

Ramsar SC25 – IUCN Opening Address

Mr Chairman (Steven Hunter, from Australia),
Mr Secretary General (Delmar B.),
Distinguished members of the Standing Committee,
Observers, Colleagues and Friends,

- On behalf of Maritta Koch-Weser, Director General of IUCN, who is unfortunately unable to join us here today due to commitments in France and Germany, I am pleased to extend these few words of welcome to the members of the Ramsar Standing Committee on the occasion of your 25th meeting. As many of you know, both as Parties to the Convention on Wetlands and as IUCN members, the IUCN Secretariat feels privileged to host the Bureau of one of the most dynamic and successful environmental treaties in the last quarter century.
- As the new IUCN Programme and Policy Coordinator, I look forward to continuing my long-standing involvement with Ramsar and wetlands issues. For those of you who do not know me, I joined IUCN in September this year after 15 years with WWF International. During my career with WWF, I worked closely with Ramsar and IUCN in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as here in Gland from 1992 to 1997. The WWF programmes that I was responsible for in Eastern and Southern Africa included strong wetlands components both in terms of on-the-ground projects and policy initiatives. It is with great pleasure that I am now in a position to work even closer with the Ramsar Convention and Secretariat.
- Following approval of our Quadrennial Programme in Amman, IUCN will continue to provide the Convention with support in many areas, including on wetland designation, wise use, wetland restoration, water allocation, participatory management, assessments, incentives, law etc. or more simply by providing daily assistance to in-country focal points.
- Another use that can be made of the IUCN Programme relates to our role as a mechanism to foster open dialogue and action on priorities on the biodiversity agenda. Indeed, we are very pleased to be seen as “intermediaries”, allowing the IUCN membership to successfully lead a particular process, programme or project, in support of the IUCN Mission – ‘to safeguard the integrity and diversity of the natural world and to ensure that when natural resources are used, they are used in an sustainable and equitable way’.
- I wish now to briefly touch upon two matters of urgent wetland conservation interest, in relation to what we see as being the two most important events this year in the field of wetlands and water resource management. Here I am referring to the 2nd World Water Forum and to the forthcoming report from the World Commission on Dams - taking into account the fact the development of water resources, as forecasted for the next 25 years, represents perhaps the single most important threat to freshwater ecosystems.
- I will briefly elaborate on both events, starting with the 2nd World Water Forum which took place earlier this year in The Hague.
- As you know, the 2nd World Water Forum in March was dedicated to the World Water Vision. As part of that Vision, Queen Noor presented the Vision for Water and Nature on behalf of IUCN. The Water and Nature Vision and Framework for Action met with wide support from the many groups present in The Hague. Subsequently, IUCN developed the Water and Nature Initiative that was launched in Amman to put the Vision into Action. This 30 million US\$ programme brings together organisations and expertise to demonstrate improved ecosystem management practices at the catchment level. The Initiative will work with a range of new constituencies, such as water companies and sectoral

institutions, that have not been traditionally involved in the implementation of the Joint Work Plan between the CBD and Ramsar.

- By involving non traditional conservation partners from the water sector, such as the Global Water Partnership and sectoral water institutions, IUCN should be able to provide better assistance, upon request, to the very welcome River Basin Initiative currently developed under CBD and Ramsar. We think it is important to ensure that Contracting Parties play a leading role in the development of this most welcome River Basin Initiative, and IUCN stands ready to use its own, complementary programme to respond to specific Governments' requests under this Initiative.
- I now turn to the World Commission on Dams.
- In 1997, in an attempt to implement several IUCN resolutions addressing the environmental and social costs of infrastructure development, IUCN and the World Bank facilitated the creation of the World Commission on Dams. This is a concrete example of how stakeholders (government, affected people, private sector and donors) can interact to develop new public policies for dam planning, development, and management. The Commission's report is to be launched on 16 November in London by former President Nelson Mandela. Based on hundreds of studies and many public hearings, the report establishes criteria and guidelines that will lead to development outcomes that are economically viable and socially as well as environmentally acceptable. The Commission has - we are convinced - set very high standards for delivering high quality results in the most transparent and independent manner.
- Two weeks ago at the 2nd World Conservation Congress in Amman a resolution was passed requesting the IUCN Council to set up urgently a Task Force to analyse the WCD report, and indicate how IUCN members and partners could - where appropriate - implement the Commission's guidance.
- We would very much like to see the Ramsar Convention, through its Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) or through other efficient means, join us in this exercise and assist us (and indeed the 68 members of the Dams Forum) - where appropriate - in the dissemination and (above all) implementation of these guidelines.
- I hope that these two examples have provided testimony of the fact that the IUCN Programme and the forthcoming Ramsar Strategic Plan have not been developed in isolation and will reinforce each other during the course of their implementation.
- To close this short opening address, IUCN wishes this meeting every success in developing the perspectives and documents which will eventually form the substantive part of the forthcoming Conference of Parties, for the benefit of wetland biodiversity throughout the world.
- Thank you.