

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

24th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 29 November – 2 December 1999

DOC. SC24-2

Agenda item 6

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is requested to note the report and to take any necessary decisions concerning the issues raised on it.

1. This report covers the period from the close of Ramsar COP7 on 18 May 1999 to 30 October 1999. It addresses major developments that the Bureau is aware of concerning the different chapters of the Strategic Plan, and in particular the activities of the Ramsar Bureau.

Operational Objective 1 of the Strategic Plan: Universal membership

2. At present the Convention has 116 Contracting Parties.
3. **Cambodia** joined the Convention on 23 June 1999 and designated three Ramsar sites.
4. With regard to non-Contracting Parties in Asia, the SGF project for **Uzbekistan** was finalized with the preparation of the Ramsar Information Sheet for the first Ramsar site in the country. The Government of Uzbekistan is currently preparing the instrument of accession to the Convention for submission to UNESCO. The Regional Coordinator for Asia will visit **Laos PDR** in early November for discussions regarding membership of the Convention.
5. In Africa, **Benin, Nigeria, and Tanzania** have made progress towards accession following visits undertaken by the Regional Coordinator to these countries. The legal and administrative procedures have been completed, but the preparation of the Ramsar Information Sheet and maps for the first Ramsar sites have yet to be finalized.
6. The **Central African Republic** has also made some progress with the identification and the preparation of the Ramsar Information Sheet and map for the first Ramsar site. The legal steps have yet to be undertaken by the new Parliament. A workshop is planned for that purpose.
7. **Cameroon** has made progress, and a workshop is planned for early December to foster the process of accession. The Ramsar Bureau and representatives from the Lake Chad Basin Commission, Chad, Central African Republic, Niger, and Nigeria will attend in order to start exploring subregional actions for the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, it is envisaged to examine the possibility of designating the whole of Lake Chad as a transboundary Ramsar site.

8. Other actions in this area include new or additional contacts with **Angola, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Sudan, and Swaziland.**
9. In Oceania, the information received indicates that several **Pacific Island countries** are moving towards accession.

Operational Objective 2 of the Strategic Plan: Wise use

10. Pursuant to paragraph 14 of Resolution VII.14, the Bureau invited Parties, via Diplomatic Note 1999/6 dated 27 July 1999, “to provide the Ramsar Bureau with information on databases which exist for invasive species, information on invasive species which pose a threat to wetlands and wetland species, and information on the control and eradication of invasive wetland species.” In addition, the Bureau called the attention of Contracting Parties to paragraph 17 of the same Resolution which “INVITES Contracting Parties to make voluntary contributions to support the activities of the Ramsar Bureau and STRP outlined in this Resolution, noting that the implementation of this Resolution is subject to the availability of adequate financial and human resources.” Contracting Parties were invited to provide appropriate information to the Bureau by no later than 5 November 1999 so that it may be taken into consideration by the 24th meeting of the Standing Committee in early December when determining priority actions to be undertaken by the Bureau.
11. In the same Diplomatic Note, the Bureau called the attention of CPs to Resolution VII.15 on incentive measures to encourage the application of the wise use principle, recalling that paragraph 14 “FURTHER CALLS UPON Contracting Parties and others to share their experiences and lessons learned with respect to incentive measures and perverse incentives relating to wetlands, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable use of natural resources generally, by providing these to the Ramsar Bureau for appropriate distribution and to be made available through the Wise Use Resource Centre of the Convention’s Web site.” Contracting Parties were invited to respond to this request by forwarding to the Bureau by 31 December 1999 any resource materials, guidelines, case studies or similar documentation relating to the application of incentive measures for wetland, biodiversity and sustainable natural resource management.
12. As indicated in page 4 of the Bureau Work Plan for 2000 (DOC.SC24-3), Action 2.2.1, the Bureau is working with the Global Environment Network to develop the so-called River Basin Initiative. This aims to establish and promote demonstration river basin action plans that apply the COP7 guidelines. The intention is to launch this initiative jointly with the Convention on Biological Diversity. Additional funding will be required.
13. Also, under Actions 2.4.4 and 2.8.2 of the Work Plan, the Bureau has commenced discussion with IUCN’s Economic Services Unit regarding a suitable follow-up project on economic valuation and related issues, such as incentive measures.
14. Under Action 2.7.1, the Bureau has been working in partnership with IUCN and WWF to launch a “Participatory Management Advisory Service” that would be based in the IUCN Social Policy Unit, to assist with the application of the Ramsar Guidelines on local communities’ and indigenous people’s participation in wetland management. Donors are

being approached to obtain the necessary funding. (See attachment to the Bureau Work Plan, in DOC. SC24.3.)

15. Within the framework of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), there were Ramsar missions to Syria (21-25 March), Tunisia (21-23 September), and Turkey (6-10 October), with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Libya planned within the next year, to strengthen the participation of these countries in MedWet/Ramsar.
16. The implementation of the MedWet/Coast (MedWet3) project, a US\$ 15.5 million, 5-year effort in five countries (Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) and the Palestinian Authority, financed by the Global Environment Facility and the French Global Environment Facility, was formally launched at a meeting in Barcelona, Spain, in early October. The Secretary General and the MedWet Coordinator were in attendance.
17. The Bureau has accepted the role of International Service Provider on a GEF/UNDP project to develop a long-term project proposal on wetland management in the I.R. of Iran. The document is expected to be completed by the end of 2000.
18. In Costa Rica, at a special ceremony at the Presidential House, the President of Costa Rica and the Minister of Environment and Energy signed, on 27 July 1999, a Presidential Decree establishing the National Wetlands Programme within that Ministry. The Decree states that Costa Rica, having recently hosted the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, now has the moral obligation “to provide testimony to the world of the seriousness of our initiatives in favor of the conservation of these important ecosystems [referring to wetlands].”
19. Wetlands International – China Programme has announced that Ramsar’s *Economic Valuation of Wetlands* book (1997) has been translated into Chinese and is now in press, soon to be ready for distribution. Wetlands International expects that the book will strengthen the management of wetlands in China and make a major contribution to the understanding of policy-makers of the real value of wetland functions.
20. In relation to the private sector, the Bureau has initiated some discussions about the possibility of establishing a “Private Sector Working Group on Wetlands”. Assistance from Standing Committee members in this area will be welcome.

Operational Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan: Awareness of wetland values and functions at all levels

21. At the Bureau level, priority was given to finalizing the texts of the Resolutions and Recommendations adopted at Ramsar COP7, the Conference Report, and the list of participants, in the three official languages. These documents were transmitted to all Contracting Parties under cover of Diplomatic Note 1999/6 dated 27 July 1999. These documents were also sent to observers at COP7 and to other key international institutions.
22. In addition, considerable effort is being devoted to prepare the publication of the “Ramsar toolkit”, a series of nine handbooks, as shown in Annex 1. The publication of the series in the three official languages has been made possible through a generous donation from the Biodiversity Foundation of the Ministry of Environment in Spain and the Spanish Agency

for International Cooperation (AECI). The printing will be done in Costa Rica, since this was the condition established by AECI. A mock-up of one of the manuals will be on display at the time of the Standing Committee meeting. It is expected that the series will be ready for distribution in January 2000. Ministers responsible for Ramsar issues in each Contracting Party will receive a copy of the series with a "Ministerial Briefing Note" on top, attractively designed, calling their attention to the key issues related to the implementation of the Convention. The package will also include a copy of the Ramsar video screened at the opening of Ramsar COP7, now available in the three official languages.

23. Through Diplomatic Note 1999/4 dated 28 June 1999, the Bureau invited CPs to designate, "in accordance with the Outreach Programme, by 31 December 1999, suitable Government and Non-Government Focal Points for Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) to undertake the functions therein specified." A form was provided to that effect. The Standing Committee will receive an update concerning the response of CPs at the time of the meeting.
24. The Bureau is preparing materials for celebration of World Wetlands Day on 2 February 2000, based on the theme "Celebrating our Wetlands of International Importance", as conveyed to Standing Committee members some weeks ago. The materials for distribution to CPs and the Ramsar network at large will include a series of five stickers with the wording "2 February – World Wetlands Day" and the Ramsar logo. Two of the stickers depict wetlands flora, and the other three depict wetlands fauna, water, and wise use respectively; all five stickers will be available in the three working languages.
25. The Bureau is producing a revised version of the Ramsar Information Pack, made necessary by the adoption of the new logo and the new Ramsar "tools" adopted at COP7. A new certificate of designation of Ramsar sites has been produced and framed diplomas are already being sent to the Contracting Parties for new Ramsar sites (it will be on display at the Standing Committee meeting).
26. Copies of the Ramsar video screened at the opening of COP7 are now ready for distribution to CPs and the Ramsar network in the three official languages.
27. A colourful brochure and information paper entitled *Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in Western Asia* has been prepared by the intern for Asia, Ms Parastu Mirabzadeh, and now is being distributed as widely as possible in the subregion.
28. In Africa, thanks to the Swiss Grant for Africa and financial assistance from the MacArthur Foundation in the USA, a project on "Awareness and Information relating to Wetlands and Harmful Invasive Species in Africa" has been initiated in cooperation with IUCN. This project is a response to Resolution VII.14 on Invasive Species and Wetlands and it is intended to begin to address the issue of harmful invasive species in Africa, so that problems can be recognized and acceptable solutions can be found and applied in good time.
29. In Asia, 2000 copies of the Mandarin language version of the Ramsar Information Pack have been prepared and are currently being distributed in the country. The Arabic version of the pack is expected to be ready by the end of 1999. The preparation of the version in

Farsi in Iran has been delayed due to problems with the transfer of funds. These efforts have been financed by the Bureau through the Danone/Evian Project.

30. In the Neotropics, Argentina, in its capacity as one of the Regional Representatives, has launched a list server in the Internet to communicate with the Ramsar network in the region and is publishing an electronic bulletin entitled "NOTIDRIYA".
31. The maintenance of the Ramsar Web site and the electronic list servers (Ramsar Forum, Ramsar Exchange, etc.) always constitutes a high priority. The Ramsar Web site continues to be commended for its content, presentation, and daily updates of information. It is also attracting an increasing number of visitors. The Secretary General is trying to identify a sponsor of the Web site, so as to generate funds to hire a professional support staff for the Executive Assistant for Communications, Dr. Dwight Peck, who continues to be overwhelmed by the task, in a situation that is not sustainable. Assistance in this regard from Standing Committee members will be very much appreciated.

Operational Objective 4 of the Strategic Plan: Capacity building

32. The Bureau continues to administer the Wetlands for the Future Initiative, a programme of capacity-building projects in the Neotropics funded by the US Government. Some 50 project proposals have been received for the 1999 cycle.
33. The Bureau has begun discussion with Wetlands International regarding preparation of a funding proposal to launch a major wetland manager training initiative under the Convention (see Action 4.2.4, page 8 of the Ramsar Bureau Work Plan, DOC. SC24-3).
34. Within the framework of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, the Bureau, following a decision of the 2nd Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, has formally invited Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, through diplomatic channels, to submit proposals, if they wish to, for the establishment of a North Africa Wetland Centre that would provide technical advice and training for the countries in the southern Mediterranean basin.
35. In Africa, **Niger** has established a Ramsar National Committee.
36. Two training activities have been initiated in Africa. The first is in Garoua (Cameroon) for the French-speaking Contracting Parties through the Danone/Evian project and the Swiss Grant for Africa. The second training session is planned in Kampala, at the Makerere University for representatives from Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. Both training sessions address the Parties' needs on various aspects, including wetland inventories and management plans.
37. The Second Evian Encounter of High-Level Officials from Ramsar Contracting Parties took place in the city of Evian, France, on 25-30 October 1999. This year it brought together officials from 14 French-speaking African countries. (The first Encounter in 1998 was devoted to CPs from the Neotropics and the third, in the year 2000, will be devoted to CPs in Western Asia.). This activity is financed under the Danone/Evian Project.
38. The 6th International Course on Wetland Management was successfully completed in September in Lelystad, The Netherlands, with the attendance of 20 participants from all

continents. The course is organized by the Institute for Inland Water Management and Waste Water Treatment (RIZA), under the advice of a Board chaired by the Ramsar Secretary General.

39. At three major meetings in Africa, two in Nairobi, Kenya (sponsored by the UN) and one in Yamoussokro, Côte d'Ivoire (sponsored by IUCN and the African Development Bank), the Bureau has undertaken the dissemination of guidelines adopted by COP7 as a means for strengthening African expertise in the fields of reviewing laws and institutions, establishing and strengthening local communities' participation, and integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management.
40. Danone/Evian Project funds are being used to support training activities in Papua New Guinea, as well as to facilitate the Administrative Authorities' access to the Internet, in collaboration with Wetlands International.
41. Australia has established the Asia-Pacific Wetland Managers Training Programme in Darwin, as pledged at COP6 in celebration of the Convention's 25th anniversary.
42. Thus far in 1998 and 1999, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in eleven Contracting Parties have been assisted by the Ramsar Bureau in gaining access to the Internet, through financial assistance for the purchase of hardware and software, telephone and ISP charges, and related expenses. The funds have been provided from the communications module of the Danone/Evian Project.

Operational Objective 5 of the Strategic Plan: Effective conservation of sites included in the Ramsar List

43. In Diplomatic Note 1999/6 of 27 July 1999, the Bureau called the attention of CPs to Resolution VII.23 on 'Issues concerning boundary definitions of Ramsar sites and compensation of wetland habitats', and in particular to paragraph 13 which "URGES those Contracting Parties or organizations with experience in issues of urgent national interest or similar determinations and habitat compensation and mitigation issues to provide any relevant information and materials to the Ramsar Bureau for consideration by the Standing Committee by no later than 30 September 1999." Contracting Parties were invited to forward to the Bureau by 30 September 1999 (as specified above) any information or relevant resource materials relating to the issues specified above. Replies were received from Australia and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (see DOC. SC24-9).
44. On 14 July 1999, the Bureau sent a Diplomatic Note to all Contracting Parties that were mentioned in the Annexes to Ramsar COP7 document 13.3 as not having yet provided adequate data, including maps, on their Ramsar sites. Their attention was called to Resolution VII.12 which urged that highest priority be given to providing to the Ramsar Bureau appropriate Ramsar Information Sheets, maps or updated site descriptions for the sites mentioned in the Annexes to Ramsar COP7 document 13.3. The concerned CPs were invited to provide such information no later than 31 December 1999.
45. Algeria has provided satisfactory updated Ramsar Information Sheets for two existing Ramsar sites: Lac Oubeira and Lac Tonga. An update will be provided to the Standing Committee on progress made in this matter.

46. The Democratic Republic of Congo has requested inclusion of Parc Marin des Mangroves in the Montreux Record because of adverse changes occurring in its ecological character. The Bureau has sent to the Administrative Authority the Montreux Record-Questionnaire in order to get the necessary information for inclusion in the Record.
47. In response to one of the recommendations made after the Ramsar Advisory Mission to the Laguna del Tigre Ramsar site in Guatemala (1997), the Government has extended the area of the site from 48,372 hectares to 335,080 hectares, including in the Ramsar site the Parque Nacional Laguna del Tigre.
48. The Bureau participated in an international experts' meeting concerning the hydrological rehabilitation of the Doñana Ramsar site in Spain, included in the Montreux Record, and is now a member of an international committee that will provide advice on the implementation of the action plan entitled "Doñana 2005".
49. The Bureau participated in a technical meeting on the protection of Ramsar Sites in Hamburg related to ecological change that is likely to occur at the Ramsar Site Mühlenberger Loch in Germany. A letter detailing the ecological functions and importance of this site, which is also declared as a Special Protection Area, was subsequently sent to the European Commission.
50. With funds provided through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, the Wetlands International - China Programme, in partnership with the Hainan Forestry Bureau and the State Forestry Administration, has developed a five-year management plan for the Dongzhaigang National Nature Reserve in southern China. This mangrove site is one of seven Ramsar sites in China and the sixth to have a management plan in place.
51. Concerning the Ramsar Database, the activities undertaken by the Database Manager at Wetlands International, Mr. Scott Frazier, are reflected in his report attached in Annex 2. The Bureau is carrying out negotiations (involving Wetlands International as well) with the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) of Columbia University, USA, for the establishment at CIESIN of an interactive Web-based clearinghouse, on the basis of the data stored at the Ramsar Database, that will provide several important services to the Ramsar community. (See attachment to the Bureau Work Plan in DOC. SC24-3.)

Operational Objective 6 of the Strategic Plan: Designation of new Ramsar sites

52. At present there are 1005 sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, covering 71,749,492. The following is the list of Ramsar site designations since COP7.
53. **Algeria** has designated two new sites: Lac des oiseaux , which has been included in the List, and Marais de la Mekkada, which still requires a better map in order to be included in the List.
54. **Australia** designated 4 new sites: Narran Lake Nature Reserve, Myall Lakes National Park, the Gwydir Wetlands (a private landholders site) and Great Sandy Strait (adjoining the Fraser Island World Heritage site).

55. **Cambodia** completed the necessary formalities for its accession to the Convention and designated three Ramsar sites, totalling 54,600 hectares.
56. **Honduras** designated the Ramsar site number 1000 on 10 July 1999. The “Sistema de Humedales de la Zona Sur de Honduras” (Wetlands system of the southern region of Honduras) is a complex of seven coastal areas totalling 69,711 hectares.
57. **Japan** designated their 11th Ramsar site, Manko (on 15 May 1999), and chose the same occasion to expand the limits of the existing Ramsar site Kushiro-shitsugen, from 7726 to 7863 hectares.
58. **Papua New Guinea** designated its second Ramsar site; Lake Kutubu, an important peatland and fish habitat site.
59. **Slovenia** designated its second Ramsar site, the Skocjanske jame, an extensive subterranean karst wetland system covering more than 300 ha.
60. The **United Kingdom** designated five new Ramsar sites: Cromarty Firth, Inner Moray Firth, Muir of Dinnet, North Uist Machair and Islands, and Poole Harbour, bringing its total number of Ramsar sites to 148, covering 753,844 hectares. All five have also been classified as Special Protection Areas under the EC Wild Birds Directive.

Operational Objective 7 of the Strategic Plan: International cooperation

61. The Bureau continued to pay special attention to the development and refinement of working partnerships with other conventions and institutions.
62. The Joint Work Plan with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is being widely recognized as a model for inter-convention cooperation. The Deputy Secretary General attended the 4th meeting of the CBD’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-4) in May 1999, and officially delivered a progress report on the implementation of the Joint Work Plan 1998-99 between the two Conventions. Many of the guidelines adopted by Ramsar’s COP7 speak directly to issues covered in the JWP’s programme, and several countries, including Canada, Japan, Malawi, the Netherlands, and the USA, spoke in support of the JWP’s progress, urging the CBD to make good use of the new Ramsar “tools”. The Bureau is now working on the preparation of a Joint Work Plan for the next two years.
63. In preparation for the 5th COP of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (25 October to 5 November in Bonn, Germany), the Bureau made available an important new policy paper on *Wetlands and Climate Change: exploring collaboration between the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, newly written under contract with the Bureau by Ger Bergkamp and Brett Orlando of IUCN-The World Conservation Union. This paper has been sent to all the Administrative Authorities in the Ramsar Contracting Parties, with the request that they encourage their counterpart national delegates to the UNFCCC COP to seek ways to build cooperation on wetland issues with the Ramsar Convention into the emerging UNFCCC agenda. The paper proposes concrete suggestions for cooperation, but it is perhaps even more valuable as a background scientific briefing paper on the effects of climate change on wetlands and

- their valuable resources to humans round the world. The paper was made available in the six UN official languages at UNFCCC COP5. The Ramsar Deputy Secretary General attended the COP5-preceding meeting of the scientific body, and the Secretary General attended the ministerial segment on 2 November to deliver a statement.
64. The Deputy Secretary General also attended the first day of the meeting of National Focal Points under the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of the Barcelona Convention in Athens in July. The DSG urged a closer working partnership, especially between the MAP and its related programmes, on the one hand, and the Ramsar Convention and its Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) on the other. He noted that both programmes are now seen as models for international cooperation on the regional scale, and that governments, NGOs, scientific centers, and the two convention secretariats need to strive for collaboration, synergistic activities, and joint work planning. The MedWet Coordinator represented the Convention at the COP of the Barcelona Convention in Malta in late October.
 65. Contact was established with the Executive Secretary of the Helsinki Commission for Baltic Marine Environment Protection in view of closer cooperation, especially with the Programme Implementation Task Force working group on management of coastal lagoons and wetlands. The Regional Coordinator for Europe was invited to participate in the 11th meeting of the working group in Brussels in September.
 66. Discussion are being held with the Conventions on Desertification and on Migratory Species in order to operationalize the MOUs with them. The Bureau will be represented at the CMS's COP in South Africa, in November, by the Regional Coordinator for Africa, who will also participate in the first MOP of the Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement. The Secretary General will attend the COP of Desertification in Brazil, also in November.
 67. The Bureau participated in Inter-linkages: International Conference on Synergies and Coordination Between Multilateral Environmental Agreements, organized by the United Nations University in Tokyo in July 1999.
 68. There has been an exchange of letters with the Director a.i. of the UNESCO Division of Ecological Sciences, Dr. Peter Bridgewater, with a view to preparing a Memorandum of Cooperation between Ramsar and the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB).
 69. The Regional Coordinator for Asia represents the Bureau on the Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee, established to oversee and coordinate implementation of the Brisbane Initiative, or Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy: 1996-2000. She will be attending a meeting of the Committee due to take place in China in November.
 70. The Bureau has maintained a fluid exchange with the four International Organization Partners with a view to strengthening the working relationships with them. With IUCN the cooperation has involved issues related to climate change, invasive species, economic valuation and incentives, and community participation in wetland management.
 71. With WWF there have been active exchanges in relation to their Living Waters Campaign, there have been joint missions in Africa, and considerable support is being provided by WWF in working toward the accession of some non-CP countries.

72. With Wetlands International, there was a special meeting to review all aspects of the working relationship, with a view to preparing a new Memorandum of Cooperation.
73. With BirdLife International, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed immediately before COP7, and in his statement to BirdLife's World Conference in Malaysia, in October, the Deputy Secretary General urged even further strengthening of the already strong partnership with the Convention. He highlighted the opportunity to use BirdLife's Important Bird Area (IBA) programme to identify priority sites for Ramsar listing. This programme has already identified over 5000 IBAs (with many more to come once global coverage is achieved) using criteria based on the Ramsar "biodiversity" site criteria.
74. A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed with the Society of Wetland Scientists in order to promote "cooperation for the knowledgeable management, conservation, and wise use of wetlands". Pursuant to that agreement, the SWS, an association of more than 4,500 scientifically-oriented wetland enthusiasts mostly in North America, has announced a new grants programme of US\$5,000 per year to support Ramsar-related activities by SWS members in developing countries. The SWS has also started to participate in the work of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) as an Observer Organization.
75. Another Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 24 September with Eurosite, the network of organizations that manage Europe's natural heritage, at a ceremony in Steenwijk, the Netherlands, presided over by the Secretary of State for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Mrs Geke Faber. Eurosite will provide support to the work of the Convention on issues related to Ramsar sites management in Europe and Africa.
76. The Bureau is also involved in the proposed Millennium Assessment of the World's Ecosystem spearhead by the World Resources Institute in Washington D.C. The Secretary General has agreed to serve in an Advisory Group established to provide inputs to the process.

Operational Objective 8 of the Strategic Plan: Institutional mechanisms and resources of the Convention

77. The Bureau evaluated internally the results and *modus operandi* of Ramsar COP7, and its conclusions are contained in DOC. SC24-7. The Bureau also began planning for Ramsar COP8 and is presenting some preliminary proposals to the Standing Committee in DOC. SC24-20. In response to paragraph 13 of Resolution VII.27, the Bureau is submitting to the Standing Committee a proposal for the format for the National Reports to be prepared for Ramsar COP8. The main gist of the Bureau proposal is that the format should be offered to Contracting Parties as a planning tool for the implementation of the Convention's Work Plan 2000-2002. A consultant was hired to prepare an interactive, electronic-based version of the National Reports format that will be demonstrated at the Standing Committee meeting.
78. The Bureau organized the 8th meeting of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) from 22 to 24 September at its premises in Gland. The report of the meeting is contained in DOC. SC24-6.

79. In relation to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF), the Bureau processed the 81 project proposals that were submitted by Contracting Parties and prepared its recommendations to the Standing Committee. The Bureau also launched a fundraising drive for the SGF '99 cycle and prepared revised Operation Guidelines for the period 2000-2002 (see DOC. SC24-18 (a); (b); and (c).)
80. Concerning staffing matters, the following issues should be noted:
- a) In August, Ms Margarita Astrálaga (Colombia) joined the Bureau as Regional Coordinator for the Americas (previously the post was Regional Coordinator for the Neotropics), and Dr Tobias Salathé (Switzerland) joined as Regional Coordinator for Europe.
 - b) Interviews were held on 8 October for the selection of the new Deputy Secretary General to replace Dr Bill Phillips on his departure in February 2000. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee and the Chair of the Subgroup of Finance were members of the interviewing panel. It is hoped that the name of the successful candidate will be announced in the week of 2 November.
 - c) The Regional Coordinator for Asia, Ms Rebecca D'Cruz, has decided for family reasons not to renew her contract that expires on 31 December, but she will leave the Bureau at the end of February 2000. The vacancy announcement was made in early September, with a deadline for applications on 31 October.
 - d) The internship programme continues with much success. The intern for Asia, Ms Parastu Mirabzadeh (Iran), will complete her internship at the end of November 1999 and will be succeeded by Ms Taeko Takahashi of Japan. The intern for Europe, Ms Anett Zellei, was replaced in October by Mr Alexander Belokurov (Russian Federation), and the intern for the Neotropics, Ms Carmen Padilla (Honduras), was replaced in September by Ms Flor de María Salvador (Peru). The intern for Africa, Ms Musonda Mumba, will be replaced in January by a new intern from Kenya. It should be noted that while the funding for the intern for Africa provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service will have ceased, the Bureau should be able now to cover the cost of this position from the core budget, as is the case with the interns for Europe and Asia.
 - e) Improvements have been made in the operation of the MedWet Team, now consisting of the MedWet Coordinator appointed by Ramsar Secretary General, the Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre in Greece, the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat in France, and the Sede para el Estudio de los Humedales Mediterráneos in Spain. The Deputy Secretary General is in the process of evaluating the MedWet Coordination function; to this effect, he has visited the wetland centres in Greece and France and has conducted interviews with a number of individuals who participate in or are familiar with MedWet.
 - f) The Administration and Fundraising Team at the Bureau has been restructured to better define tasks and increase efficiency. As a result, as of 1 August, two of the Bureau's longstanding staff members have changed roles. Ms Annette Keller, who previously was responsible for the administrative aspects of the Small Grants Fund, working part-time, is now working full time as Administration Coordinator. Ms Julia

Tucker moved from her post as Administrator to a new post of Project Administration Officer. Ms Tucker requested to be allowed to take up the new responsibilities on a probation period of three months. At the end of October she has informed the Secretary General that she would prefer to leave Ramsar employment, given the required notice period of three months. Thus, Ms Tucker will be leaving the Bureau by 31 January 2000.

81. Concerning finances, documents DOC. SC24-16 to SC24-19 inclusive indicate that the financial situation of the Bureau is healthy and there are no issues of particular concern. In spite of the difficulties that the Government of Costa Rica and the Bureau encountered in raising the required funds for Ramsar COP7, the Trust Fund in Costa Rica closed its accounts without a deficit and the Bureau incurred a small deficit of SFR 63,000 that should be absorbed without difficulties by the core budget in the current fiscal year. It should be noted that the fact of having charged a participants fee and a hotel room commission, while they were unpopular measures with some COP7 participants, definitely helped to end up with a reasonably good financial situation.
82. In relation to the funding and operations of the MedWet Coordination function, the Secretary General has initiated discussions with the Spanish Government and IUCN to locate this function at the IUCN Mediterranean Office that should be opened in January 2000 in the city of Malaga in southern Spain.

Annex 1

Ramsar prepares to publish its 'toolkit'

Following its 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP7), in Costa Rica in May 1999, where several Resolutions adopted guidelines to assist with applying the Ramsar Convention, the Bureau is preparing an integrated 'toolkit' of handbooks as shown below. These handbooks fall under the three main themes of the Convention – Wise Use, Ramsar Sites, and International Cooperation. With the generous support of the Government of Spain, which will host COP8 in 2002, these handbooks should be available in the three working languages of the Convention (English, French and Spanish) in early 2000.

The Ramsar Convention 'toolkit' for Contracting Parties		
I. Wise use of wetlands	II. Wetlands of International Importance - designation and management .	III. International cooperation
Handbook # 1 Wise use of wetlands	Handbook # 7 Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance	Handbook # 9 Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands – which covers:
Handbook # 2 Developing and implementing National Wetland Policies	Handbook # 8 Frameworks for managing Wetlands of International Importance and other wetlands - including: i. Guidelines on management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands,	i. Management of shared wetlands and river basins; ii. Management of shared wetland-dependent species;
Handbook # 3 Reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands	ii. Guidelines for describing and maintaining the ecological character of Listed sites	iii. Partnerships between Conventions and agencies
Handbook # 4 Integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management	iii. Framework for designing a wetland monitoring programme	iv. Sharing knowledge and expertise; v. Development assistance;
Handbook # 5 Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands	iv. Guidelines for operation of the Montreux Record (of sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or likely to occur)	vi. Foreign investment and business sector codes of conduct
Handbook # 6 Promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands through communication, education and public awareness - The Outreach Programme of the Convention on Wetlands	v. Wetland Risk Assessment Framework	

Post COP7, Ramsar Database developments or actions

Development or Action	Relevant link(s)
<p>The first of many planned phases of putting the Ramsar Database on the World Wide Web has been completed. The regular Graphical Profile web presentation now includes the first of many “clickable” maps for moving easily through global, regional, national and site layers of information. Starting with Africa, there are now clickable maps for each Contracting Party which display the general distribution of Ramsar Sites with links to descriptions of those sites from the 1999 Directory of Wetlands of International Importance. Work is now progressing on other regions (starting with Asia) and in other thematic areas. This also constitutes the first basic GIS development of the Ramsar Database. The relevant URL is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar/wetl_ram_graprof.html</p>	<p>Annex from Resolution VII.9 The Convention’s Outreach Programme 1999-2002 ¶ 33. A more accessible database for the Wetlands of International Importance - As the List of Wetlands of International Importance rapidly expands, a priority is to make the information about these flagship sites more freely available by electronic means. The database, managed for the Convention by the Wetlands International office in the Netherlands, will be introduced on the World Wide Web by the end of 1999. Capacity for answering a range of queries on-line is envisaged. Contracting Parties, in developing their Wetland CEPA Action Plans, should anticipate this development and plan for increased use of the Ramsar sites database as a promotional and information tool.</p> <p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 3.3.1 Review the Bureau’s communications activities, especially those related to the creation and functioning of regional and national communication networks; develop new material and use of technology, and improve existing material.</p> <p>Action 5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS).</p> <p>Action 5.4.3 Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through Electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs.</p>
<p>The 2nd editions of the trilingual Ramsar site overview were posted on the World Wide Web after COP7. The relevant URL is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar/EN_Overview_Link.html</p>	<p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.4.3 Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through Electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs.</p>

<p>The 1999 edition of the Directory of Wetlands of International Importance (originally published on CD and issued at COP7) was made available for browsing on the World Wide Web. This version was then improved by adding a new more user-friendly table of contents to the presentation. The web presentation is a “living” version of the 1999 Directory, meaning that new sites which were designated since it was published on CD will be added, and updates or corrections will be effected where needed. New sites have been drafted (but not yet posted on the web site) and some existing entries have already been updated on the web site. The relevant URL is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/wetl_publications.html#cd</p>	<p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 3.3.2 Develop existing Bureau productions, notably the Newsletter, videos and CD-ROMs.</p> <p>Action 5.3.4 Review, update and reprint the Directory of Ramsar Sites for the 7th COP (1999), and produce, for the 8th COP (2002), a summary of sites listed between the 7th and 8th COPs.</p> <p>Action 5.4.3 Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through Electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs.</p>
<p>An assessment of the status of Ramsar site Information Sheets (RIS) and site maps was conducted and presented for and to the Bureau and STRP (8th Meeting).</p>	<p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.3.1 Ensure that the maps and descriptions of Ramsar sites submitted to the Ramsar Database by the Contracting Parties at the time of designation are complete, in the approved standard format of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands, and provide sufficient detail to be used for management planning and monitoring of ecological character.</p> <p>Action 5.3.2 Ensure that missing or incomplete data sheets and/or maps of listed sites are submitted as a matter of priority and in the shortest possible time, as a means to enhance the relevance and use of the Ramsar Database.</p> <p>Action 5.3.3 Ensure that data sheets on Ramsar Sites are regularly updated, at least for every second meeting of the COP, so that they can be used for reviewing the achievements of the Convention, for future strategic planning, for promotional purposes, and for site, regional and thematic analysis (Resolution VI.13).</p> <p>Action 5.4.1 Assess data currently available in the database and identify any gaps in the data provided by Contracting Parties.</p>
<p>Met with representative of the CIESIN organization to investigate and develop layering of Ramsar sites and other GIS information. Provided data, interpretations, advice and contacts to CIESIN.</p>	<p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS).</p>

<p>An assessment of the status of under-represented wetland types was conducted and presented for and to the Bureau and STRP (8th Meeting). Distribution maps were posted on the Ramsar Database presentation. Further analysis was conducted for the Bureau with regard to Resolution VII.21. The relevant URL is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar/wetl_ram_grapof_under_rep.html</p>	<p>Resolution VII.11 on the Strategic framework for the List Resolution VII.21 on intertidal wetlands</p> <p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 6.2.1 Promote the designation for the Ramsar List of an increased area of wetland, through listing by new Contracting Parties, and through further designations by current Contracting Parties, in particular developing countries, in order to ensure the listing of a representative range of wetland types in the Territory of each Contracting Party and in each Ramsar region.</p> <p>Action 6.2.3 Give priority attention to the designation of new sites from wetland types currently under-represented on the Ramsar List, and in particular, when appropriate, coral reefs, mangroves, sea-grass beds and peatlands.</p>
<p>Provided extensive information servicing to the Ramsar Bureau and a wide external audience.</p>	<p>Indirectly applicable to many SP objectives.</p>