

Statement to the 26th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee

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By

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Chairman, Colleagues good morning.

Thank you for giving me, on behalf of the Wetlands International network an opportunity to address this 26th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee.

Board of Member Meeting

As many of you will remember, at last years meeting, I reported that Wetlands International was undertaking a major review of its operational effectiveness.

In the last 12 months we have worked with our stakeholders to modify the structure and redefine the future strategy of our organisation.

On Sunday 2 December we concluded the 3rd meeting of the Wetlands Board of Members . This meeting brought together 150 delegates to discuss the future direction of Wetlands International and it was a pleasure to see so many of you, now in this room, at our meeting. The meetings were very open, honest and gave clear guidance on the future development of the organisation.

I am pleased to report that the Board of Members fully endorsed recommendations to change the modus operandi of Wetlands International as follows:

Our 2002-2005 Strategy was adopted in principle subject to one more round of consultation.

The Board of Members will once again become the ultimate decision making body within the organisation. The Board of members will be re-constituted and will determine overall global policy and strategy and will set levels of membership dues.

The Board of Members will also elect the President and Board of Directors.

This new Board of Directors replaces our existing Board and Regional Councils and is mandated to manage Wetlands International between triennial meetings of the members.

The Board will have a new blend of skills including financial management, resource development, communications, legal, human resource management and of course wetland science.

The Board of Directors will also have broad geographical representation.

I am delighted to inform you that some good friends from our respective networks will play important roles on the Board.

Dr Max Finlayson from Australia is our new President and he is joined on the Board by among others, Victor Pulido from Peru, David Pritchard from BirdLife International, Daizaburo Kuroda from Japan and Stefan Pihl from Denmark.

In addition to these new governance arrangements we will be implementing significant changes within the executive to ensure accountability, authority, empowerment and responsibility.

One of these internal changes will be the creation of Wetlands International Regional Focal Points. These will be based in all of the 5 Ramsar regions. I invite you to consider using these focal points more productively in the implementation of the Convention at regional level, to increase synergy and avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap. Already many of our staff, for example in Africa, Asia and Oceania, undertake promotion and development activities for the Convention at regional and national level.

The Board of Members also re-inforced its commitment to working with our partners, especially BirdLife, WWF and IUCN.

During his opening statement to Wetlands International, Delmar noted “that the Convention needs a strong and effective Wetlands International because Wetlands International is the only international organisation working solely for the conservation of wetlands”

We firmly believe that these changes will enable Wetlands International to become a stronger voice for wetlands conservation and deliver better results and actions in support of the Convention.

In essence we are reinforcing our role as a Science, knowledge-based organisation with sustainability built into all actions and we will be driven by the needs of our users.

Through this philosophy we will engage with our partners to support not only the Ramsar Convention but also the Bonn Convention and the Convention on Biodiversity.

So what can you expect in terms of outputs and support from Wetlands International in the coming years under this new structure ?

A CD Rom containing the complete Ramsar Sites Database will be delivered to CoP 8

Waterbird Population Estimates Volume 3 will also be delivered to the next Meeting of the Contracting Parties.

We will continue to build on the momentum developed this year with the publication of the South American Wetland Assessment

The Ramsar Training Service will, subject to support from contracting parties and others be launched.

The DGIS Global Programme Fund on wetlands and wise use will continue, with our partners, to deliver on the ground results including support for the

- The Global Peatland Initiative
- The Niger Basin Initiative,
- The Zambia-Kafue wetland programme
- The IUCN-SSC Freshwater Biodiversity initiative.
- Support to the Small Grants Fund for Belarus, Slovakia and Bulgaria
- And the Asian Wetlands Inventory

...to date 2 million US\$ has been committed to a range of projects.

We will continue to promote the AEWG GEF Flyway project, the River Basin Initiative and I know very much that my colleague Doug Taylor is enjoying his role as one of the Millennium Assessment STRP focal points.

Finally Wetlands International would like to propose that a sub-group, drawn from the Standing Committee, be formed to review the scientific support to the Convention.

This would include development of a proposal for enhanced synergy between International Organisation Partner Specialist Groups and expertise.

The Standing Committee is invited to review the potential of additional support from Wetlands International to achieve the following results:

- Applying and extending Specialist Group skills to STRP matters
- Integrating IOP expertise
- Improving peer review capacity
- Contributing to enhancing the capacity of STRP National Focal Points

We will circulate a proposed draft Terms of Reference for consideration during this meeting and the subgroup would report back as directed by the Standing Committee prior to CoP 8.

Conclusion

I am sure that December 2001 will be seen as a turning point in the fortunes of Wetlands International.

In concluding Wetlands International re-affirms its commitment to support the Convention. Our new strategy will compliment your draft strategic plan for 2004-2008, to further advance aspects of the Convention that are still in their infancy, and

through inventory, assessment and promotion of capacity building we will further the ultimate goal of wise use of wetlands.

I wish you all a very successful meeting.

Thankyou.