

35th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee

27/02/2007

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
35th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 14-16 February 2007

Agenda item 1

Opening statement from the International Organisation Partners

presented by Jane Madgwick, Wetlands International

In addressing the business of this Standing Committee and especially the Strategic Plan and priorities for COP10, the IOPs urge you to take and plan steps to ensure that the Convention becomes more visible and responsive to major global threats and challenges for wetlands. As food shortages, droughts, floods and disease become more frequent and severe, the threats to wetlands and to people's security are heightening. The case for this Convention to be visible and to reach out and catalyse effective global action has probably never been stronger.

The recent stark warnings from scientists of the devastating climate change that will happen over a few decades, calls for a significant response by the Convention. Wetlands mitigate the extreme weather events resulting from climate change; wetland loss and degradation can heighten climate change impacts - and climate change will lead to further wetland loss and degradation. Further threats to wetlands are likely to come from inappropriate strategies for managing climate change - such as through land use changes linked to biofuel production systems. Increased understanding and debate on these facts and issues needs to be further stimulated by Ramsar CEPA activities. Furthermore, the IOPs would support the development of a Resolution on climate change for COP10, to call for specific action to

secure and manage wetlands as a means to reduce emissions and to increase our adaptive capacity. We also believe that more steps should be taken to strengthen connections between Ramsar objectives and strategies and those of UNFCCC.

The Ramsar mission is explicit about the need for wise use and conservation of wetlands as a contribution to sustainable development, throughout the world. The IOPs believe that this can only be achieved if poverty reduction and food and water security gain greater emphasis in the Conventions work. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment findings on wetlands threw down the gauntlet - and the Convention must now take up the challenge. Resolution IX-14 on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction could be a useful vehicle for assisting Parties in addressing their National Poverty Reduction Objectives, but guidance and support for implementation is urgently needed. Further attention by the Convention is also called for on water-related matters. The population living in water-stressed countries is projected to increase from 1.7 billion to 5 billion people by 2025. How can we prepare for this? We must take steps to ensure that the role and values of wetlands as "natural infrastructure" in defining and delivering water resources for human use is recognised and factored in to economic development plans - and that policies and political processes support shared and equitable management of water resources across national boundaries. However, currently Ramsar's standing in the development world is relatively weak. We believe that more attention is needed to broker strategic alliances with UN agencies and development or aid NGOs, so as to provide access to competencies lacking in the Convention. Greater use could be made of the work and partnerships that IOPs have developed with the water, aid and development sectors in this respect. Adopting a theme of "Wetlands for health and well-being" for COP10 would be timely and would provide the opportunity to engage the interest and support of the health and development sectors.

The threat of avian influenza outbreaks has reminded many Contracting Parties of the need to have access to wetland inventories and for real-time assessment of ecological and management status. The IOPs are actively supporting the steps being taken to clarify the

gaps in the Ramsar site network, to identify critical sites for inclusion and to provide more effective monitoring. Through a more integrated approach to our individual efforts in "watching the wetlands", we seek to provide more coherent and effective advice to Parties. We recognise that much more work is needed to highlight the links between biodiversity, ecological character, ecological and social resilience. In this respect, the IOPs welcome the role of the Secretariat and STRP in promoting scientific and technical collaboration in this direction and key initiatives, such as the Wings over Wetlands Project that started this year - which will demonstrate these aspects on the level of the African-Eurasian flyway and in individual wetlands. We also see the Joint Workplan and increased team efforts between the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention as vital in this respect.

We believe that the new Ramsar Strategy needs to be relevant and responsive to the current and predicted major global threats and challenges for wetlands. The Ramsar mission statement was visionary at the time it was set - and it is still modern and relevant. But the Strategy must establish and communicate goals for the impacts the Convention wants to achieve in the longer term - and hence the steps that need to be achieved in the upcoming triennium. Linked with the progress being made on Ramsar governance, there is an opportunity to forge a renewed partnership built on reciprocity and trust between the Secretariat, CPs and IOPs, by recognising and indicating the particular roles and targeted contributions needed by each as well as where collective action is called for. Finally, the Strategy needs to identify the need for adequate Convention financing any significant institutional or operational adjustments that will be necessary to achieve the planned outcomes.

Thank you...