

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE
ASIA REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR COP10
14 – 18 JANUARY 2008, Bangkok, Thailand

The Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10 was attended by a total of 160 participants:

- 65 representing 20 member countries in the Asia region;
- 1 representing the Russian Federation, which has formal observer status in the Asia region;
- 2 from non-member countries (Lao PDR and Yemen), attending as observers; and
- 92 representing Ramsar's International Organization Partners (BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF), several international organizations, and regional and national non-governmental organizations, attending as observers plus a number of invited experts.

The Parties represented were Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, P.R. China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, I.R. Iran, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam. Apologies were received from Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Philippines, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The meeting discussed issues ranging from challenges in implementing the Ramsar Convention at the regional and national levels to scientific and technical issues of concern to the countries of the region, and explored opportunities to advance regional cooperation through existing and proposed mechanisms under the Convention.

The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand.

Key messages:

Challenges in implementing the Ramsar Convention at the regional and national levels

1. The implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Asia region since COP9 has seen some progress, e.g. with the welcomed accession to the Convention of Iraq, Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates, the pending accession of Yemen, and the designation of 9 new Ramsar sites, with several more planned before COP10.
2. However challenges remain with regards the wise use of wetlands and the implementation of the Convention, particularly in terms of the need to:
 - a. increase capacity at the national and local levels to implement the wise use of wetlands;
 - b. improve coordination and collaboration within the various national Ramsar focal points (Administrative Authority, STRP focal point, and CEPA government and NGO focal points); and between Ramsar focal points and other relevant sectors (e.g. agriculture, water resources, health, tourism, urban development, and science and technology), and national focal points of other multilateral environmental agreements (e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Migratory Species, and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change);
 - c. increase the number of sites designated to the Ramsar List to better reflect the diversity of wetland types in the region and the importance of wetland resources to the people of Asia, and ensure that the ecological character of these sites is maintained;
 - d. promote membership to the Convention; and
 - e. support the implementation of the principles of wise use of resources on-the-ground at Ramsar sites.
3. There is an increasing need to enhance and promote international and multilateral cooperation amongst Contracting Parties on issues related to the management of shared water resources and shared species.

Wetlands, Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction

4. The Convention should approach the issue of wetlands and their contribution to livelihoods and poverty reduction in a more holistic way,

with equal emphasis given to the conservation, social and development aspects.

Wetlands and Agriculture, including Fisheries

5. Agricultural practices in wetland areas should strive to balance the need to increase production with the need to maintain the ecosystem services provided by wetlands.

Avian Influenza, Wetlands and Waterbirds

6. To mitigate the spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), Ramsar authorities should work to share information more effectively, engage proactively with the health sector, and develop efficient tools and mechanisms to monitor, detect and respond to outbreaks.

Regional Initiatives

7. There are two existing (*Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in Central and West Asia; and East Asia-Australasia Waterbird Flyway Partnership*) and two proposed (*proposed Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia; and the proposed Himalayan Initiative*) Ramsar regional initiatives in the Asia region; these serve to bring member countries together to share experience and knowledge, and to find solutions for common issues. There are other wetland-related regional initiatives which provide valuable lessons, and opportunities to promote the wise use of wetlands.

Wetlands and Climate Change

8. The impact of climate change on wetlands is already evidenced by declining water levels, changes in the migratory pattern of waterbirds, and reduction in aquatic biodiversity. However, more research is needed to document and identify options to mitigate these impacts.
9. Peatlands are a major wetland type in the Asia region. The continued loss and degradation of peatlands will have wide-ranging impacts on human health and local economies, as well as on efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Ramsar Convention should give greater attention to raising awareness about the value of peatlands and increasing the capacity of member countries to conserve and manage peatlands.

Wetlands and Human Health

10. The importance of maintaining wetland ecosystem services for human health is not appreciated by the sectors that deal directly with human health issues. The Ramsar Convention should be more proactive in engaging with these sectors; mechanisms should be developed to enhance collaboration with these sectors at the global, regional and national levels.

Designation and Management of Ramsar Sites

11. The capacity within Contracting Parties in Asia to identify, designate, and manage Ramsar Sites is limited. A regional approach should be adopted to build capacity among member countries. The Ramsar Convention should make available additional tools and funding to overcome this limitation.
12. Measures need to be developed to monitor the status of Ramsar Sites at the regional and global levels to assess the effectiveness of conservation measures at these sites.
13. In view of the significant number of GEF-funded wetland conservation initiatives in Asia, some of which involve the conservation of biodiversity in a complex continuum of wetland resources from the high alpine zone to the sea, and transecting extensive arid and semi-arid landscapes, the Ramsar Secretariat should initiate the process of creating and maintaining closer links with the GEF Secretariat.

Financing for Wetland Conservation

14. The Ramsar Convention should develop a fundraising strategy, taking into account the need to have a sustainable long-term financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention, and the need to put wetland issues firmly on the global agenda so as to be able to tap available and potential funding sources.
15. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is a good mechanism to secure funding for wetland conservation and wise use; this area of work is under-developed in the Asia region and more effort should be directed under the Convention to advance this issue.
16. The Asia region should work towards a proposal for a financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention in the region

to be presented to COP10; this should be linked to a good communications strategy to reach out to potential funders at the international, regional and national levels.

OUTCOMES FROM THE GROUP BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

Challenges in implementing the Ramsar Convention at the regional and national levels

Key messages:

1. The implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Asia region since COP9 has seen some progress, e.g. with the welcomed accession to the Convention of Iraq, Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates, the pending accession of Yemen, and the designation of 9 new Ramsar sites, with several more planned before COP10.
2. However challenges remain with regards the wise use of wetlands and the implementation of the Convention, particularly in terms of the need to:
 - a. increase capacity at the national and local levels to implement the wise use of wetlands;
 - b. improve coordination and collaboration within the various national Ramsar focal points (Administrative Authority, STRP focal point, and CEPA government and NGO focal points); and between Ramsar focal points and other relevant sectors (e.g. agriculture, water resources, health, tourism, urban development, and science and technology), and national focal points of other multilateral environmental agreements (e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Migratory Species, and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change);
 - c. increase the number of sites designated to the Ramsar List to better reflect the diversity of wetland types in the region and the importance of wetland resources to the people of Asia, and ensure that the ecological character of these sites is maintained;
 - d. promote membership to the Convention; and
 - e. support the implementation of the principles of wise use of resources on-the-ground at Ramsar sites.
3. There is an increasing need to enhance and promote international and multilateral cooperation amongst Contracting Parties on issues related to the management of shared water resources and shared species.

Ways to enhance the wise use of wetlands:

- Use existing collaborative mechanisms (e.g. regional treaties and agreements) to promote the concept of the wise use of wetlands
- Develop and apply new tools and approaches
- Share information and experience
- Enhance wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring
- Enhance CEPA actions
- Promote restoration and rehabilitation

- Monitor and control the spread of alien species in wetlands
- Provide positive incentives for wise use
- Enhance the involvement of the private sector

Ways to enhance implementation capacity:

- Enhance coordination and cooperation (a) within the country (e.g. between the Ramsar focal points, and between the Ramsar focal points and other sectoral agencies); and (b) between member countries, especially those within a subregion which share many similarities.
- Review the role of the Regional Meetings to provide opportunities for (a) expert workshops to discuss scientific and technical issues, and (b) preparatory meetings for the COP, during which member countries can adopt a common position on resolutions to be adopted.
- Provide support for training and capacity building to implement the Convention.
- Recognise that language remains a barrier to effective communication on the region, and take steps to address this issue.
- Increase financial assistance to member countries in the region.

Ways to promote membership:

- At the regional / subregional level, through regional and subregional projects, programmes and initiatives; and regional and subregional organizations/agreements: e.g. ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization for Central and West Asia).
- At the bilateral or transboundary level, through bilateral agreements and programmes; and transboundary projects and programmes.

Wetlands, Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction

Key message: The Convention should approach the issue of wetlands and their contribution to livelihoods and poverty reduction in a more holistic way, with equal emphasis given to the conservation, social and development aspects.

General recommendations:

- Approaches to poverty reduction should view poverty in a more holistic way (e.g. human rights, security and vulnerability, access rights) and include the social aspects, including those for marginalized and nomadic groups.
- Policy change is needed at government level; however, we should recognise that some 'pro-poor' policies, such as restrictions on food export, can have a negative impact on livelihoods.
- Solutions should be area-specific or site-specific, and should not result in degradation of the ecosystem services provided by the wetland.

- We should build the capacity of the local community groups to plan and manage solutions.

Wetlands and Agriculture, including Fisheries

Key message: Agricultural practices in wetland areas should strive to balance the need to increase production with the need to maintain the ecosystem services provided by wetlands.

General recommendations:

- To achieve this, wetland planners and managers need to form new partnerships at the national level (e.g. with the agricultural, water resources, and irrigation sectors) and at the regional/international level (e.g. with international agencies working on agriculture and fisheries such as FAO and IRRI)
- The spread of alien invasive species is a common problem in wetlands across the region; more research is needed to assess the extent of the problem and its impacts on wetland habitats and wetland species, and to identify ways to eradicate the threat.
- Impacts on wetland biodiversity in agricultural areas due to water pollution such as eutrophication, and algal blooms should be assessed through research and monitoring.
- Rice paddies are a common wetland type in Asia, and are of biological and cultural value.

Avian Influenza, Wetlands and Waterbirds

Key message: To mitigate the spread of High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), Ramsar authorities should work to share information more effectively, engage proactively with the health sector, and develop efficient tools and mechanisms to monitor, detect and respond to outbreaks.

COP10 provides an opportunity to build on Resolution IX: 23, by considering:

- Effective management and response measures to ensure conservation of habitat and waterbirds;
- Establishment of expert groups with ornithological expertise to strengthen national capacity to advice and guide strategy development and responses;
- Strengthening of flyway cooperation and rapid sharing of information with neighbouring Parties;
- Improved synthesis of current status of knowledge;
- Collation of and availability of guidance and guidelines;
- Encouraging translation and adaptation of information into local languages;

- Reviewing role of the Scientific Task Force and other regional groups to support the Convention; and
- Resource mobilization to support countries in need.

Regional Initiatives

Key message: There are two existing and two proposed Ramsar regional initiatives in the Asia region; these serve to bring member countries together to share experience and knowledge, and to find solutions for common issues. There are other wetland-related regional initiatives which provide valuable lessons, and opportunities to promote the wise use of wetlands.

Specific recommendations for each regional initiative:

A. Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in Central and West Asia

The Centre should work towards becoming a resource centre for member countries, while continuing to play a vital role in research and training in the region. In order to be effective, the Centre will have to be financially sustainable.

B. Ramsar Priorities for the Waterbird Flyway Partnership

1. We should strengthen links between the Flyway Partnership and the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.
2. We should promote the development of national partnerships to support implementation of the Flyway Initiative at the national level.
3. We should consider including existing or new Ramsar Sites which are of international importance for migratory waterbirds to the Flyway Site Network.
4. We should support and provide input to the development of the COP10 draft Resolution on promoting the flyway conservation approach.

C. Proposed Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia

1. The Central government of the Republic of Korea proposed the establishment of the Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia (RRC-EA) to focus on dealing with the regional needs regarding various wetland issues. The proposal was warmly received by member countries of the Asia region.
2. The Wetland Foundation that will be founded by Gyeongsangnam-do Provincial government will grant adequate financial support for the Center. And the Korean government will provide the necessary assistance for the successful operation of the Center.
3. The Korean government will send the draft resolution for the RRC-EA to interested participants of Asia Regional Meeting. The final version of draft resolution, which will be formally submitted to 37th meeting of the Standing Committee, will reflect the feedback received from the participants.

4. It was proposed that the name of the Centre be changed to “Ramsar Regional Network Center – East Asia” to better reflect its objective which is to promote regional cooperation on wetland issues of common concern.
5. It was suggested that the Centre seek to utilize resources available within existing international organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation in the Philippines.

D. Himalayan Initiative

1. Participants endorsed the submission of the regional initiative proposal to the Standing Committee for possible approval by COP10.
2. Countries warmly welcomed the ICIMOD offer to continue to serve as facilitator/coordinator to develop the proposal. For this purpose, ICIMOD will be the communication point for the Ramsar Secretariat on behalf of the ‘Himalayan Initiative’.
3. ICIMOD will draft the proposal as per the Ramsar Guidelines and circulate it to the concerned countries for input/feedback prior to submission to Standing Committee.
4. The International NGOs (e.g. WWF, GEC, WI) reiterated their support to ICIMOD and Himalayan Countries for further development of the ‘Himalayan Initiative’.

Wetlands and Climate Change

Key messages:

1. The impact of climate change on wetlands is already evidenced by declining water levels, changes in the migratory pattern of waterbirds, and reduction in aquatic biodiversity. However, more research is needed to document and identify options to mitigate these impacts.
2. Peatlands are a major wetland type in the Asia region. The continued loss and degradation of peatlands will have wide-ranging impacts on human health and local economies, as well as on efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Ramsar Convention should give greater attention to raising awareness about the value of peatlands and increasing the capacity of member countries to conserve and manage peatlands.

General recommendations:

- Develop case studies on the impacts of climate change on wetlands, and the impact of wetlands on climate change, with emphasis on the water requirements of wetlands; and on the impacts of wetlands on climate change.
- Develop more educational materials to increase awareness about the impacts of climate change on wetlands, and also on the impact of wetlands on climate change.
- Ramsar focal points should work to get wetlands into the global climate change agenda through the responsible agencies in their country.

Specific recommendations for peatlands:

- Better inventory of peatlands, especially high-altitude peatlands.
- Better sharing of resources & experiences, perhaps via the Ramsar Convention.
- Explore the potential for market pricing of the ecosystem services (e.g. water retention) provided by peatlands.
- Undertake more research on the impacts of climate change on wetland habitats and species (e.g. sea level rise on coastal peatlands).
- The Ramsar Convention should develop a policy on energy from peatlands.
- COP10 should adopt a resolution that encourages countries to pay more attention to the wise use of peatlands, especially in relation to the impacts of peatland degradation on climate change.

Wetlands and Human Health

Key message: The importance of maintaining wetland ecosystem services for human health is not appreciated by the sectors that deal directly with human health issues. The Ramsar Convention should be more proactive in engaging with these sectors; mechanisms should be developed to enhance collaboration with these sectors at the global, regional and national levels.

General recommendations:

- Maintain the ecosystem services provided by wetlands to ensure safe water and food security, especially for local communities. This can also help prevent the spread of disease.
- Develop more tools to assist Contracting Parties e.g. for monitoring and surveillance and for bioremediation.
- The Ramsar Convention should increase collaboration with the World Health Organization at all levels, i.e. from the international to the national and local levels, as well as collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the issue of food security.
- More research and information is needed on the link between wetlands and human health.
- Ramsar focal points should work more closely with the health and water sectors in their countries.

Designation and Management of Ramsar Sites

Key messages:

1. The capacity within Contracting Parties in Asia to identify, designate, and manage Ramsar Sites is limited. A regional approach should be adopted to build

- capacity among member countries. The Ramsar Convention should make available additional tools and funding to overcome this limitation.
2. Measures need to be developed to monitor the status of Ramsar Sites at the regional and global levels to assess the effectiveness of conservation measures at these sites.
 3. In view of the significant number of major GEF-funded wetland conservation initiatives in Asia, some of which involve the conservation of biodiversity in a complex continuum of wetland resources from the high alpine zone to the sea, and transecting extensive arid and semi-arid landscapes, the Ramsar Secretariat should initiate the process of creating and maintaining closer links with the GEF Secretariat.

General recommendations:

- Strengthen regional capacity in a coordinated manner – conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and develop a strategy.
- Member countries should draw donor attention to the need for financial support.
- Link the Ramsar Convention more closely to CBD to leverage funds.
- Introduce a very strong resolution at COP10 on climate change to enable incremental costs to be met.
- The Ramsar Convention needs to take fundraising more seriously.
- In some cases, there is a discrepancy between the national protected area legislation and Ramsar's concept of wise use pertaining to access to resources, or resource use. This needs to be addressed.
- Participants recognized the importance of intertidal habitats in the East Asia region, especially for migratory shorebirds, and that COP10 provides an opportunity to: (a) understand the issues facing these habitats; (b) discuss opportunities and plans to conserve these habitats; and (c) share experience in intertidal wetland conservation and management.
- There is a need to undertake a global assessment of freshwater ecosystems as has been done for marine ecosystems, to inform policy and planning processes at the national level, as well as for the development of appropriate legal and regulatory mechanisms for the protection and management of these systems.

Financing for Wetland Conservation

Key messages:

1. The Ramsar Convention should develop a fundraising strategy, taking into account the need to have a sustainable long-term financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention, and the need to put wetland issues firmly on the global agenda so as to be able to tap available and potential funding sources.

2. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is a good mechanism to secure funding for wetland conservation and wise use; this area of work is under-developed in the Asia region and more effort should be directed under the Convention to advance this issue. The Parties would like to request that STRP work on providing detailed guidance on PES.
3. The Asia region should work towards a proposal for a financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention in the region to be presented to COP10; this should be linked to a good communications strategy to reach out to potential funders at the international, regional and national levels.

General recommendations:

- The Ramsar Convention needs to get more serious about fundraising.
- Wetland issues need to be placed more firmly on the global agenda e.g. with regards climate change, so as to be able to tap into existing and potential funding sources.
- The largest potential source of funding is at national level; Ramsar Focal Points should engage proactively with the relevant agencies at the national level to raise their awareness about the ecosystem services of wetlands and seek financial support.
- Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is relatively under-developed in the Asia region; more effort needs to be directed in this area so that wetland conservation and wise use efforts can benefit from additional financial and political support, especially at the national level.