

**KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
4th OCEANIA REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR COP10
10 – 11 APRIL 2008
Apia, Samoa**

The 4th Oceania Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10 (ORM-4) was attended by a total of 24 participants, according to the following breakdown:

- 13 participants representing the 7 member countries in the Oceania region;
- One participant representing a non-party Pacific Island country nearing accession to the convention, Kiribati.
- 10 participants representing international organisations, academic institutions and regional organisations and Ramsar international partner organisations.

The meeting discussed issues and challenges (administrative, technical and scientific) in implementing the Ramsar Convention at the regional and national levels, as well as priorities and assistance needed to enhance the implementation of the Convention in the region over the next three years.

Key messages from the meeting

1. The relationship between human health and wetlands is a critical issue for the region. Communities rely heavily on healthy wetlands as a key contributor to cultural, spiritual, and physical well being. Wetlands are a key mechanism for maintaining healthy ecosystems, which produce and support many of the services essential to human health. A healthy wetland means a healthy community.
2. Climate Change is a key issue for the region's wetlands, particularly given their vulnerability to its impacts. A strong stance by the Convention on climate change is welcomed in order to convey a powerful message on the seriousness of its impacts.
3. The connection between freshwater, estuarine and marine systems in the Pacific is very close. Pressure on high island rivers quickly leads to pressure on their estuaries and coral reefs. The connection between Pacific atoll freshwater lenses and their estuarine and marine areas is even closer. Maintaining healthy connectivity is critical in supporting the livelihoods of Pacific island communities.
4. In some high islands of the region, the most vulnerable wetlands are in the coastal and marine zones, particularly mangroves and coral reefs that are under constant pressure from development. Highlighting the connectivity of these critical wetlands would ensure that the consequences of development are well understood.
5. Coral reefs are a very high priority throughout the region, particularly as 2008 is the International Year of the Coral Reef. The Oceania region contains 25% of the world's coral reefs, and they are an important source of livelihoods for the peoples of the region.

6. Extractive industries have major implications for wetlands in the Oceania region, especially island ecosystems that are fragile and particularly vulnerable to damage. In particular, coral mining/extraction is of great concern to the region. It has been difficult for national governments and conservation efforts to compete with these industries.
7. Integrated catchment management and other integrated planning processes are important for the conservation and management of the region's wetlands, particularly for mangroves and coral reefs, the region's critical wetland ecosystems.
8. Strengthening the application of cultural knowledge and traditional conservation methods is needed to revive the way in which wetland sites are managed in the region. The traditional knowledge and practices of the Oceania region have enabled our peoples to sustain our livelihoods in balance with the natural environment for millennia, we need to nurture and restore these aspects of our heritage as they are under threat of being lost forever. This will foster self-reliance and the documentation and sharing of experiences.
9. Additional funding is needed to improve training for on-the-ground wetland conservation in the region. Currently, there are not enough people working on the practical implementation of wetland conservation in the region to ensure the value that wetlands provide to the region is maintained for future generations. The Convention should focus greater attention on developing a financial mechanism to support the implementation of its work in the Oceania region.
10. Coordination is a key issue for the Ramsar Secretariat and other organisations. There needs to be better coordination in exchanging and harmonizing data to enable more effective work on the ground.
11. Wetland inventory is important for decision making and planning at the national level. However, there continues to be a lack of wetland inventory to enable the formulation of government policies and interventions aimed at the conservation of wetlands.
12. Establishing a more active network to share information, experiences, challenges, solutions, new ideas and knowledge between Oceania Ramsar parties is needed. Such information would enhance the region's ability to nominate Ramsar sites in the future, and would engender more frequent communication and interaction between parties in the region.
13. There is a need to facilitate the engagement of Ramsar activities and principles for all countries in the Oceania region and stronger engagement of Oceania Ramsar parties to promote the appreciation and critical importance of wetlands, rather than focusing on the addition of Ramsar sites.