

Agenda item 5

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to receive the Secretary General's report and advise as appropriate.

Introduction

1. This report covers the period since the 41st meeting of the Standing Committee (SC41), in May 2010. The analysis of some global issues goes beyond this time frame, taking into account existing Ramsar Resolutions and ongoing global debates and actions that affect wetlands.
2. At present the Convention has 160 Contracting Parties, with 1,925 Ramsar Sites, totaling 187,868,884 hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Thus the level of activity required of the Secretariat continues to increase, as the number of Contracting Parties increases and new challenges are emerging from global debates.

Secretariat actions to enhance the recognition of the contribution of wetlands to human well-being, livelihoods and human health, biodiversity, and climate change adaptation and mitigation:

3. The most significant achievements made to encourage the implementation of the Ramsar Convention and to make its work relevant to global challenges are related to the following subject areas.

Management of wetland ecosystems as an integral part of landscape planning, including urban planning

4. Most of the interactions with key players are intended to increase the recognition of significant facts regarding wetlands, such as
 - Wetlands are part of the overall landscapes.
 - The root causes of wetland degradation are unsustainable land use planning, together with actions that damage vital functions and services provided by wetland ecosystems such as flood and water flow regulation, water quality enhancement, water transport, groundwater recharge, reduction of storm damage, providing habitat for species, providing food, and providing opportunities to adapt and mitigate climate change.
 - "Water" is a successful "entry point" to use when explaining the significance of wetland values for life on Earth.

- Ecosystem use are increasingly seen as a “win-win situation” which generates substantial ecological, social and economic benefits.
- A key aspect of the wetlands-water link is the urgent need for good information, especially economic information, which is generally lacking. The dependence of water supply and water resources quality and sustainability on healthy wetland ecosystems is generally not addressed with good, quantitative economic and financial information to support decision making about water infrastructure and water allocation decisions.
- There is sometimes improved attention paid to the other side of the relationship now with wider awareness of environmental flows issues, i.e., the dependence of wetland ecosystems on water (“no water, no wetlands” as it is phrased in our water guidance documents), but often we fail to generate or seek out adequate information to underpin the “no wetlands, no water” side.
- Reliable economic information pertaining to wetland values is a critical foundation work for us if we are to go forward with development of this whole area of policy and science related to the economics of water-related wetland ecosystem services.
- With concrete examples of the actual economic and social values of wetlands, the management of wetland ecosystem services can be successful in the overall landscape by identifying where high priority management areas are, specifying what services should be managed, and taking action on how they should be managed by precise stakeholders.

Enhancing the implementation of the Convention at local level

5. The Secretariat is recognizing the important role that local governments, regions, and cities can play in land use planning, including urban development and water and wetland management. Some states, regions or cities are translating national policies into action. In the absence of national policies, some local governments and cities are even taking the lead in developing local policies that may provide models for future national efforts. However, these local policies need technical support to suitably integrate wetland issues into their development plans.
6. The Secretariat acknowledges the fact that many wetlands, including Ramsar Sites, are under the direct or indirect influence of local governments and cities, and in fact, all wetlands are under the direct influence of local stakeholders. Taking that into account, the Secretariat is now involved in the global efforts that support integrated approaches to environmental protection and sustainability at local level through cooperation with ICLEI (‘International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives’) - Local Governments for Sustainability. ICLEI is an association of over 1,220 local government members who are committed to sustainable development. Their members come from 70 different countries and represent more than 569,885,000 people.
7. ICLEI’s basic premise is that locally designed initiatives can provide an effective and cost-efficient way to achieve local, national, and global sustainability objectives. They emphasize the linkages and coordination of regional and municipal services and the role of local governments in:
 - land-use, energy and transportation planning;
 - infrastructure design;

- purchase and use of sustainable products and services;
 - building retrofits;
 - water conservation;
 - solid waste diversion; and
 - use of renewable energy.
8. Cooperation with ICLEI has begun through two areas of work: in Nagoya, Japan, on Biodiversity and Wetlands, and in Cape Town, South Africa, on local government actions on climate change.
 9. Cooperation with UN-HABITAT is also growing, in order to encourage cities to integrate wetland management into their urban planning, taking into account the following trends:
 10. For the first time in human history, most of the world's population lives in cities (3.3 billion people), and the urban landscape continues to grow. According to the United Nations' publication "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision", the urban areas of the world are expected to absorb all the population growth expected over the next four decades while at the same time drawing in some of the rural population. Globally, the level of urbanization is expected to rise from 50 per cent in 2009 to 69 per cent in 2050.
 11. The Secretariat has been involved in the celebration of the theme of this year's World Water Day, "Water and Urbanization", under the slogan "Water for Cities: Responding to the Urban Challenge", which is raising awareness of the impact of rapid urban population growth, industrialization, and the uncertainties caused by climate change, conflicts and natural disasters on urban water systems. The Secretariat has joined relevant organizations in encouraging action by governments, organizations, communities, and individuals around the world to engage in addressing urban water management challenges.

Putting into operation some of the key principles of the TEEB Study

12. Applying economic thinking to the use of wetlands and their ecosystem services can help clarify two critical points: why prosperity and poverty reduction depend on maintaining the flow of benefits from ecosystems, and why successful environmental protection needs to be grounded in sound economics, including explicit recognition, efficient allocation, and fair distribution of the costs and benefits of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
13. It is now widely recognized that nature conservation and conservation management strategies do not necessarily pose a trade-off between the "environment" and "development". Investments in wetland conservation, restoration and sustainable development can be shown to be economically attractive, and we need to incorporate the values of nature into decision making at all levels, including urban development and business practices:
14. The Secretariat and the STRP are now exploring with the team of the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative and some Ramsar partners the possibilities for a TEEB product on "Wetlands and Water". Different options will be examined to define the form and the process and to mobilize human and financial resources to carry out the study.

15. The Ramsar Secretary General and the Senior Regional Advisor for Africa were pleased to be involved in the discussion of the experience with the TEEB Manual (currently being prepared by ICLEI LAB) and the technical training session held jointly with ICLEI at the Local Climate Adaptations conference for Africa in February-March 2011 in Cape Town, South Africa. This experience shows that it is very important to illustrate, step by step in a very basic manner, the relevance of ecosystem services and the benefits they can provide to the issues decision makers are concerned with at the different levels.
16. Both Secretariat and the STRP believe that it would be immensely valuable to capitalize on the TEEB efforts by producing wetland-related TEEB materials. The scope of any such product should not just be “wetlands” but “Wetlands and Water” since one of the key issues for the Ramsar and CBD partnership is the range and value of water-related ecosystem services delivered by/through wetlands acting as natural/green infrastructure. It is thus advisable to collaborate on a TEEB product for “Wetlands and Water” and try to launch and showcase it at Ramsar COP11 in June 2012 in Bucharest.
17. A TEEB product for water and wetlands would also provide very valuable input to our planned first edition of a “State of the World’s Wetlands” report, which we anticipate will also go to Ramsar COP11, and it could also provide valuable input to the expert working group on the biodiversity role and value in the water cycle that Nagoya Decision X/28 invited STRP to take a lead on, and for which STRP is just setting up the mechanisms.
18. In addition, the overall theme for COP11 (and for World Wetlands Day 2012) is “wetlands and tourism”, so if the TEEB materials should include anything on wetland tourism services/values that would be doubly valuable. The CBD Secretariat seems also to be very supportive of this, which could thus lead to a contribution to both Ramsar and CBD (under Ramsar’s lead implementation role on wetlands for CBD).

Promoting the role of wetlands and Ramsar in the global debate on international environmental governance and sustainable development

19. The Secretariat participates in the debate on the concept of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication with UNEP and other organizations, mainly through the work of the Environment Management Group (EMG).
20. The Secretariat and the STRP are also contributing to the work of the UN-WATER process, recognizing that the outcome of Rio+20 and the preparations leading up to the meeting are very important for the water community, including Ramsar. Although it is regrettable that water has not been specifically highlighted as one of themes at the Rio +20, the water community believes that the focus on building green economies offers an opportunity to demonstrate the importance that water issues have in any economy, regardless of whether it is green or not.
21. The Secretariat encourages Ramsar Contracting Parties to participate actively in the preparation of Rio +20 so as to take advantage of the chance to connect with those who operate outside the Ramsar community and to ensure a productive outcome from Summit.
22. The Secretariat is making significant efforts to participate in the deliberations of the most relevant Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the

Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD); in particular, the Secretariat will attend SCD 19, which will focus on the following thematic issues: transport; chemicals; waste management (hazardous and solid waste); mining; and a ten-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns.

23. All of these topics impact upon wetlands. It is important to remind the CSD of the vital importance of wetlands and of the impact from transport and road construction, chemical releases through spills or through pesticide applications, waste dumping into wetlands, and the impact of mining. In addition to the thematic discussions, there will be a partnership forum where public-private partnerships are discussed with respect to their construct, progress, stumbling blocks or obstacles and results.
24. CSD 19 will be chaired by the Minister of Environment from Romania, likely the same senior official who will be nominated by the host country as president of Ramsar COP11 in 2012.
25. The Ramsar Secretariat has been registered to participate in CSD19 as one of the biodiversity-related conventions and under the status of "Intergovernmental Organization". This is the response we can provide regarding Decision SC41-1, which requested the Secretariat to provide relevant information on the ECOSOC process for those Parties willing to help obtain consultative status. Although the Secretariat is still seeking permanent consultative status with the ECOSOC, it has not been possible to clarify the legal procedures for obtaining this status. The lack of legal expertise within the Secretariat staff is a bottleneck that needs to be addressed.
26. The involvement of the Ramsar Secretariat in the work of UN-Water is also increasingly responding to the need to be better connected to the UN system, including the Chief Executives Board (CEB) and the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP). These linkages are being further strengthened through the dialogue that we initiated last year between the chairs of UN-Water, UN-Oceans, and UN-Energy. In addition, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is now becoming directly engaged in UN-Water's activities. This high-level engagement will strengthen the links of UN-Water not only to UN DESA but also to a number of key processes in the UN system at large. For example, the UN-Water members and partners are keenly interested in the preparations for the Rio+20 Summit, and the guidance from UN-DESA is key in ensuring that significant and relevant messages are fed into the preparatory process.

The role of the Ramsar Convention as an MEA dealing with water

27. Over the last months the key area of focus has been through the work of UN-WATER on challenges and trends, drivers and impacts related to water quality. The Ramsar Secretariat supports the UN-WATER Policy, presenting four strategies for policy solutions and a series of specific recommendations through which these solutions can be achieved. It would be useful to see if the STRP can examine this policy paper in order to advise the Ramsar Contracting Parties.
28. Since water quality is a complex issue involving a wide range of stakeholders, to address the challenges we need strong partnership at all levels, involving the public and private sectors and civil society at international, watershed, national and local levels. The

Secretariat encourages strong support from all Contracting Parties and Ramsar partners to raise awareness and stimulate collective action to reverse the current trends.

The role of the Convention in promoting people's livelihoods through contributions to environmental and social safeguard policies

29. The Secretariat is actively participating in the ongoing deliberations on the possibility for UN-wide environmental and social safeguards. Key UN organizations are discussing how to translate principles into practice, and Ramsar is making significant efforts to influence decisions that aim to convert or alter wetlands through market-based activities that fail to take into account the total costs of service loss. Our efforts are intended to prevent behaviors that are detrimental to wetland service delivery and to stimulate actions that increase or maintain wetland service delivery to improve human livelihoods. To that end, the Secretariat is increasingly working with some major players, including the UN agencies that are supporting activities on the ground.
30. "Environmental and Social Safeguards", according to the UNEP Environmental Management Group's website, refers to "the adaption and integration of precautionary environmental and social principles and considerations into decision making processes. The objective of such safeguards is to prevent and mitigate undue harm to the environment and people at the earliest possible planning stage. Safeguards can appear as a combination of minimum standards and best practice guidelines." It is well known that a policy, programme or project that addresses one issue can affect other issues, which may not be less important. For example, inappropriate biofuel subsidies to reduce reliance on fossil fuels can contribute to wetland degradation (especially peatlands), food shortage, and deforestation.
31. In all our working relationships with the Contracting Parties and various organizations, our key objective is to raise awareness about wetland values in order to help shape public opinion towards an integrated view of human livelihoods and wetlands and the necessity to ensure healthy and productive wetlands for existing and future generations. Progress is being made – for instance, the World Bank has now taken action to make sure that all World Bank projects that can have an impact on Ramsar Sites should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat for comments and recommendations before approval. The Secretariat has already received requests for comments from the World Bank regarding a project on the Kagera River Basin, involving Ramsar Sites and potential Ramsar Sites in Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania.
32. It is also encouraging to note that Switzerland has requested comments from the Ramsar Secretariat on a project proposal submitted by Senegal on the Djoudj National Park (Ramsar Site and World Heritage property).
33. We also acknowledge the request made by Burkina Faso regarding a project to be submitted to GEF. The Secretariat is pleased to be able to make comments and recommendations that take into account Ramsar's principles, standards and guidelines.

The role of the Convention in adaptation and mitigation of climate change

34. The Secretariat is pleased to report that some promising progress has been made to enhance our knowledge and promote effective management of wetlands, including

restoration, under climate change scenarios. This refers to actions that are taken to support basic human needs for food and water but also provide carbon credits to investors that are willing to support wetland management and restoration. In this regard our partnership with the Danone Group and IUCN has resulted in two processes:

35. Following the workshop on “Achieving Carbon Offsets through Mangroves and Other Wetlands” in November 2009, a substantial milestone has been reached in the preparation of a large-scale methodology on “Afforestation and reforestation project activities implemented on wetlands”. The development of this methodology has been made in the framework of the partnership between the Ramsar Secretariat, IUCN, and the Danone Group, work that is part of the implementation of the agreement signed among our three organizations during Ramsar COP10 in Changwon. The draft methodology has now been submitted to the Working Group of the Executive Board of the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism). The Working Group has also concluded consideration of the proposed new A/R CDM methodology, “Afforestation and reforestation of degraded mangrove habitats”. The group agreed to request the Secretariat of the UNFCCC to send the draft methodology to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention for our comments, before recommending it to the Executive Board. Comments by the Ramsar Secretariat will be shortly sent to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC.
36. The methodology mentioned above is based on elements from three other methodologies: AR-NM0038 “Afforestation and reforestation of degraded tidal forest habitats” (the baseline and monitoring methodology and project design document were prepared by Silvestrum on behalf of the partnership comprising IUCN, the Ramsar Secretariat and the Danone Group); AR-ACM0001 “Afforestation and reforestation of degraded lands”, version 05; and AR-AMS0003 “Simplified baseline and monitoring methodology for small scale CDM afforestation and reforestation project activities implemented on wetlands, version 01.
37. Thus, a submission has been made by the Danone Group (through the government of Senegal) to the Executive Board of the Climate Change Convention CDM seeking validation of a “Simplified baseline and monitoring methodology for small-scale CDM afforestation and reforestation project activities implemented on wetlands”, which is intended to allow emission-reduction projects on wetlands in developing countries to earn certified emission reduction (CER) credits. It is important and encouraging to note that the simplified baseline and monitoring methodologies are applicable if all specified conditions are met, including Ramsar principles and standards:
 - a) Project activities are implemented on wetlands. The DNA (Designated National Authority) of the host country is to provide a statement that project activities conform to national policies and legislation applicable to wetlands. If the host country is a Party to Ramsar or other conventions applicable to wetlands, the DNA will also provide a statement that project activities conform to the provisions of the convention(s).
 - b) Project activities are implemented for afforestation or reforestation through assisted natural regeneration or seeding or tree planting on degraded wetlands, which may be subject to further degradation and have a tree and / or non tree component that is declining or in a low carbon steady-state.

- c) Direct measures/activities undertaken by the project proponents for the establishment of forest on degraded or degrading wetlands will not lead to any changes in hydrology of land subjected to afforestation or reforestation project activity under the control of the project participants. Some examples of direct activities that are not permitted include drainage, flooding, digging or ditch blocking. Therefore, the project activities are specifically restricted to the following wetland categories: i) degraded intertidal wetlands (e.g., mangroves); ii) undrained peat swamps that are degraded with respect to vegetation cover; iii) degraded flood plain areas on inorganic soils; and iv) seasonally flooded areas on the margin of water bodies/reservoirs.
- d) Carbon pools to be considered by these methodologies are above- and below-ground biomass (i.e., living biomass) of trees.

Climate change and freshwater

38. Many scientists are working to clarify emerging issues to assist policy makers and decision makers in addressing climate change through wetland conservation and wise use. It is worth noting the recent publication of a special issue of the journal *Marine & Freshwater Research* (March 2011) on “Conservation management of rivers and wetlands under climate change”. This publication confirms and supports the Ramsar principles on River Basin Management and investigates a number of topics such as analyses on droughts, floods and freshwater ecosystems; evaluating climate change impacts and developing adaptation strategies; freshwater conservation options for a changing climate; a new era in catchment management: integration of environmental flow assessment and freshwater conservation planning; dam re-operation as a freshwater climate change adaptation and conservation measure.

KEY CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

39. **Secretariat’s capacity:** Legal expertise, Information Technology expertise, and a media officer are sincerely needed to increase and enhance the effectiveness of the Secretariat.
40. **Financial support.** The overall key challenge is the need to ensure continued financial support through the payment of regular contributions to the core budget and increased voluntary funding to enhance the work of the Convention.
41. **Fundraising strategy and priority actions.** Following the appointment of Ms. Claudia Fenerol as the Secretariat’s Partnership Coordinator, a comprehensive work of streamlining priorities of the Secretariat for fundraising purposes is underway, including but not limited to:
42. **Ramsar and GEF.** Standing Committee Decision 41-17 requested the Secretariat to explore the development of an MOU with the GEF and look for an appropriate process for obtaining official support from GEF. The Secretariat is still exploring long-term possibilities and, in the meantime, has taken the following actions:
- Discussion with GEF officials about initiating joint projects with the African Development Bank and GEF support to restore and maintain groundwater recharge in the Niger River Basin, the lake Chad Basin and the Senegal River Basin.

- A joint request to the GEF CEO by the Secretariat of four biodiversity-related conventions (Ramsar, CITES, CMS and World Heritage) for a meeting with the CEO. A positive response from the GEF CEO has been received.
43. **Ramsar and other multilateral donors.** Working with regional organizations such as the European Union and its Commission requires substantial time and effort. The current capacity of the Secretariat is a limitation but efforts will be made to explore possibilities. Other organizations such as the African Development Bank, the Asia Development Bank, and similar organizations in the Americas will also be approached.
 44. **Ramsar and national development agencies.** Most of the funding mechanisms are now decentralized. It is important to explore joint actions at country level, in those countries receiving financial support from developed countries. The best way is to encourage fundraising activities by the Ramsar Administrative Authorities, together with other relevant water/wetland/biodiversity stakeholders in each recipient country.
 45. **Ramsar and Business sector.** A comprehensive strategy for engagement of the business sector with the Convention is in preparation.

Organizing and holding meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

46. The Ramsar Secretariat is increasingly experiencing significant difficulties in handling all of the substantive and logistics matters to prepare and carry out all the tasks that are required to achieve a successful meeting of the Conference of the Parties. In contrast with the other conventions, the Ramsar Convention does not have a distinct and approved budget allocated by the Parties for organizing and holding the meetings of the COP. All previous efforts to include COP major expenses into the core budget have been unsuccessful. There is an increasing upward trend in the costs of COPs, and the logistics are becoming challenging in relation to the limited capacity of the small Secretariat. After 40 years of existence, it is time for the Convention on Wetlands to adopt a more sustainable way to ensure a standardized and streamlined way for organizing and holding its meetings of the Conferences of the Parties through a more reliable funding mechanism.
47. The organization of COP11 will be particularly challenging because 2012 will be the year for RIO+20, IUCN World Conservation Congress, CBD COP, Climate Change COP, World Water Forum, World Water Week and many other international meetings. The current economic crisis makes it even more challenging. The Secretariat is requesting a strong and persistent support from the Standing Committee to enhance the likelihood of success.

Ensuring the presence of the water dimension in the outcome documents of Rio 2012

48. The Secretariat continues to contribute to the preparation for RIO+20, largely, as mentioned above, through participation in the UN-WATER process. The success of this will require UN-Water's continued engagement with the official preparatory process of the Conference through its dedicated secretariat located in UN-DESA, as well as through the complementary landmark events of partners such as the Bonn Conference and the WWF6 (World Water Forum), which also seek to inform and influence the Rio 2012 process and outcome.

49. However, all decisions will be made by country representatives. Therefore, the Ramsar Secretariat is encouraging Ramsar Contracting Parties to take seriously the challenges related to water security to ensure that water and wetland conservation and wise use are included in the priority actions to be adopted in RIO+20.

Providing practical guidance on the ground to Contracting Parties

50. In addition to the global scientific and technical guidance provided by the STRP, there is a growing expectation from Contracting Parties to receive practical and specific guidance on **how to address particular issues on the ground**. STRP guidance is useful regarding **what to do in general terms** but Contracting Parties, especially their site managers, city councils and other local stakeholders are also requesting assistance to build their capacity and enhance their ability to take the right action in the right manner. For instance, the Jiangxi Provincial Forestry Department, P.R. China, invited the Ramsar Secretariat to form a team of experts from the Convention to visit the Poyang Lake Ramsar site from 12 – 17 April 2010. Accordingly, a joint team of experts from the Ramsar Secretariat, ICF (International Crane Foundation), IUCN, IWMI and WWF visited Poyang Lake, 12–17 April, to provide recommendations for the perceived problem facing the lake, that the normal decline in winter water levels was now occurring much earlier and the period of decline lasting longer than previously. This was followed from 15 to 20 October by a visit to Geneva and the offices of the Secretariat by a delegation from the Jiangxi Provincial government who are responsible for the management of Poyang Lake, to study how the level and quality of the water in Lake Geneva is managed.
51. Pakistan is currently requesting similar assistance. The Secretariat would be happy to organize a Ramsar Advisory Mission to Pakistan to provide advice on floodplain management after the terrible floods last year. Financial assistance is required to provide this support. While the STRP's assistance is most appreciated through their voluntary support, for more specific input that requires very specialized experience, additional financial resources are needed not only to provide the guidance but also to be able to implement the recommendations.
52. China's experience on the Yangtze Focal Project can be used to illustrate this kind of need for technical assistance. This experience focuses on field demonstration sites in the Dongting Lake region and initiates Integrated River Basin Management policy work in Poyang Lake, intended to restore the Yangtze as a living river and to rehabilitate ecological processes of wetlands through pilot sites and magnifying experiences to the wider region of the Central Yangtze.

Ramsar and CBD: wetlands and biodiversity

53. Many of the outcomes of CBD COP10 (Nagoya) are relevant to Ramsar, notably Decision X/28 on inland waters biodiversity and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including its 20 Aichi Targets (Decision X/3). Concerning the Strategic Plan, it is worth noting that it is not just a Plan for the CBD, but that all the biodiversity-related conventions have committed to contributing jointly to its implementation. With the support of some Parties a reference to water has been included in Aichi Target 14 on ecosystem services, and in preparing the technical rationale for this target, there is an instruction to include the "paramount importance of water-related services".

54. A process is now underway to develop headline indicators for each of the Aichi Targets, including building on the work of the 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) indicators, and with development of additional indicators on drivers and on ecosystem services. The Ramsar Secretariat is participating in other works on indicators that will feed into a planned expert workshop and Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Aichi Target indicators in late June 2011. Ramsar has nominated Dave Pritchard to represent STRP interests and contributions, and a group of biodiversity-related secretariats (Ramsar, CMS, CITES and World Heritage) have jointly nominated the Ramsar Deputy Secretary General to represent their interests.
55. Decision X/3 of the CBD COP also “invites the scientific advisory bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions [...] to address at their future meetings options for enhanced cooperation, inter alia, with regard to work on cross-cutting issues, such as climate change, scientific criteria for the identification of ecologically or biologically significant areas in need of protection, and invasive alien species;” to which might also valuably be added water. The Decision also “expresses its appreciation to the Ramsar Convention, and its Secretariat and Scientific and Technical Review Panel, for the continued cooperation”.
56. Decision X/28 includes much of major significance to Ramsar and the future work of the STRP. Importantly it focuses not only on the water needs of inland wetlands, but strongly on the vital role of ecosystems (including wetlands) for “water security” (although not using that precise term). Some key elements include “noting with appreciation the continuing value of national reports of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention [...] in providing key information on the status and trends of inland water biodiversity and drivers of change”, and “expresses its appreciation for the inputs of the Secretariat and Scientific and Technical Review Panel [...] into the in-depth review of the implementation of the programme of work”. The Decision also urges Parties to expand “protected areas and ecological networks for inland water biodiversity and through designating coherent and comprehensive networks of wetland areas within river basins for the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance and through international cooperation in the management of inland water resources”.

Need for increasing partnership at local, national and international levels

57. The Secretariat believes that the Contracting Parties will better achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands if they encourage and support effective partnership at local, national and international levels with key players. In this regard, at least three kinds of partnerships are highly recommended:
- a) encouraging collective action through urban planning;
 - b) encouraging cross-sectoral actions at river basin level; and
 - c) developing and supporting the networks established by the Global Water Partnership (GWP) at country and regional levels.
58. Implementing jointly the Ramsar Strategic Plan and the Global Water Partnership Strategy is feasible and worthwhile. The Secretariat has been advocating for Water Security over the last years, and the GWP’s definition of water security is helpful. According to the GWP water partnership,

“A water secure world harnesses water’s productive power and minimises its destructive force. It is a world where every person has enough safe, affordable water to lead a clean, healthy and productive life. It is a world where communities are protected from floods, droughts, landslides, erosion and water-borne diseases. Water security also means addressing environmental protection and the negative effects of poor management.

A water secure world means ending fragmented responsibility for water and integrating water resources management across all sectors – finance, planning, agriculture, energy, tourism, industry, education and health. This integration is at the heart of GWP’s strategy.

A water secure world reduces poverty, advances education, and increases living standards. It is a world where there is an improved quality of life for all, especially for the most vulnerable – usually women and children – who benefit most from good water governance.”

59. The Secretariat will increase its cooperation with the GWP to encourage the integration of water security in urban planning, national planning and international priorities, including actions on food security, energy security, biodiversity, climate change and economic development.

Priority setting for the work of the Convention and its Secretariat

60. In line with the Ramsar Strategic Plan, the Secretariat is fine-tuning its planning process to identify a set of overarching priorities based on issues and processes of global concern into which the Ramsar Convention can make an effective contribution, including but not limited to:
 - wetlands and water;
 - sustainable development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
 - contribution to the implementation of the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity (2011-2020) and achievement of the Aichi Targets;
 - climate change mitigation and adaptation (including REDD+); and
 - economic valuation of wetlands (TEEB), etc.
61. The Ramsar Convention’s 40th anniversary is a good time to develop an overarching strategy, which would also help in the branding of the Convention.

Progress on implementation of the Strategic Plan 2009-2015

Goal 1: Wise use of wetlands

62. The Secretariat is paying special attention to a particular type of wetlands: it is increasingly recognized that conserving existing mangroves and restoring the vast areas of degraded and cleared mangrove wetlands will serve as a partial solution to global warming. In Cancun, Mexico, during the 16th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, many organizations recognized the importance of wetland conservation and wise use as a way to

- adapt and mitigate climate change. As explained above a methodology has been developed on mangroves to use carbon markets to mitigate climate change, restore wetlands and secure livelihoods, and this methodology has been submitted to the Clean Development Mechanism of the UNFCCC. It is hoped that the methodology will be validated in 2011, as it has the potential to raise the interest of the business sector for wetland conservation and wise use.
63. To enhance the Convention's capacity in improving the conservation status of mangrove ecosystems, the Secretariat is also preparing a proposal to be submitted to the MAVA Foundation to seek additional financial assistance.
 64. The Secretariat has been making considerable efforts to raise awareness about the importance of water and wetlands for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use as well as for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Our efforts are supported by some Contracting Parties but also by some international organizations as well, and in this regard, the Secretariat strongly supported the need for CBD to incorporate water issues into its Strategic Plan targets – we are pleased to report that the Biodiversity Strategic Plan adopted in Nagoya, Japan, has finally made reference to water, as explained above.
 65. A practical example of the assistance of the Secretariat in promoting wise use of wetland is the work done with one of the collaborating institutions for the 'First World Conference on Terraced Landscapes' which was held in Mengzi City, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province, P.R. China, from 11 to 15 November 2010. The meeting discussed the conservation of terraced landscapes worldwide, but with a particular focus on the Yuanyang Hani Rice Terraces that lie within Honghe Prefecture. The conference provided an opportunity to promote Resolution X.31 *Enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies as wetland systems* and to learn more about the issues facing rice terraces farming.
 66. On 13 December the Irish Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr John Gormley TD, launched a new guidance document on Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICWs). ICWs represent created or restored natural wetland systems that are designed not only to deal with farmyard and domestic wastewater but also to deliver on a range of benefits including flood management, landscape aesthetics, educational opportunities and biodiversity. The Secretariat finds this to be a promising development and will be following it closely.
 67. With preparatory support from the Secretariat, in the first half of 2010 the Alsace regional authorities of France invited the managers of the dozen or so designated Transboundary Ramsar Sites to a first meeting of exchange of experiences in Strasbourg with an opportunity to visit the French-German Ramsar Site of the Upper Rhine. Again with the Secretariat's support, this was followed up a few months later with a special meeting for mayors, locally elected people and tourist promoters to explore the socio-economic potential to develop local business models. And at the Pan-European level, the Secretariat is working closely with the UNECE Water Convention Secretariat and the relevant Ramsar Administrative Authorities for the preparation of the 2nd Assessment of Rivers, Lakes and Groundwater that will include for the first time specific Ramsar Site information.

GOAL 2. Wetlands of International Importance

68. As of 5 April 2011, 1925 Wetlands of International Importance have been listed, covering a total surface area of 187,868,884 hectares.

Threats to Ramsar sites and the Montreux Record (See Doc SC42-17 on Status of Ramsar Sites)

Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs)

Africa:

69. At the invitation of the Republic of Congo, a Ramsar Advisory Mission was undertaken jointly with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Agreement on African-Eurasian Waterbirds (AEWA) to Brazzaville and the area of Pointe Noire, 23-28 June 2010. This mission, funded by the Swiss Grant for Africa programme, examined the possible impacts of the development of potash extraction facilities on the Ramsar Site Cayo-Loufoualeba. The mission also discussed broader subjects such as the management of the Ramsar Site and, more generally, the implementation of the two Conventions (Ramsar and CMS) and AEWA in Congo.
70. Another RAM was undertaken from 12 to 16 October 2010 jointly with the CMS and AEWA in Rabat and the area of Saïdia, on the Ramsar Site Embouchure de la Moulouya in Morocco. This mission of technical assistance, at the invitation of the government and funded by the Swiss Grant for Africa, was organized to address the concerns related to the development of tourist facilities in the vicinity of the Ramsar Site, well-known for its avifauna and high biodiversity.

Americas

71. Three Ramsar Advisory Missions have been undertaken in the region since May 2010 – to the Laguna del Tigre Ramsar Site in Guatemala, which is included in the Montreux Record as a result of oil activities; to the Marismas Nacionales and Huisache Caimanero Ramsar Sites in Mexico to evaluate the threats from resort activities and possible building of a dam; and to evaluate changes in the ecological character of Caribe Noreste Ramsar Site in Costa Rica. Because of the special nature of this last mission, a diplomatic note was sent for information to all Contracting Parties. These missions were made possible by funds granted by the USA, and this is an opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to the USA for its generous financial support.

Europe

72. From 28 September to 1 October 2010, the Secretariat executed a Ramsar Advisory Mission at the invitation of Spain. Four experts, representing the regional authorities of the Balearic Islands, the Spanish Ramsar Administrative Authority (Ministry of Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs), and the Convention Secretariat, assessed the conflictual situation created by the development of a golf course in a former dune area at the edge of the coastal Ramsar Site S'Albufera de Mallorca.

Goal 3. International cooperation

73. As a part of the MOU signed in February 2010 with the World Bank, the project “Adaptation to climate change impacts on the coastal wetlands in the Gulf of Mexico” has been approved by the Bank, and its development will contribute 1) to promoting such adaptation through the implementation of pilot measures to provide information about the costs and benefits of alternative approaches to reducing the vulnerability of these coasts to climate change, and 2) to assessing the overall impacts of climate change on Mexico’s national water resource planning, including the identification of potential response options, with a focus on coastal wetlands and associated watersheds.
74. In 2010, the Asia-Oceania regional team has been working to improve implementation of the Convention in particular subregions through a range of activities, such as the development of subregional action plans. For example, a workshop was held in Nouméa, New Caledonia, 2–6 August, for representatives from Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and regional organizations and academics. This event was able to develop an updated edition of the Regional Wetland Action Plan for the Pacific Islands (RWAP) that included a range of focused activities to improve and provide coordination to the implementation of the Convention in the PICs. The event was also an opportunity to provide information to the representatives from the non-Parties in the region about the benefits of accession to the Convention and to answer any questions that they may have. Current PIC Parties were also further advised on Ramsar implementation issues and processes (national reporting, RIS completion, etc.).
75. Ramsar cooperation with the Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS) continued to strengthen in 2011. From 7 to 9 June, a workshop was held in Muscat, Oman, principally for the countries in the Arabian Peninsula to discuss steps to improve the implementation of the Convention in the subregion, as well as to encourage accession by non-Parties. The important outcome from the workshop was the ‘Muscat Action Plan’ to give direction and coordination to the cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the countries in the LAS, particularly those in West Asia. On 19 December, the Senior Advisor for Asia-Oceania was invited to the 22nd meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), where he gave an introduction to the Convention. At the same meeting, the ‘Muscat Action Plan’ was endorsed, as was a proposal from Prof. Reda Fishar (Egypt) to conduct a study of the economic value of Arab wetlands, which will be assisted by the Secretariat.
76. In March 2011, the IUCN Mekong Water Dialogue and the Ramsar Secretariat organized a workshop in Vientiane, Lao PDR, for the Ramsar Authorities, Ramsar Site managers, and other relevant stakeholders from the four countries in the Lower Mekong River subregion (Cambodia, Lao, Thailand and Vietnam) to exchange experiences and best practices for the implementation of the Convention. In future, it is hoped that a network of wetland conservation and wise use practitioners can be established for the subregion, and that this network can be extended to the ASEAN region. As one of the activities towards this goal, a Memorandum of Cooperation has been prepared with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity which will be signed in July 2011.
77. A great deal of support for the above activities in the Asia subregions was provided by the Ramsar Regional Centres (RRC) based in the Islamic Republic of Iran (RRC–Central and West Asia) and Republic of Korea (RRC-East Asia). Examples include the RRC-EA organizing a workshop for Ramsar Site managers from South, Southeast and East Asia which was held 13–17 September. The RRC-EA also supported the 2nd Changwon

Declaration Network meeting from 23 to 25 November, intended to monitor the roll-out and uptake of the Declaration since its adoption at COP10.

78. To further improve the implementation of the Convention in particular subregions, work was completed on translating some of the key Convention documents, e.g., the Ramsar Convention Manual and a number of the Ramsar Handbooks (3d ed.), into Arabic and Russian. These have now been placed on the Ramsar website for easy download and work on translating further documents into Arabic is in progress. These translations were made possible with financial support from the RRC-CWA and Danone-Evian.
79. On 12-13 October 2010, Ms Annika Olsen, Interior Minister of the Faroe Islands Government, invited Ramsar experts and representatives of local ministries for a special meeting on the Ramsar Convention. The seminar was prepared by Bergur Olson of the Faroe Marine Research Institute, based on exchanges and ideas created during this year's Nordic-Baltic wetland conference in April in Norway.
80. Greece and Turkey agreed to collaborate on the Evros / Maritsa / Meriç River. A Declaration was signed in Athens on 14 May by the two Ministers of Environment in the presence of Prime Ministers Erdogan and Papandreou.

GOAL 4. Institutional capacity and effectiveness.

Managing the Secretariat of the Convention

81. **Senior Regional Advisor for Africa.** The Regional Affairs Officer, Dr Alexia Dufour, ably covered the Africa desk in the interim from March to November, under the supervision of the Secretary General. A new SRA for Africa, Mr Paul Ouedraogo, was recruited and started work on 1 November 2010.
82. **Partnership Coordinator.** A Partnership Coordinator, Ms Claudia Fenerol, has been successfully recruited and started work in Gland on 18 January 2011.
83. **Project Management Officer.** Following the departure of the first Project Officer, whose brief is chiefly to manage the Secretariat's collaboration with the Danone Group, Ms Virginie Pirens has been appointed, and her work has already been helpful in the preparation of a strategic approach and a new proposal to Danone to strengthen our partnership.
84. **Assistant Advisors (Interns).** Four new Assistant Advisors, who serve as assistants to the Senior Regional Advisors, were recruited from the respective regions and trained in 2010 to replace those who have completed their terms in the Secretariat.

Convention financial capacity (See DOCs. SC42-04 - SC42-08 and SC42-23)

85. The Ramsar Secretariat reiterates its request to Contracting Parties to increase the capacity of the Secretariat. After 40 years of action, the Convention is facing new challenges that require more energy, more capacity and more resources. For instance legal expertise and IT expertise are needed to better assist the Contracting Parties.

CEPA activities (See DOCs. SC42-21 & SC42-22)

86. In addition to these reports, it is worth noting that the handbook for francophone African National Focal Points, developed in collaboration with ATEN, has been finalized and is being disseminated.

The Scientific and Technical Review Panel

87. The Scientific & Technical Review Panel is widely respected both inside and outside Convention circles for its high level of wetland expertise and delivery. Concerning the roles and future work of the STRP, which the STRP Chair has covered in her report (DOC. SC41-18), the Panel will be meeting again in late June 2011 to review and develop recommendations to Standing Committee 43 and COP11 concerning future scientific and technical work of the Convention and what priority tasks Parties may wish to instruct the Panel to undertake in the 2013-2015 triennium. As part of this work, at its June meeting the Panel will be reviewing the current suite of scientific and technical guidance (compiled in the Ramsar Wise Use Handbooks) in relation to the strategies of the current Ramsar Strategic Plan so as to identify what gaps in advice on implementation may exist, and from this to seek the views of Parties prior to COP11 as to what priority needs, if any, Parties have for the Panel to prepare further relevant guidance to fill any such gaps.
88. However, the preparation of scientific and technical guidance at the request of Parties is but one aspect of the work now expected of the Panel, and it is the sense of both the Panel and the Secretariat that the expectations of what the Panel should be doing in bringing its wetland expertise to a range of Convention-related processes and mechanisms are widening, and that this is placing an ever-increasing burden of time demands on Panel members, and especially the Chair. These include expectations of advising on, and responding to, emerging issues likely to affect wetland conservation and wise use; developing and providing training and capacity-building to Parties in the application of guidance; representing the Convention in an increasingly wide range of scientific and technical processes (such as the CSAB, the IPBES process, UN-WATER, and CBD expert groups and in-depth programme of work reviews); participating increasingly as wetland experts in other Ramsar functions, including Ramsar Advisory Missions, regional COP preparatory meetings, COPs, STRP NFP meetings, etc.; focusing more on responding to the needs of 'wetland managers' for technical advice and guidance; and engaging with bodies in other sectors in the development and roll-out of sectoral guidance on wetlands (such as the current work on urban wetlands, with UN-HABITAT, ICLEI, etc.).
89. In light of this, it is an appropriate time for both us and the Panel to revisit and consider what should be its core work and responsibilities, what (at least under its currently low level of funding) is realistic and unrealistic to expect of the Panel, and what should be considered outside the core business of the Panel itself but might benefit from complementary mechanisms being established for delivery.
90. In addition, a considerable amount of the time given by the STRP Chair and members to the work of the Panel continues to be provided *pro bono*. But with increasing workloads, particularly for the STRP Chair, and given that the Chair and members are appointed in their own right as wetland experts and do not necessarily have organizational or institutional support for their Panel work, we cannot continue to expect such levels of time commitment to continue without question. The Secretariat believes that we need now to consider adding to the STRP budget line a component of funds to contribute to at least

some of the time given to the work of the Panel, particularly by its Chair, but also its members.

91. Regarding the working relationships of STRP with national stakeholders, it is worth noting that from 30 November to 2 December 2010 the STRP National Focal Points of the Africa region met in Johannesburg, South Africa, described in the STRP Chair's report (DOC. SC42-18, paras. 47-48). The three-day workshop provided an opportunity both to discuss STRP processes in view of the forthcoming COP and to give an overview of the high priority STRP tasks currently under development.

Goal 5. Membership

92. Lao PDR acceded to the Convention in 2010, with its entry into force on 28 September. This means that all four countries in the lower region of the Mekong River are now members of the Convention.
93. The Kingdom of Bhutan is the remaining Himalayan country that has yet to join the Convention, and in October 2011 the Secretariat and WWF provided support for a delegation from the government to make a study tour to Thailand to see at first hand the benefits from accession. Thanks to the generous and kind support from the government of Thailand, the delegation had a successful tour and is now preparing its official report to parliament for possible approval to join the Convention.
94. Zimbabwe and Swaziland are taking steps for accession and, according to the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Management of Zimbabwe, the accession process is expected to be achieved by that country in May 2011. Angola and Ethiopia are also making some progress for accession.

Working with the International Organization Partners (See DOC.SC42-13)

Partnership with private sector (See DOC.SC42-20)

95. In the Americas, the first workshop on the involvement of the private sector in the management of wetlands, organized by four Chilean mining and oil companies and with the support of the Chilean government and the Ramsar Secretariat, was held in Santiago de Chile in October 2010 to present and discuss the experiences and activities undertaken by different mining and oil companies.

Conclusion

96. The year since the 41st meeting of the Standing Committee has been a challenging, but a fruitful one for the Convention and for the Secretariat as well. The priorities for all of us now lie with the preparations for COP11 in Bucharest next year, and the Secretariat's COP11 planning team has been hard at work on our part of it, but at the same time we have many other ongoing responsibilities for the administration of the Convention to attend to and quite a few additional opportunities to influence events in the wider world of environmental policy and action – to all of these, the staff of the Secretariat will devote its best abilities and looks forward to working with the Contracting Parties over the next year with enthusiasm and confidence.

97. At the same time, the Secretariat continues to count on the full support of the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties in helping us to position wetlands firmly on the political agenda, in order to maintain the ecosystem services that are vital for sustainable development.