland systems (Resolution VI.5),
 - are peatland ecosystems (Recommendation 6.1)
 - are coral reefs and associated systems (Recommendation 6.7)
 - are under-represented wetland types (which apart from d. and e. above include mangroves and sea grass beds) (Strategic Plan Action 6.2.3)

Yes/No? If yes, please describe these actions.

a. Flanders

Yes, the list of wetlands that meet the 1 % criterium for waterbirds has been updated. Beside the 4 designated Ramsar sites, another 11 sites can be regarded as internationally important for wintering waterfowl.

- Achterhaven Zeebrugge
- Poldercomplexen Oost- en Middenkust
- Krekengebied/polders Noord-Oost-Vlaanderen
- Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen Drongen
- Gentse Kanaalzone
- Schorren en slikken Zeeschelde, Durme en Rupel
- Blokkersdijk en De Kuifeend
- Poldercomplexen en havengebied Antwerpen Linkeroever
- Rivierengebied Willebroek, Mechelen, Lier
- Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg
- De Grensmaas-vallei

As is shown in the table below, the designation of these new Ramsar-areas would lead to a considerable better protection of waterbird populations in Flanders.

| | | (0) | % Flemish population in Ramsar (1) | % Flemish population in Ramsar ++ (2) |
|----|--|------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Anser brachyrhynchos</i> | 59,1 | 0,0 | 65,6 |
| 2 | <i>Anas strepera</i> | 11,7 | 4,8 | 72,1 |
| 3 | <i>Anas clypeata</i> | 7,3 | 11,6 | 60,3 |
| 4 | <i>Anas crecca</i> | 6,2 | 6,1 | 85,7 |
| 5 | <i>Anas penelope</i> | 5,9 | 39,9 | 77,0 |
| 6 | <i>Aythya ferina</i> | 5,1 | 0,8 | 56,7 |
| 7 | <i>Anser albifrons</i> | 4,9 | 2,8 | 75,4 |
| 8 | <i>Anas acuta</i> | 3,1 | 13,4 | 73,1 |
| 9 | <i>Anser anser</i> | 2,6 | 33,2 | 75,4 |
| 10 | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | 2,3 | 6,0 | 50,0 |
| 11 | <i>Cygnus columbianus</i> | 2,1 | 17,8 | 82,2 |
| 12 | <i>Fulica atra</i> | 1,9 | 6,0 | 38,5 |
| 13 | <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> | 1,8 | 9,9 | 57,7 |
| 14 | <i>Aythya fuligula</i> | 1,7 | 2,4 | 46,8 |
| 15 | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> | 1,7 | 2,2 | 51,8 |
| 16 | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> | 1,2 | 10,7 | 40,3 |
| 17 | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | < 1 | 2,0 | 34,8 |
| | <i>n species > 50 % present in (potential) Ramsar areas</i> | | 0/17 | 13/17 |

Comment [k1]:

Proportion of the Flemish waterfowl populations in (1) the designated Ramsar areas and (2) all areas that

*meet the Ramsar criteria (1993/94 - 1996/97).
In column 0 the average proportion of the total Flemish population in NW-Europe is given which
is also reflected in the ranking of the species .
(data: Institute of Nature Conservation)*

b. Région wallonne

Des mesures sont actuellement prises pour désigner :

- une zone qui satisfait aux critères relatifs aux poissons, qui concerne un cours d'eau et qui est transfrontalière (Haute-Sûre) ;*
- une zone de tourbière (Hautes-Fagnes) ;*
- une grotte (grotte des émotions, découverte en 1997).*

Pour ces zones, les études biologiques et la cartographie sont terminées et en voie de digitalisation.

- 6.5 If your government indicated at COP6 that it would be proceeding to list further specific sites, please advise of the status of this action.

a. Flanders

Although at COP6, a list has been published in the Ramsar National Report of potential new Ramsar sites that meet the criteria of the Convention, the Flemish government did not proceed with the designation of new Ramsar sites.

b. Région wallonne

Les 3 sites sous 6.5 devrait être désignés officiellement en 1999.

- 6.6 Please advise which of the sites included in the Ramsar List from your country are transfrontier wetlands (Refer also to 7.1).

- The valley of the river Maas (Meuse) is a transfrontier wetland of international importance (eg. for Cormorant). The Netherlands, Flanders and Wallonia started an international coöperation for integrated water management of the Maas. In the Netherlands and Flanders, plans have been developed which combine flood prevention measures with large scale nature development along the Grensmaas (Border Meuse).*
- The Ramsar site 'Vlaamse banken' is a part a large complex of shallow sand banks in the southern North Sea, off the coast of Belgium and Northern France. The banks in the French part of the area are however not designated as a Ramsar site.*
- The brackish tidal mudflats and marshes along the Schelde river (North of Antwerp) are situated just upstream of the Dutch border and thus are connected with the "Verdronken Land van Saefinghe" in the Netherlands, a Ramsar site along the Westerschelde.*
- The Zwin nature reserve is situated at the Dutch border, but the Ramsar status is only contributed to the Flemish part.*
- De Flemish Ramsar site 'Kalmthoutse Heide' makes part of a bordercrossing landscape park 'De Zoom-Kalmthoutse Heide' which has a Benelux status.*

- 6.7 Describe any plans, or actions being taken for further transfrontier sites to be listed (Refer also to 7.1).

*No action has been taken yet to designate the Maas valley as a transfrontier Ramsar site in the Netherlands, Flanders and Wallonia.
Le site transfrontalier de la Haute-Sûre devrait être désigné en 1999.*

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 7

To mobilise international cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.

7.1 Briefly describe any bilateral or multilateral activities that have been taken, are under way, or are planned for the management of transfrontier wetlands or their watersheds/catchments (Refer also to 6.6 and 6.7).

7.2 Do you have Ramsar sites that are "twinned" with others, either nationally or internationally? Yes/No.

If yes, please give details.

7.3 Where your country is also a signatory of any of the following Conventions, describe what mechanism(s) exist to assist regular dialogue and cooperative actions between the personnel responsible for their implementation and the Ramsar Administrative Authority:

- a. Convention on Biological Diversity
- b. Framework Convention on Climate Change
- c. Convention to Combat Desertification
- d. Convention on Migratory Species
- e. World Heritage Convention

a., d. : Some administrative authorities are responsible.

Il existe un Comité de Coordination pour la Politique Internationale de la Belgique en matière d'Environnement (CCPIE); en son sein, il y a un "Groupe de travail Nature" qui assure la coordination entre les diverses conventions adoptées (RIO - BONN - RAMSAR - BERN ...).

7.4 Is your country cooperating as part of any bilateral or multilateral activities directed at the conservation of migratory wetland species? Yes/No.

If yes, please provide details.

The Institute of Nature Conservation and administrative authorities were represented at the AEWa Conference in 1995 at Noordwijk (the Netherlands).

La Région participe à un programme de suivi des cigognes noires en migration entre la Belgique et l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

7.5 Are there multilateral and/or bilateral donors supporting projects which contribute to implementation of the Ramsar Convention in your country? Yes/No.

If yes, please provide details.

7.6 Does your government make an annual budgetary allocation to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands within your country? Yes/No.

a. Flanders

The government only supports activities of local administrations for nature management and nature development. Each year, 20.000.000 BEF is available for Municipal Nature Development Actions. At present, there are 110 projects. 33 % of these projects concern wetland areas or rivulets/ditches.

If yes, is this a specific allocation to a wetlands programme or as part of a larger environment or natural resource management budget?

b. Région wallonne

Il y a des attributions budgétaires spécifiques à la gestion des Réserves Naturelles privées ou publiques, dont les zones humides importantes (montant en 1998 :24.500.000 BEF.).

7.7 If your country has a development assistance programme, does it include funds earmarked for wetland conservation and wise use in other countries? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.

No

7.8 Is there a formal process in place for consultation between the Ramsar Administrative Authority and the development assistance programme in your country, where one exists? Yes/No

No

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 8

To provide the Convention with the required institutional mechanisms and resources.

8.1 Has your government made voluntary financial contributions, other than the invoiced contributions or to the Small Grants Fund, to further the work of the Convention globally? Yes/No.

a. Flanders

In process (Brisbane pledge)

b. Région wallonne

Contributions volontaires en 1998 (Bureau de la Convention de Ramsar: 14.000 US \$ - Fonds Ramsar : 17.500 CHF).

8.2 If your country is in arrears with the payment of its annual contributions to the Ramsar Convention, please indicate the reasons for this situation and the prospects for paying these arrears in the near future.

Payment depends on regional contributions. This structural problem is being solved. "Dues" from previous years will be paid before the end of 1998.

Optional section - Participation of non-government organizations in the implementation of the Convention

These are **optional** questions relating to cooperation with and involvement of non-government organizations in the implementation of the Convention.

At COP6 some 42 NGOs made the “Brisbane NGO pledge of support for the Ramsar Convention”.. The Standing Committee agreed that for COP7 there should be an effort made to gauge the level and type of cooperation which is occurring between government Administrative Authorities and the national and international NGOs with an interest in wetlands issues.

In this **optional** section of the National Report, you are asked to describe the nature of the cooperation and relationship with any other international, regional, national and provincial NGOs operating within your country.

- 9.1 Approximately how many NGOs have wetlands as part of their regular “business” in your country?

Please break this down between international, regional and national/provincial organizations.

a. Flanders

The largest NGO's are 'Natuurreservaten' and 'De Wielewaal' both include wetlands in their nature conservation programs.

- 9.2 Is there a regular forum or mechanism through which these NGOs express their views on wetland conservation and Ramsar implementation:
- to each other? Yes/No
 - to the government? Yes/No

a. Flanders

No.

b. Région wallonne

Dans le cadre de la mise en place d'un Comité National Ramsar, des comités régionaux et locaux Ramsar vont se mettre en place.

- 9.3 Does your government include one or more NGO representatives on its official delegation to Ramsar COPs? Yes/No

No

- 9.4 Do any of the NGOs run programmes aimed at Education and Public Awareness about wetlands in your country? Yes/No. If yes, please give details (Refer also to question 3.1).

a. Flanders

Education and nature conservation in general, not only wetlands.

b. Région wallonne

Oui : des brochures, vidéos et dossiers pédagogiques spécifiques sont édités, notamment par la Région wallonne et l'Institut d'Eco-Pédagogie (Sart-Tilman - Dpt. de Botanique, B22. B-4000 LIEGE).

- 9.5 Where they exist, do Ramsar site management advisory committees include NGO representatives? If yes, please give details

Yes. The Blankaart nature reserve is NGO property. The schorren van de Beneden-Zeeschelde are managed by a NGO.

Les Marais d'Harchies appartiennent aux Pouvoirs publics et aux ONG : un comité de gestion mixte et paritaire a été installé.

- 9.6 Describe the themes of the Convention (refer to General Objectives 1-8 of the Strategic Plan) where you perceive the national/provincial NGOs to be most active.

Final comments:

- 10.1 General comments on implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.
- 10.2 Observations concerning the functioning of, relations with, and services provided by:
- a. The Ramsar Standing Committee
 - b. The Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel
 - c. The Ramsar Bureau
 - d. The Ramsar NGO partners
- 10.3 Any other general observations and/or recommendations for the future.
- *The contacts through e-mail/website proved to be increasingly helpful and efficient.*
 - *The planned Ramsar Committee will improve both internal and external contacts.*
 - *The Ramsar "label" needs to be used more intensively as part of or promoting nature conservation.*

The Ramsar Convention Bureau
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
tel +41 22 999 0170
fax +41 22 999 0169
e-mail ramsar@hq.iucn.org