

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

30th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 13-16 January 2004

DOC. SC30-2

Agenda item 4

Report of the Secretary General

Actions requested: The Standing Committee is requested to review the report of the Secretary General on the progress of the Convention since the 29th meeting of the Committee, and to advise the Secretariat as appropriate.

Introductory remarks

1. Since taking office on August 1, my priority has been to examine the basic operations of the Secretariat, including the budget allocation and expenditures. Clearly much work was already in the pipeline, and I have simply watched the processes unfold, while trying to restrain the number of missions paid for from Core funds. As for this present Standing Committee meeting, I have simply allowed previous processes to be followed in terms of the arrangements and preparation of papers, etc.
2. The process of securing COP9 agreements with Uganda have been also a priority, with the MoU being signed in late October. Discussions on COP9 will be held in the framework of the COP9 Subgroup, preceding Standing Committee.
3. I should like, however, to spend some time with Standing Committee examining the future directions for the Secretariat, in the lead-up to COP9, as well as more generally. We also need to spend some time discussing the shape and focus of the COP meeting itself – I am formulating some ideas on this, as is the working group chaired by the USA.
4. Since the last Standing Committee we have recruited a new Regional Advisor for Africa, Mr Abou Bamba, and the Government of Andorra has generously seconded Dr Sebastià Semene to a position of special assistant for Media, Outreach and Culture, to start January 1 2004. I have instituted some renaming of functions, in particular changing the old term “Bureau” to the more modern and comparable Secretariat, as used in other MEAs. Other changes include renaming Regional Coordinators “Advisers”, to reflect more accurately their role and function vis-à-vis Contracting Parties.
5. The rest of this report is divided into sections corresponding to areas of activity in the Secretariat.

Global scientific, technical and policy activities

6. This section highlights some key areas of the Secretariat’s 2003 work and achievements.
7. During the first part of the year, a significant amount of time was taken up with finalizing the outputs and outcomes of COP8, and then preparing for the 29th meeting of the

Standing Committee in February 2003 and the 11th meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in April 2003. For the STRP this included making rapid contact with, and logistical arrangements for, the Chair, Vice-Chair and members of the Panel appointed by the Standing Committee, and preparation of the prioritized STRP task list developed from the priorities for the Panel's work directed by the Standing Committee, as well as the rapid establishment prior to STRP11 of the STRP Support Service, which is provided for the Convention by Wetlands International under contract from the Secretariat. Reports on STRP progress since its 11th meeting, and on the STRP Support Service, are provided as separate papers (DOCs SC30-4 and SC30-5).

8. During this year Wetlands International has been undertaking a major redevelopment, with guidance and input on the redesign from Secretariat technical staff, of the Ramsar Sites Database which it manages for the Convention under contract from the Secretariat. The redesign and upgrading to modern database software will not only improve data entry and handling capabilities, including permitting its better linkage with other related data sources as called for by COP8, but importantly it will lead to the database being accessible to all for Web-based querying by the end of the year. A report from Wetlands International on their delivery of this important work for the Convention is provided as part of this report. In November 2003, database team members Ellen Diémé and Karin Schneider visited the Secretariat to work with our Regional Advisory Teams on improving collaboration on handling Ramsar site information. The Secretariat was saddened to learn of the death in October 2003 of Ramsar Sites Database staff member Dineke Beintema, who has made valuable contributions to the Ramsar sites work over the past few years.
9. The Convention has recognized that earth observation (remote sensing) may make a valuable contribution to supporting wetlands inventory, assessment, monitoring and management activities, and February 2003 saw the successful completion of the European Space Agency's TESEO wetlands project in support of the Convention, which developed pilot remote sensing products for wetland managers. With input from the Deputy Secretary General, in November 2003 the ESA launched a EUR 1 million follow-up project ("GlobWetland") which over the next two years will be working with wetland managers and decision-makers to provide remotely-sensed information products to support wetland and catchment management for 50 Ramsar sites, chiefly in Europe and Africa. Collaboration between the Convention and the Japanese Space Agency is also under development for provision of complementary earth observation products. This issue will be carefully monitored to ensure that really useful on-ground results can be delivered for Contracting Parties and does not simply become an exercise in technical excellence.
10. Further successful development of cooperation between Ramsar and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), in order to enhance synergies on issues of common ground to support streamlined national implementation by our respective Parties, has been a major feature of 2003. The Ramsar/Convention on Migratory Species/African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement Joint Work Plan 2003-2006, a draft of which was endorsed by COP8, has now been finalized. Working with the AEWA Secretariat and Wetlands International, the Secretariat has contributed to the preparation of a UNEP-GEF African-Eurasian Waterbird Flyways project, which will focus on capacity-building through Ramsar site management and regional training networks. The project was approved by the GEF Council in November 2003.

11. The Secretariat participated in UNCCD's COP6 in Cuba (August/September), UNFCCC's SBSTA18 (June) and its COP9 (December). Significant progress in the implementation of the 3rd CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan has been made during 2003, and this is further reported in DOC. SC30-15.
12. Concerning protected areas, the Secretary General participated in IUCN's World Parks Congress in September, leading its "Linkages in the Landscapes" stream and making presentations on Ramsar-related issues in several other elements of the process. Results from this congress will be released over the next six months and should help influence the direction of the Wetlands of International Importance component of the Convention.
13. The Secretariat attended, as an invited observer, the GEF Council meeting in November, at which a significant proportion of projects being considered for approval concerned wetlands and/or river basin management.
14. In implementation of the Secretariat's Memorandum of Cooperation with the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA), the Deputy Secretary General sits on the Steering Committee of a Netherlands government-funded project on "Incorporating biodiversity issues in impact assessment", presently being implemented by IAIA in support of CBD and Ramsar national-level implementation, and contributed to Steering Committee meetings (Marrakesh, June) and Den Haag (October), also chairing a plenary session of IAIA's annual conference, in Marrakesh.
15. The Secretariat finalized and issued to all Contracting Parties the COP9 National Planning Tool and National Report Format, as approved by the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee, and requested Parties to complete and return to the Bureau the National Planning Tool component by August 2003. To date, very few Parties have done so. Prior to his departure in December 2003, Secretariat technical officer Carlos Villalba (on secondment from the Government of Spain) completed development of the COP9 National Reports database, designed to facilitate the Secretariat's handling and analysis of Convention implementation from National Reports for reporting to COP9. This is a serious issue which needs discussion and guidance from the Standing Committee.

The Africa Region

16. The key general item to be reported concerns the fact that the very successful Regional Coordinator for Africa, Mr Anada Tiéga, left the Secretariat team in August 2003, and his successor as Senior Advisor for Africa (in the new terminology) is Mr Abou Bamba of Côte d'Ivoire, joining the Secretariat in early December. Mr Bamba is coming to Ramsar from the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) where he has been since 1998, first as Program Officer and Acting Coordinator, since 2001 as Coordinator.

General Objective 1: Wise use of wetlands

17. The Secretariat has been working with African Contracting Parties and other interested organizations to develop projects and other activities that promote and demonstrate good practice in water allocation and management for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands.

18. In March, the Regional Coordinator and a representative of WWF participated in the validation of the results of a wetland inventory, including the selection of new Ramsar sites, following inventory work supported by WWF's Living Waters Programme.
19. In June, he visited Mali in order to assist authorities there in the preparation of their national wetland policy and to participate in the inception workshop of Wetlands International's new Programme in West Africa.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of International Importance

20. Since COP8, 19 new Ramsar Sites have been designated and a further 38 Ramsar Information Sheets have been received by the Bureau and are under review for completion of their Listing.

General Objective 3: International cooperation

21. Throughout 2003, the Secretariat, working with the WWF Living Waters Programme, has been very closely involved in the progress of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger Basin Authority in advancing towards the designation of additional Ramsar sites to complete the networks and towards joint wetland management plans for these important basins. A GEF project for the coordinated management of the Lake Chad Basin Ramsar sites has been inaugurated, and Regional Coordinator for Africa, Anada Tiéga, has left the Ramsar Secretariat to become the project manager.
22. As part of the continuing close cooperation between the Secretariat and both the LCBC and the NBA, memoranda of understanding to facilitate future coordination were signed with both of those organizations at Ramsar COP9. Discussions are in progress, also including WWF, concerning similar basin-level cooperation for the Lake Malawi basin and possibly the Nile River Initiative, and less formally so far with other basin authorities.
23. In the framework of NEPAD, there has been an agreement among African Ministers to develop Africa-wide environmental action plans for selected thematic areas, including wetlands. This provides a major opportunity for assisting Parties in their delivery of commitments to the Convention, and supporting its NEPAD development and implementation will be a major priority during 2003. A significant area of work for the Africa Team has involved working with countries, donors and partner organizations to progress the implementation of the NEPAD wetlands action plan, as well as those concerning transboundary cooperation and invasive species.
24. In April, the Regional Coordinator participated in the inception workshop of the Wetlands International Programme in West Africa, which addressed the new Programme on Integrating Research and Wise Use in four "Wetland Ecoregions" of West Africa: Western Sahelian wetlands and floodplains, West African mangroves and rice-growing zone, West African Seaboard from Mauritania to Guinea, and Coastal wetlands of the Gulf of Guinea.
25. In July, the Regional Coordinator assisted the Secretariat of the UNCCD, at a workshop in Benin, to prepare African countries for the UNCCD's COP6 held in Havana, Cuba, from August-September 2003.

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

26. In 2003 and the recent past, the Secretariat has organized or contributed to wetland wise use training workshops and seminars, at the regional level, held in Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia, and at the national level, in Angola, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania. In addition, a number of other such workshops have been funded through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund and the Swiss Grant for Africa.
27. In November 2003, the government of Benin, the Ramsar Secretariat, and the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) jointly organized in Cotonou the first meeting of West and Central African Members of Parliament about wetlands. The objective of the meeting was to brief the deputies of West and Central Africa and draw attention from decision makers and the public to a number of key issues involving the ecological and socio-economic aspects of wetland sustainable use and what parliamentarians can do to help. The meeting, with financial assistance from Sweden, Belgium, and Norway, gathered representatives of the environment/development commissions from the National Assemblies of 17 countries, as well as the executive secretaries of river basin authorities covering the Gambia, the Senegal, the Niger, and Lake Chad Basin.

General Objective 5: Membership

28. As of November 2003 there are 38 Contracting Parties in Africa: Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.
29. Fifteen African countries have yet to join the Convention: Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sao Tome, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Zimbabwe.
30. The Secretariat has been working effectively with the International Organization Partners, the Contracting Parties, and other players to facilitate the accession of additional countries to the Ramsar Convention. As a result, Benin, Burundi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the United Republic of Tanzania joined the Convention during the last triennium. Since COP8, three countries have acceded to the Convention: Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea and Liberia.
31. Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, and Sudan are taking steps for accession. The Bureau understands that Mozambique has completed its accession papers, and that in October 2003 Lesotho held a pre-accession workshop.

The Americas Region

32. This report covers progress from November 2002 to November 2003.

General Objective 1. The wise use of wetlands

33. The Secretariat supported the implementation of the wise use concept by providing advice and technical assistance in the drafting of wetland policies and strategies and establishment of national wetland committees.
34. Brazil has established its national wetland committee under a decree by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The Committee held its first meeting on 24 October 2003 with the participation of Ramsar's Secretary General, Peter Bridgewater.
35. Guatemala is in the process of implementing the first phase of a project for the drafting of a National Wetlands Policy. The second phase of this project was presented as an SGF proposal for approval at the Standing Committee in January 2004. Bahamas also submitted a project for advancing in the development of a National Wetlands Policy.
36. The Regional team participated actively in multiple events to promote and provide training and information on Ramsar's role in the application of the wise use concept, including:

Argentina: International Seminar on Wetland Sustainable Management in Latin America took place in Paraná, September 2003

Chile: Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of High-Andean Wetlands International Workshop, Iquique, December 2002.

Chile: Western Hemisphere Migratory Birds Conference and the Neotropical Ornithological Congress, Termas de Puyehue, October 2003

Colombia: International Urban Wetlands Forum, Bogotá, May 2003

Cuba: UNCCD 6th COP, Havana, August–September 2003

France: Interagency Consultative Meeting on the Global Marine Assessment, September 2003

Nicaragua: ITTO/UNFF mangrove strategy meeting Managua, March 2003

Panama: Wetlands and Sustainable Development workshop in Panama and the Panama Center Board meeting, May 2003

Peru: Iberoamerican River Basin Congress, June 2003

Switzerland: International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI): Coordinating and Planning Committee (CPC) meeting hosted by Ramsar and IUCN, May 2003, Gland.

United States of America: Open-ended informal consultative process on oceans and the law of the sea, New York, June 2003.

General Objective 2. Wetlands of International Importance

37. Since November 2002, 23 new sites have been designated in the Americas, with a total surface area of 1.5 million hectares, and at present 3 new ones are in process of being designated.
 - Argentina (1), Brazil (1), Costa Rica (1), Cuba (5), Ecuador (1), Honduras (1), Mexico (10), Panama (1) and Peru (2).
 In process:
 - Chile (1) and Paraguay (2).

38. In this period, six management plans for Ramsar sites were received: Ecuador - Cayapas-Mataje & Isla Santay; Colombia – La Cocha & Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta; and Nicaragua – Los Guatuzos & Refugio de Vida Silvestre San Juan.
39. **Article 3.2.** Regarding threats to Ramsar sites, problems have been reported for Lago de Peixe in Brazil; Gandoca-Manzanillo and Isla del Coco in Costa Rica; Paracas and Junín in Peru; Fonseca Gulf in Honduras; Laguna del Tigre in Guatemala; and Lagos Poopó y Uru Uru in Bolivia. As is the general practice, the Secretariat sent copies of the reports to the Administrative Authorities in each country with a request that they investigate the situations and take action as appropriate, and notify the Secretariat of the results.

General Objective 3. International cooperation

40. The Government of Panama and the Ramsar Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding for establishing the Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere during the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee in February 2003. The first meeting of the Board took place in Panama City on 27 May 2003, where the Terms of Reference for the Director of the Center and a timetable for recruitment were agreed upon. The job was advertised in June, and in July the short list was prepared. In the week of 15 September the interviews were conducted in Panama City by the Director General of the Panamanian Environment Authority and a representative of the Smithsonian Institution. The final stages of recruitment are in the hands of the Panamanian Government.
41. Representatives from 25 countries in the Western Hemisphere, 40 international organizations, and wildlife conservation stakeholders met in Chile in October to develop strategies for cooperation for conservation of migratory species and collaboration on wildlife conservation issues among the countries of the Western Hemisphere. An interim steering committee was established including the following representatives: Herb Raffaele, USA – Coordinator; Maria Rivera, Colombia; Jorge Luis Cravino, Uruguay; Donald Anthony, Saint Lucia; Jose Calvo, Costa Rica; Rob Clay, Guyra Paraguay/Birdlife International; Carlos Dreus, World Wildlife Fund; Melanie Steinkamp, Wetlands International; David Pashley, American Bird Conservancy; Lyle Glowka, CMS; Margarita Astrálaga, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; and Marco Solano, Sea Turtle Convention.
42. The interim committee will produce and disseminate baseline reports on priorities and tools identified at the Conference by country representatives and develop a mechanism to establish a permanent body to address Western Hemispheric priority issues in the conservation of migratory species.
43. After the 'Managua Meeting of Government-Designated Experts on the Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technologies for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Mangrove Ecosystems in Latin America and the Caribbean' in March of this year, a regional strategy for sustainable management of mangroves was adopted by Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama. With the assistance and cooperation between UNFF, the World Bank, the Ramsar Convention, ITTO, FAO, Organization of American States (OAS), Central American Commission for Maritime Transportation (COCATRAM), the Endowment Fund for the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northeast Pacific, WWF and the Smithsonian Tropical

Research Institute (STRI), a project proposal will be submitted for consideration to the UN Foundation to seek funding for the implementation of the strategy.

44. Several ad-hoc meetings have taken place regarding the implementation of Resolution VIII.39 “High Andean wetlands as strategic ecosystems”, which requests the Ramsar Secretariat, with the support of the Standing Committee, to propose a joint strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of High Andean ecosystems for the next COP. NGOs in the region have managed to secure funding to undertake several activities in support of the conservation of high-Andean wetlands. The first regional meeting including Administrative Authorities and NGOs is being planned for the beginning of 2004 in Quito, hosted by IUCN, an active stakeholder in this process.
45. The White Water to Blue Water Initiative (WW2BW) is a platform/process meant to generate the greatest number of partnerships in the integrated watershed management in the Caribbean region, including lower United States, Bahamas, Virgin Islands, the coastal regions of the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico. The initiative recognizes the overlapping natures of sustainable tourism, marine transportation, marine ecosystem-based management and integrated watershed management, and promotes new approaches of integrated management. The Partnership Conference will take place in Miami, 21-26 March 2004, to discuss how to improve collaboration between governments, IOs, NGOs, and the private sector and enhance existing partnerships and promoting new partnerships. The Ramsar Secretariat is a member of the Steering Committee owing to its important role in marine and coastal wetlands in the Wider Caribbean and will continue to promote the initiative actively in 2004.

General Objective 4. Implementation capacity:

46. Ramsar efforts towards capacity building in the Americas are mainly carried out through training and technical assistance provided by the Americas Regional team, through written advice, training and visits, as well as through direct financial support provided to Parties, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the region to undertake training activities, public awareness campaigns, participatory management projects, etc. within the framework of the two existing funding programs, the Small Grants Fund (SGF) and the Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF).

Small Grants Fund

Approved Projects SGF 2003 (4 of 22): Chile, Costa Rica (Emergency), Mexico and Uruguay
 Completed projects in 2003 (5): Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Jamaica and Venezuela

Wetlands for the Future

Approved Projects WFF January 2003 (16 of 21): Argentina (7), Chile (1), El Salvador (1), Mexico (3), Paraguay (1), Peru (1) and two workshops
 Approved Projects WFF September 2003 (7 of 16): Argentina (1), Colombia (2), Ecuador (1), Uruguay (1), Venezuela (1), and 1 Regional
 Completed projects in 2003 (36): Argentina (3), Bolivia (3), Brazil (4), Chile (2), Colombia (5), Costa Rica (2), Ecuador (1), Guatemala (4), Mexico (3), Paraguay (3), Peru (3), St. Lucia (1), Venezuela (1), and Caribbean Region (1).

General Objective 5. Membership

47. Discussions took place with officials of Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Haiti, and Guyana regarding their accession to the Convention, and the Secretariat has been informed by UNESCO that Antigua & Barbuda has completed the process of accession to the Convention but must provide information on its Ramsar site designation to complete the process. As soon as this is completed, the region will be able to add the Bahamas as the new additional regional representative in the Standing Committee as decided at COP8.

Ramsar in the Asia/Pacific

48. This report covers two of Ramsar's administrative regions, Asia and Oceania, for the period March 2003 to November 2003

General observations

49. There is a strong desire for strengthening regional cooperation, which has been shown both at the Himalayan High mountain wetland conservation and wise use workshop (August –September 2003) and in the Southeast Asian Mangrove Conservation workshop in Brunei (October).
50. There is also a strong commitment for the designation of new Ramsar sites. Up to now, 11 RS (Iran, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Uzbekistan) have been declared in 2003, 17 are in the pipeline (India and Mongolia), and a further 62 sites have been committed by China (52) and India (10). A substantial number of mangrove RS designations are expected before COP9 (Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam).
51. The identification of National Targets (according to the National Report Format for COP9) has so far been a failure: only one (Republic of Korea) out of the 29 CPs has so far submitted its COP9 National Planning Tool with national targets and planned actions
52. There are 29 countries (50% of the Asia/Pacific region) remaining outside the Ramsar Convention. Fiji and Marshall Islands are expected to join in near future.

General Objective 1: The wise use of wetlands

53. *Mountain wetlands.* WWF International, the Ramsar Secretariat, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) jointly organized a workshop on "Wetland Conservation and Wise Use in the Himalayan High Mountains" from 30 August to 1 September 2003 in Kathmandu. Attended by 34 participants from 11 countries comprising government representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, and Kyrgyzstan and representatives of national and international agencies, the workshop agreed specific targets for the initiative, on numbers of Ramsar sites to be designated before COP9, on forming a network of Ramsar sites, on creation of a resource center, and on joint efforts for project proposals.
54. *Mangroves.* "The International Symposium on Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves in Southeast Asia", jointly organized by the Forestry Department of Brunei Darussalam, University Brunei Darussalam and the Ramsar Center Japan, was held in October 2003 in

Bander Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam. It was attended by more than 80 participants and experts from Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China (including Taiwan), Indonesia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. An Asia Mangrove network initiative will be further explored by the participating countries, with the facilitation of Ramsar Center Japan.

55. The Senior Advisor also participated in the Dushanbe Water Forum (including a symposium on Pamir: Source of Life) organized by Tajikistan and attended by all Central Asia countries.
56. *National Wetlands Policy*. Vietnam and Iran launched their wetland policies. Thailand organized a workshop on Ramsar Convention implementation in November 2003 in Bangkok, in which participated five government departments, local NGOs and representative from the pilot areas, as well as the Senior Advisor from the Ramsar Secretariat.
57. *Inventory and Monitory*: China has set up a national wetland monitory network.
58. Concerning Iraq, the Secretariat has provided advice to UNEP and others concerning proposals to undertake major work to restore the Mesopotamian Marshes.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of international importance

59. Eleven new Ramsar sites have been designated in the region since COP8: 1 in Iran, 3 in Malaysia, 3 in Nepal, 3 in Pakistan, and 1 in Uzbekistan, covering together close to 1,112,689 hectares. In addition, 17 new Ramsar sites will be added to the List before the end of 2003, including 12 in India, and five in Mongolia. Some 14 new high mountain wetland Ramsar sites are currently in preparation, including 12 in China and two in Kyrgyz Republic.
60. In the Kathmandu workshop, China and India committed to designate a further 52 and 10 high mountain RS, respectively, before the end of 2010. In the Brunei Mangrove workshop, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam representatives reported that up to 10 mangrove sites are under preparation for designation.

Problems at Ramsar Sites (Article 3.2):

61. The Bureau has contacted the relevant Administrative Authorities concerning reports of threats and damage to the following designated Ramsar sites: **Upo wetlands, South Korea**; Dyke construction along the Ramsar site, a heavy flood destroys the crops around the wetlands and the dykes as well. **Coast erosion at Tanjung Piai, Malaysia**; this site was visited by the Regional Advisor, and advice was provided during a mission to Malaysia in July 2003.
62. Further problems were reported at the following wetland sites of major importance particularly for migratory waterbirds, but which have not been included in the Ramsar List: Republic of Korea (**Semangeum** tidal flats), Thailand (highway construction plan over the inner gulf of Thailand, which will affect the shore birds, as well as one Ramsar site).

63. In October 2003 the Bureau received an Article 3.2 report from the government of Australia concerning destruction to the ecological character of part of the **Gwydir** Wetlands Ramsar site, advising that legal action has been initiated to seek to resolve the problem. In Australia, the Secretariat has also been advised of potential threats to the ecological character of the **Moreton Bay** Ramsar site relating to proposed airport expansion, although there is no authentication of this report.

General Objective 3: International cooperation

64. The Asia-Pacific Migratory Water Bird Conservation Committee (MWCC) meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in July 2003. Government representatives from Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkmenistan, and representatives from UNEP/GEF, Wetlands International, Ramsar Convention, Convention on Migratory Species, and International Crane Foundation participated in the meeting. As the main donors of this regional cooperation, the Governments of Australia and Japan take it in turn to serve as the chair and vice-chair of the committee.
65. MedWet/Com5: the fifth meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, including 26 states and a number of international and wetland organizations, took place in Izmir, Turkey in June 2003.
66. Himalaya Initiative development, see General Objective 1, above.

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

67. WWF Hong Kong provides training programmes in Mai Po (Ramsar Site). Every year, 17 groups (each of around 10 participants) of wetland reserve managers from East Asia (mainly China) received the one-week training on the management of wetland reserves. The government of Iran Republic is working on establishment of a Ramsar training center in the town of Ramsar. The government of Indonesia is exploring setting up a wetland training center for Asia. ICIMOD is volunteering to serve as the resource center for high mountain wetlands in Himalayan region.
68. For the Oceania Region, support to Pacific Island States in preparing for accession and implementation of the Convention has been provided, with funding from the government of Australia and WWF-International. A 2003 project funded by Wetlands International-DGIS in Fiji is being delivered through the Ramsar Secretariat by the Government of Fiji working with three of the Convention's International Organization Partners (BirdLife, WWF, and Wetlands International) and covers wetland inventory, Ramsar site designation, review of legislative and institutional frameworks, and accession preparations.
69. The Secretariat is exploring with WWF-International, SPREP, and governments in the region ways and means of establishing a Convention-support role for Oceania in the form of a regionally-based Pacific Island States support officer to assist with accessions and implementation of the Convention, as called for in Resolution VIII.42.

General Objective 5: Membership

70. There are still 29 countries in the region that have not yet acceded to the Convention. For Oceania, the Secretariat anticipates that Fiji and the Marshall Islands will have completed their accession procedures by the end of 2003, and other Pacific Island States, including Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, are preparing for accession. Communications with Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore and Turkmenistan have been made concerning accession. In June 2003, a pre-accession workshop organized by IUCN was held in Lao PDR.
71. *Small Grant Fund Proposals*: 14 proposals (12 from Asia and two from Oceania) were received for the 2003 cycle, from: Bangladesh (2); India (1); Indonesia (1); Israel (1); Lao PDR (1); Kyrgyz Republic (1); Sri Lanka (1); Thailand (4); Marshall Island (1) & Tonga (1). Most of the proposals are of high quality and in need of urgent support.

Outlook for 2004 and preparations for COP9

72. *Regional cooperation*:
- Himalayan initiative: a) further define the role and development of a resource center for coordination of the initiative, and proposal preparation for fundraising will be the milestone; a workshop is preliminarily schedule in Feb. 2004; b) Wetland Ambassador Campaign (CEPA), from the summit to the sea along the Mekong River, will be carried out; c) Evian Encounter, a gathering of senior officials from 10 countries in the Himalaya region, has been scheduled for October 2004.
 - Mangrove Conservation Network: the Secretariat will work with CP's and Ramsar Center Japan to explore the initiation of this major task.
 - There is a need to work on the proposal for a Ramsar Center in Iran. Existing centres, including the UNESCO-IHE centre in Delft, the Netherlands, should be involved in the development of this idea.

Ramsar in Europe

73. This report covers the period March 2003 to November 2003.

General observations

- A significant point is the high number of new Ramsar Site designations, triggered by the meeting of the COP and continuing since then.
- The identification of National Targets (according to the National Report Format for COP9) has so far been a complete failure: none of the 44 CPs submitted anything (except the UK, submitting targets according to the outdated pre-COP8 format, and a few others that had submitted tentative National Targets already before COP8).
- In a nutshell: a year without outstanding Ramsar events in Europe. This provided more opportunities to work with others and bring Ramsar issues to their agendas.

General Objective 1: The wise use of wetlands

74. *Wetlands and water management* (Res.VIII.1, VIII.40): this became increasingly an issue, addressed by a French conference in Lille (organized by two of the six French Basin

Agencies), through two international training courses on Integrated Water Resources Management organized by the Centre for Hydrogeology of Neuchâtel University and the World Bank Institute, and by the Ecological Expert Group of the Danube Commission (within the context of the EU Water Framework Directive).

75. *Wetlands and agriculture, socio-economics, culture, and national policies* (Res.VIII.19, VIII.34): themes that were directly (or with a less direct link to wetlands) addressed by the ministerial conference “Environment for Europe” in Kyiv (Ukraine) under the auspices of UN-ECE, as well as by the first regional session of the Global Biodiversity Forum for central European and NIS countries in Chisinau (Republic of Moldova). Publication of the proceedings of one of the workshops of the 17th GBF prior to Ramsar COP8 “Wetlands and Agriculture” by the Indian National Institute of Ecology (with a global scope, including many case studies, European editors).
76. *Global action on peatlands* (Res.VIII.17): establishment and initial meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Global Action for Peatlands (Wageningen, NL, 5-6 November 2003) and start of the work to prepare an Implementation Plan, progress of which will be reported to COP9. Particular activities in France through one of the six thematic relay units focusing on peatlands.
77. *Wetlands and climate change and coastal zone management* (Res.VIII.3, VIII.4): a specific EU-funded research project (FRAGILE) addresses ecological changes in Arctic tundra habitats (including many wetlands) due to climate change and their effects on migratory waterbirds. The Ramsar Site network of Mediterranean deltas “Delta chiama Delta” organized a seminar in Italy on climate change and its impacts on coastal wetlands.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of international importance

78. *Venice lagoon*: the Venice Province is making considerable efforts to declare the entire lagoon (or most of it) as a WII; a public seminar to this end took place in May, and a meeting between the Province, Region and Environment Ministry is scheduled for the near future.
79. *Albania*: declared its second WII “Butrint”, a lake and coastal wetlands covering a World Heritage site and National Park with outstanding archeological values throughout the ages, *i.a.* the remains of the Greek and Roman cities of Buthrotum.
80. *Thirteen new WII* were declared since COP8: 1 in Albania (cf. above), 4 in Spain, 4 in France (Ramsar Bureau outing to one of them in June), 1 in Germany, 1 in Estonia, 1 in Austria and 1 in the Republic of Moldova, covering together close to 128,000 hectares.
81. *Furthermore, 18 new RS declarations are currently being processed by the Secretariat*: 3 in Latvia, 3 in Belgium (including a transborder site with Luxemburg), 2 in the UK (1 in the Cyprus sovereign base area), 5 in Poland, 1 in Spain, and 4 in Italy, covering together some 190,000 hectares.
82. *Waddensee*: the 25th anniversary of the trilateral management agreement was celebrated with a keynote speech from myself as part of the ministerial ceremony.

83. *Montreux Record*: three Ukrainian coastal RS were removed from the MR thanks to the improvement of the inflowing water quality (from the terrestrial hinterland) and better management provisions. Twenty-five European RS remain on the MR without much news received during 2003 about improving situations.
84. *Ramsar Advisory Missions*: the possible Ukrainian plans to transform the Bystroye arm of the Danube delta rivers, right in the core zone of the Kyliiske RS (and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve), were the subject of a joint mission between Ramsar and MAB-UNESCO in October 2003. Another joint mission, together with an *ex post* project evaluation of the FFEM, looked at the Bulgarian RS Durankulak (on the MR) and Shabla lakes in November 2003, though it is not certain yet whether this mission should be presented as a formal RAM. Furthermore, a second visit to Doñana RS in Spain (after the first in October 2002) is foreseen for early 2004.
85. *Problems at Ramsar Sites (Article 3.2)*: Unfortunately, the pressure on European RS is augmenting rather than decreasing. In addition to the Ukrainian Danube Delta and lake Durankulak in Bulgaria (cf. above), the Secretariat received information about possible problems of ecological change at the following sites: Bosnia & Herzegovina (Hutovo Blato), Croatia (Neretva Delta), Cyprus (Larnaca salt lake), Czech Republic (Vltava meadows in Sumava RS), France (Camargue, Petite Camargue), Georgia (Kolkheti wetlands boundary restrictions, Ispani II marshes), Germany (Ostfriesisches Wattenmeer und Dollart), Greece (lakes Koronia and Volvi), Norway (Nordre Oyeren), Poland (Biebrza NP), Russian Federation (Kurgalsky peninsula), Spain (Ebro Delta), Turkey (Gediz delta), and UK (SW London waterbodies).
86. Further problems were reported at the following wetland sites, not yet included in the Ramsar list: Croatia (Donji Miholjac fishponds), Iceland (Karahnjúkar dam), Portugal (Salinas de Alverca).

General Objective 3: International cooperation

87. *MedWet/Com5*: the fifth meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, including 26 member states and a number of international and wetland organizations, took place in Izmir, Turkey in June 2003.
88. *Ramsar seminar for NIS countries*: a seminar discussed current Ramsar and wetland topics at Sevan lake in Armenia with focal points from 11 countries plus several organizations.
89. *ICPDR*: the Ecological Expert Group of the Danube Commission had two meetings in Budapest and Laufen (DE) to continue its work on wetlands, protected areas, and integrated water and river basin management in the Danube region.
90. *Tizsa river*: a meeting on protected areas and water and river basin management in the upper Tizsa region, with participation of five range states, took place in Budapest (late November 2003) with support from FAO and WI.
91. *LDGC*: a meeting on project development for protected areas under the Lower Danube Green Corridor agreement (of which the Ramsar Secretariat is a depository) took place (late November 2003) with participation of the four countries concerned (no Ramsar participation because of budgetary restrictions).

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

92. Latvia proposed an efficient way of help to improve the implementation capacity by inviting Ramsar's regional advisor to discuss current issues with ministerial focal points and on the ground with the managers of different Ramsar Sites.
93. *The Wetland Advisory and Training Centre* of RIZA in Lelystad delivered its 10th and last wetland management training course, following a government decision to review the context and form of these courses. The Ramsar Secretary General chairs the board of these courses and Ramsar staff members normally assist at opening and graduation sessions.

General Objective 5: Membership

94. Andorra is actively preparing its accession to the Convention. No responses received so far from the Holy See and San Marino; no further major communications efforts are foreseen from our side.

Senior Advisor on Trade and Development

95. During 2003, the Senior Advisor on Trade and Development has been closely involved in the creation of the Conservation Finance Alliance, collaborating with the World Bank, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the Wildlife Conservation Society, and in the production and publication of its Conservation Finance Guide. He is presently serving as Chair of the Alliance and made a number of related presentations at the World Parks Congress in Durban in September, where the Conservation Finance Guide was launched. Future involvement in this activity will depend on its relevance to achieving the Convention's objectives.
96. The Senior Advisor has made a number of trips to consult with individual Contracting Parties concerning conservation financing issues. In January 2003 he advised the Peruvian Environmental Fund (Profonampe) on the use of its resources for wetlands and helped the NGO ProNaturaleza in developing the socio-economic potential of the Paracas Ramsar site. On a visit in February and in ongoing contacts, he has collaborated with UNDP and the Ramsar Administrative Authority in Comoros on the establishment of a GEF-supported environmental fund for the management of the island's protected areas, including its Ramsar sites. He has also been advising Brazil, including in a visit there in August, on the establishment of an environmental fund for the Pantanal.
97. He has also worked to develop and maintain close contacts with bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies to seek further support for wetland activities, most notably with JICA, GTZ, USAID, and DFID in Indonesia in March and with numerous agencies concerned with Sahel region, in Niger in June, as well as with the Multistakeholder Forum of the EU Water Initiative.
98. He has participated in a number of training sessions on conservation finance and sustainable trade, notably at the International Academy for the Environment in Vilm, Germany, in April, to train a group of 22 people from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Georgia, and at a symposium for 40 participants from eight Latin American countries

held in October at Cuba's Ciénaga de Zapata. He has also participated in a project led by the Tour du Valat and the Pôles Relais Lagunes Méditerranéennes concerning graduate student research studies aimed at promoting the sustainable trade in wetland products.

99. In addition, in June he participated in a CBD workshop on incentives, intended to prepare input on removing or mitigating perverse incentives for the work of the SBSTTA, and led a workshop on sustainable trade and rural livelihoods at the Global Biodiversity Forum preceding the World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún in September. He is also representing the Convention on the International River Basin Task Force of China and attended a workshop there on the management of the Yangtze River Basin in November.
100. Throughout the year, the Senior Advisor has also continued to assist in the development of regional organizations for the sustainable trade in wetland products, such as Bolsa Amazônia and Bolsa Nusantara, in collaboration with the UNCTAD Biotrade Initiative. Bolsa projects are in development so far in Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Central America, and Ecuador.

The Communications Unit

101. The preparation of the second edition of the Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands (or "Ramsar Toolkit"), embodying all of the new guidance adopted by Ramsar COP9 and the necessary updating of the earlier volumes, had been proceeding at a good pace. The work was delayed throughout the autumn, however, because of a hitch in final approval of the financial support pledged by the Government of Spain, but it appears that this problem will be resolved by the time the Standing Committee meets.
102. For World Wetlands Day 2004, the Secretariat has produced a new poster, "From the Mountains to the Sea – Wetlands at Work for Us"; a new leaflet, "Working for Wetlands"; and a new sticker, with financial assistance from the Danone Group/Evian Project, and made them available to the public beginning the first of November 2003. In addition, previous years' items, including posters, leaflets, a video, and screensavers, are once again being offered to the public to assist in their WWD celebrations. Following WWD 2003 last February, the Secretariat received and posted on the Ramsar Web site the organizers' reports of activities in about 60 countries, down from about 80 countries the preceding year, possibly because preparations and follow-up for COP8 in November 2002 severely impeded the Secretariat's promotion efforts.
103. The Ramsar Web site has published almost daily press releases about the work of the Convention and its partners throughout 2003, and by November 2003, an average of 2,742 users were visiting the site per day, viewing 12,800 Web pages per day and staying on the Web site for over 22 minutes per average visit. Many of these press materials have also been posted on the Ramsar Forum e-mail list, which is intended for the public, and official news has been posted to the Ramsar Exchanges in English, French, and Spanish for the Administrative Authorities. Many of the most significant news items on the Web site and Ramsar Forum have been picked up by environmental news services such as ENS, the IISD's Linkages, Mangrove Action Project news, Migratory Bird & Wetlands NewsLink, etc. The Ramsar Forum presently has about 700 members. I should like the Committee to consider the effectiveness and appropriateness of the current format of the Ramsar Forum.

104. In addition, news and support materials specifically concerning CEPA (communication, education, and public awareness) issues have regularly been posted on a CEPA mini-Web site within the Ramsar Web site and distributed over the Secretariat's CEPA e-mail lists for English, French, and Spanish readers. I intend to review the effectiveness of our CEPA efforts during early 2004, to ensure that our efforts are well targeted and our scarce resources effectively used. If Standing Committee agrees, I suggest we adopt the following themes for the next 2 WWD:

2005 – Cultural and biological diversity of wetlands

2006 – Wetlands as a tool in poverty reduction (following on from the CoP 9 theme).

MedWet Coordination Unit

Institutional development

105. Following the approval of Resolution VIII.30 on Regional Initiatives, MedWet was formally established as an outposted unit of the Ramsar Secretariat, employing five staff (four full time and one half-time), and supported by an external advisor.
106. On 11-12 March 2003, a MedWet Team meeting (MedWet Coordination Unit, the four MedWet wetland centres – TdV, EKBY, SEHUMED, CEZH) was held at the MedWet Coordination Unit building with the participation of observers from the WWF Mediterranean Office and IWMI to coordinate actions on programme development and implementation.
107. On 12-15 June 2003, the meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee was hosted by the Turkish Government and held in Izmir, Turkey, bringing together the representatives of the Mediterranean Contracting Parties, the four wetland centres, and the IOPs. The MedWet Strategic Plan, Workplan and CEPA strategy were approved among other documents (see www.medwet.org).
108. On 3 July 2003, the Secretary General of the Convention signed the Memorandum of Collaboration with the Minister of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works of Greece for hosting and funding the operation of the MedWet Coordination Unit during the triennium 2003-2005.

Programme development

109. The MedWet Coordination Unit, through the work of the MedWet Programme Development Officer and with support by the MedWet Coordinator, the MedWet Policy advisor and the MedWet Centres, managed the MedWet programme.
110. New projects were approved for funding and/or their implementation was launched:
- LIFE 3rd countries project for the protection of North African wetlands (*Maghreb wetlands* project), for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, with a total budget of €1.2 million, starting on January 2004.

- INTERREG-MEDOC (*MedWet/Regions* project) project for wetland inventory and management for 10 regions of Spain, Portugal, Italy, France and Morocco. Total budget €2,3 million, in progress.
 - INTERREG-SUDOE (*MedWet/Sudoe* project) for wetland inventory in Portugal and Spain. Total budget €700,000, in progress.
 - Local dialogue on agriculture, water and wetlands for North Africa and Middle East, funded by Inwent, Germany. Total budget €100,000, to be completed in January 2004.
111. A proposal was also submitted for the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture in North Africa and Middle East to the CGIAR programme, but was not approved due to shortage of funds. The proposal will be revised and re-submitted in the next call for proposals.
112. Finally, MedWet is currently planning a new database for the effective registration and monitoring of all MedWet projects.

Transboundary actions

113. MedWet remained strongly involved in the trilateral transboundary Prespa Park (Albania, Greece, The FYR Macedonia) as an *ex officio* member of the Prespa Park Coordination Committee. Its participation and support provided by the MedWet Senior Advisor is funded by the MedWet Coordination core budget. The Prespa Park is just launching the PDF-B phase of a project approved by GEF-UNDP and co-funded by KfW (Germany) with a total of approx. €700,000 for one year. This PDF is expected to lead to a full GEF project for the region.
114. With the financial support of the Principality of Monaco (€30,000 for two years), MedWet has continued the collaboration between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia for the Neretva River Delta, and on 8 June 2003 a Memorandum of Collaboration was signed at ministerial level among Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and MedWet for the establishment of the transboundary committee for the protection of the Neretva Delta. The members of the committee are already appointed by Ministerial Decisions, and it is expected that in early 2004 the Committee will hold its first meeting under the aegis of MedWet, which has also prepared the draft documents for the meeting.

Communications

115. The following actions were undertaken by the MedWet Coordination Unit, led by the MedWet Communication Officer:
116. In early 2003 the MedWet Web site was fully restructured towards a more dynamic model, and during the year it was continuously enriched and updated with fresh news, provided by the whole MedWet Team. All MedWet/Com-approved documents were placed in the Web site (for the first time in both working languages, English and French). In November 2003, MedWet undertook the preparation and hosting of the Prespa Park Web site, which is now available within the MedWet Web site.

117. The last printed version of the MedWet newsletter was produced in April 2003; thereafter it was replaced by the new electronic version. The first issue was prepared in July 2003, but dissemination was limited due to technical problems with the MedWet server, now resolved. The next issue of the newsletter will be disseminated shortly.
118. The MedWet CEPA strategy was prepared and approved by the MedWet/Com, including a number of priority activities (see www.medwet.org).
119. A number of events were planned in 2003 for the coming year, and the first of them will be held in Athens on World Wetlands Day 2004, in order to present the values and functions of Mediterranean wetlands and the work of MedWet. The event will be addressed to Greek officials, Mediterranean CPs' embassies, NGOs and the press. More events are planned for 2004 and will be held if funding is secured.

Network development

120. During 2003, the *MedWet North African Wetlands Network (NAWN)* was kept fully active through the regular presence of the MedWet Policy Advisor in the subregion. The NAWN is currently in full preparation for the implementation of the LIFE 3rd countries *Maghreb wetlands* project (see above).
121. The *MedWet/Regions* network was also fully active in the implementation of the EU INTERREG –funded MedWet/Regions and MedWet/Sudoe projects.
122. In December 2003 the new *MedWet/NGOs* network was launched, with the support of WWF Mediterranean Office and Tour du Valat.
123. Finally, the collaboration within the (informal) *MedWet/Salinas* network continued, and the necessary preparation for the submission of a proposal to the EU LIFE-Environment programme was carried out. The proposal was not submitted for reasons of time, but will be at the next call for proposals.

Partnerships

124. MedWet has continued working in the existing partnerships, as follows:
 - In the Context of the Barcelona Convention and in collaboration with its secretariat (UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan and RAC/SPA - Regional Activity Centre on Specially Protected Areas, based in Tunis), MedWet has prepared the comparative typology of Mediterranean coastal wetland habitats that was adopted by COP13 of the Barcelona Convention in November 2003.
 - Also in collaboration with the RAC/SPA, MedWet has participated as a member of the Advisory Committee in the preparation of the Strategic Action Plan for Mediterranean Biodiversity (SAP-BIO), and has contributed the section on Mediterranean wetlands. The implementation of the SAP-BIO is to be funded by GEF, and MedWet will be the main partner of RAC/SPA as regards its wetlands component.

- MedWet is a founding member of the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med). The MedWet Senior Advisor participates in the GWP-Med Advisory Board.
- MedWet is also the leading partner in GWP-Med's programme on Water, Food and Environment, and in this context it is organizing the dialogue on agriculture, water and wetlands (see above) and a regional workshop on the same theme in January 2004 in Tunis. In collaboration with IWMI, MedWet is preparing a proposal for a full project on agriculture, water and wetlands for the South and East Mediterranean subregions.

The Ramsar Sites Database Service

Note by the Secretariat. This report has been provided by Wetlands International under the terms of its Ramsar Sites Database contract with the Ramsar Secretariat.

General

125. The Service, operated by Wetlands International under contract with the Ramsar Secretariat, provides support to the Ramsar Convention through the development and maintenance of the Ramsar Sites Database, which holds coded data on all designated Ramsar sites and which is linked to an increasing suite of Web-based information products and analyses about the Ramsar sites network. Under its contract, the Service also provides analyses of Ramsar sites data, answers enquiries, and provides advice concerning the implementation of the *Strategic Framework for the development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11). However, it should be noted that this last function is relatively unfunded, and the Secretariat and Wetlands International recognise that its full delivery is subject to necessary resources being found to deliver the work concerned.
126. The staff working on the Ramsar Sites Database Service are all based at Wetlands International's headquarters in Wageningen, the Netherlands. Staff strength was a problem in 2003, with one staff member leaving to join IUCN, while Dineke Beintema, Technical Assistant, died in October after a serious illness developed earlier in the year. An additional staff member was recruited - Karin Schneider v. Deimling - who started work in August 2003. Currently Doug Taylor, Ellen Diémé and Karin Schneider v. Deimling are the full time staff members responsible for the delivery of this contract.

2003 progress: database upgrade and enhanced Web-based presentation

127. Beginning in April 2003, a contract was let to a Wageningen-based information technology company to transfer and restructure the database from outdated FoxPro software to Microsoft Access and to write an Internet programme suite for data entry and public enquiry.
128. This work was completed in September 2003, and the software went under test in cooperation with the Ramsar Secretariat, CIESIN, UNEP-WCMC, and the MedWet Coordination Unit, until October 2003. In November 2003, the Web site was released for public use. The Web site address is <http://www.wetlands.org/RSDB/default.htm>. This important development now means that many types of query about Ramsar sites can be

run directly from the Web site by the Ramsar Secretariat and by others seeking information on Ramsar sites.

129. Data entry is now also managed via the Internet, with password protection, and a full record is made of who entered the data, amended or deleted data, together with a datestamp. The entry module is in principle usable from anywhere with Internet access and therefore would allow any group of staff to work on the Database.
130. Progress has also been made in scanning a copy of each Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for Ramsar sites for which the RIS is not currently available in electronic format, so that these may be added to the Web-accessible Database.

The Ramsar Sites Directory

131. The on-line Directory of Wetlands of International Importance is constantly being updated in terms of addition of data and information on newly designated sites, updates to information on existing sites, and new analyses of site characteristics. At present the existing Directory is fully integrated within the Sites Database Web presentation via maps and hyperlinks.
132. However, the new on-line queryable Sites Database system includes a Directory entry screen which allows automatic generation of the Directory report for a Site and makes the Directory part of the Sites Database. The content of the Directory will therefore increasingly be integrated into Sites Database records, making searches and reporting more efficient, and providing a user with a more seamless tool.

Further development plans for 2004

133. The following activities are planned to be undertaken during 2004 to further develop the versatility of the Ramsar Sites Database service:
 - i) in consultation with the Ramsar Secretariat, Wetlands International will maintain and further develop the Internet presentation of the Ramsar Sites Database Service, including the Web-enabled Ramsar Sites Database for public access;
 - ii) Ramsar Information Sheets which are not yet electronically available are continuing to be scanned into PDF format and all scanned or electronically available Ramsar Information Sheets will be linked to the Database during 2004;
 - iii) electronically available maps of Ramsar sites (provided by Contracting Parties) will be linked to the Database;
 - iv) a map server module with GIS functionality will be developed to standards agreed with global partners;
 - v) the Ramsar Sites Database will be linked to the map server and also to a data query builder to enable spatially related analyses to be undertaken;
 - vi) maps of Ramsar Sites provided by Contracting Parties in GIS format will be made available via the map server as a data layer;

- vii) key floral/faunal species recorded at the Ramsar sites will be added into the Database; and
- viii) the Web-enabled Ramsar Sites Database will be further developed to enable connectivity with the International Waterbird Census (IWC) dataset maintained by Wetlands International.

The European Space Agency's "GlobWetland" project

134. A project proposal involving Wetlands International has been successfully submitted within a consortium led by Atlantis Scientific Inc. of Canada, under the European Space Agency (ESA) "GlobWetland" tender invitation. The project will support those Ramsar Convention Parties and their Ramsar site managers who have requested ESA assistance with application of remote sensing to wetland inventory assessment, monitoring and management, working with 50 Ramsar sites chiefly in Africa and Europe.
135. Wetlands International will provide the "GlobWetland Information Service", a Web-hosted database and map server, with strong linkage to the Ramsar Sites Database. There is a counterpart package of capacity building to assist African users in applying the technology, and to carry out effective ground-truthing of Ramsar sites included in the dataset. The GlobWetland Information Service will be implemented from November 2003.
136. This approach will provide the Ramsar Sites Database Service with a valuable tool to incorporate all available digital mapping into the Sites Database presentation. It will also provide added value to those using the information in the Sites Database through a capacity to present and view this information spatially, using the proposed Web mapper.