

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
31st Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 6-10 June 2005

DOC. SC31-35

Agenda item 4

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is requested to consider this account of activities since its last meeting and offer its advice where appropriate.

Introductory remarks

1. Since the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC30) in January 2004, there has been considerable effort made on preparations for the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, which we will discuss in detail under various agenda items to follow. At the same time, the global discussions on water and related ecosystems have been proceeding apace, all with potential and actual impacts on the Convention, its processes and its products. In sum, the Convention now sits in a very different, and very actively changing, environment and we need to understand and reflect this in our approach at COP9.
2. Following the receipt of funding support for which we are especially grateful, we have been able to have regional meetings for all regions except Oceania, and that meeting seems likely to occur in August. The meetings have been regional in scope, rather than subregional, and I believe this has promoted the coherence both within and between regions, as well as allowing expression of the heterogeneity within the regions. These regional meetings are a key mechanism in preparation for the COP, and the Secretariat is very satisfied with the regional feedback we have in the run-up to COP9.
3. Since the last Standing Committee meeting, we have changed some of the staffing arrangements – as notified shortly after SC30, reflecting both changes in the nature of financial operations as decided by SC30, the need to manage the staffing budget more effectively, and consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Chair of the Finance Subgroup, I annulled the position of Senior Advisor on Trade and Development. Following the retirement of the Convention's Human Resources officer in late 2004 – and here I pay tribute to the enormous contributions of Annette Keller – we have re-organised how the administration team works, and we hope we can now provide a better service for Parties as a result.
4. Early in 2005, following discussions with IUCN on introducing a different way of managing the Convention's finances and consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Chair of the Finance Subgroup, I annulled the post of accountant. On the recruitment side, following the need for effective management of national report materials and the need to follow up on the plethora of new issues emerging, I established, for a one-year term, the post of Convention Development Officer. We have also had a complete turnover of regional assistants since SC30, and I have taken the opportunity to add an administrative intern/assistant position to help with the arrangements for COP9, as this is an area where

it is clear that the Secretariat is under-resourced. All of these changes have meant an overall reduction in expenditure on staffing, which has helped the budgetary control necessary after the income reduction discovered at SC30.

5. During the period since SC30, I have attempted to provide regular updates to SC members to continue the information flow from SC30 to this point. We have also held regular briefings for the missions in Geneva of Contracting Parties, and the feedback suggests these are well received and seen as valuable. We will continue these briefings in the future, with possibly one more briefing before COP9 occurs. These do take time and effort from the Secretariat, but I believe strongly that they are one of our “duties” to help Parties remain engaged between Standing Committee meetings and especially between COPs. But we would welcome feedback on the level of communication from the Secretariat, as well as the quality and direction of communication.
6. The rest of this report is divided into sections corresponding to areas of activity in the Secretariat.

Global scientific, technical and policy activities

7. This section highlights some key areas of the Secretariat’s 2004/5 work and achievements.
8. During the period of this report, we held the 12th meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in February 2005. Much of our discussion in this meeting will focus on the work done by STRP at that meeting, as well as before and since. We will dwell on the future of the STRP in some detail, and I believe this is a very crucial issue for the Convention in the future. I will not say more on STRP here, but simply wish to put on record my personal thanks for the efforts from all who were engaged in STRP, perhaps especially the Vice-Chair, Heather McKay and the Chair Max Finlayson. Without the personal dedication of these two people, and the support given them by active STRP members, this SC would have little to discuss! Finally I put on record the dedication and intellectual contributions of the Deputy SG Nick Davidson in managing the STRP process from the Secretariat side. And the contribution in supporting the function of the STRP from Wetlands International, through the support service, has been excellent and highly professional.
9. We will also be considering during the meeting the report from Wetlands International on the Ramsar Site Database, and I believe this will be an area that the Convention needs to consider seriously in the future.
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 2004/5. At CBD’s COP7 in Kuala Lumpur, 2004, a decision was taken by CBD Parties that a Biodiversity Liaison Group and global biodiversity partnership be established. This decision tasked the Executive Director of the CBD Secretariat to seek to develop this liaison group with heads of the secretariats of the Ramsar Convention, CMS, CITES and World Heritage Conventions. After two very brief meetings the first full formal meeting of the group was held at Ramsar headquarters very recently, and I had the honour to chair that meeting. This meeting examined *inter alia* the issue of joint approaches to the achievement of the 2010 targets to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity, as well as the

critical issue of harmonizing national reports. This initiative of the CBD COP should really speed the process of coordination and liaison among the conventions, and I have proposed some ideas to have our Convention endorse this approach and legitimize my participation.

11. On the issue of harmonization I should also refer to the UNEP project, funded by the Government of Belgium, which has a separate pamphlet provided to you. This project aims to develop modules of harmonized effort for selected key themes considered by the biodiversity conventions. The issue of inland waters is one of the initial themes, and this should be of particular value and importance to the Ramsar Convention.
12. The Secretariat participated in UNFCCC's SBSTA19 (May 2004), although there is still, in my view, not sufficient linkage between the Convention and the FCCC, especially concerning the role of wetlands in the Kyoto Protocol implementation, in terms of both positive and negative effects on wetlands.
13. We continue to work effectively with the GEF secretariat, regarding especially the significant proportion of projects being considered for approval concerning wetlands and/or river basin management. We have been represented on the GEF project on managing lake basins, the steering committee of which met last week. The final report highlights the role and relevance of the Convention in the key issue of lake basin management. The Secretariat has also continued to develop the proposal for a project on the River Basin Initiative. This proposal is now in the near final stage of development, and hopefully it will be able to be formally launched as part of the events at COP9.
14. I have sought to redevelop all the memoranda of cooperation the Secretariat had initiated with other agencies over the years, since the format of the existing MoC's was heterogenous, confused and complex. This process has been helpful in distinguishing those memoranda which are productive from those which have become moribund. In particular we had a formal re-signing of common MoC's with our IOPs at the IUCN's World Conservation Congress last November.
15. Regarding the COP9 National Planning Tool and National Report, to date, regrettably few Parties have returned their national reports. The Convention Development Officer is working with regional teams to try and redress this situation, but we will face difficulties in Kampala to provide an appropriate global perspective on the state of the Convention if we do not very soon have the completed reports. But it is abundantly clear that part of the problem is the design of the National Report Format, and for COP10 we must make an effort to resolve this issue in favour of simpler, crisper formats – as well as seeing what may be possible in terms of harmonizing our national report with reports in other MEA processes. A possible draft Resolution is available on this point.
16. During the period, the 12th and 13th sessions of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development were held. The Secretariat participated on both occasions, arranging side events at both as well. At CSD12 we held a major side event with the support of the Governments of Switzerland and Japan, which was very well attended and served to deliver the Ramsar message, especially on the need for integrated approaches to water and ecosystem management. At CSD13 we again held a side event with the Government of Switzerland, as well as a learning centre course on Ramsar Handbook use with support from RIZA and UNESCO-IHE. In addition, I was able to participate in the high-level segment and was invited by the Chair to make an intervention on the role of Ramsar in

water management. CSD13 has evolved a statement of policy on these issues, a digest of which will be presented later in the meeting.

17. In May last year we were invited to present the Convention at the UNEP H2O (Hilltops to Oceans) meeting organised in Cairns, with the support of the Government of Australia. This meeting elaborated again the need for holistic actions to be taken at a landscape/seascape scale, and a key outcome was an agreement from the secretariat of the Global Plan of Action for the prevention of pollution from land-based sources to build cooperation with the Convention. This is an example of a synergy with one of the non-biodiversity cluster of MEAs that is developing satisfactorily and broadening the base of the Convention.
18. Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) was a key process highlighted at the CSD meetings, and it was also the subject of a separate meeting organised by the Japan Water Forum in early December 2004. The Convention was invited to make a presentation at this meeting, which was again well received and served to take the message of the Convention into a wider audience. With support from the Japanese Ministry of Environment, presentations were also made to research organisations in Tokyo. Again, new connections, which have been helpful in promoting the work of the Convention to our enlarging audience.
19. In the same vein, I was invited to moderate a session at the Netherlands Government/FAO-sponsored workshop on Water for Food & Ecosystems held in February this year. This was a very significant conference, which highlighted the role of water in the provision of food, balanced with the maintenance of ecosystem services. In fact, as there was a considerable ministerial presence at the conference, the outcomes will hopefully be taken well into governmental planning and process. One of my conclusions was that the title should perhaps have been “Ecosystems for water and agriculture” – and this backdrop certainly is the frame for several of the upcoming discussions in COP.
20. The UNEP Governing Council has held two meetings since SC30. I represented the Secretariat at both meetings, where the issue of capacity building was discussed, as well as the issue of ecosystems management for the protection and production of water resources. It is clear from the reactions of member states at these meetings that Ramsar is well accepted as a key player in these issues, and the direction of the COP9 DRs should certainly be framed to move us more in that direction.
21. Following an intervention by President Chirac, the French government organised a meeting in January this year on ‘biological diversity – linking science and governance’. The Convention was represented, along with CBD and CITES, on the steering committee for the conference. Outputs from the conference included a call from scientists on a way forward, including the possibility of establishing an IPCC-like process for biodiversity. While this seems a little unrealistic, the French government is currently establishing a mechanism to take this forward in the next months. The Standing Committee and indeed the COP should perhaps take an informed view on the relationship of such a development (should it come to fruition) and the Convention.
22. Since SC30 the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has completed its work. The products are almost complete, and the contribution from the Deputy Secretary General, Chair of the STRP, STRP members and other persons associated with Ramsar have been considerable.

Frankly, this process has been frustrating, but the final results will, I believe, be of help in informing the future discussions in the Convention. The Chair of the SC, Chair of the STRP, and Secretary General have been members of the board, and this has helped give the views of Ramsar into the process. It is planned to have a presentation from the MA at the COP, and the Chair of the STRP is suggested as the presenter of this contribution.

23. UNWATER is the replacement for the Coordinating Committee for Freshwater under the UN, now broadened to include non-UN participants such as the Ramsar Convention. We have been invited to attend the last meetings of this body, and look forward to continuing our involvement to ensure close coordination within the broader UN context for water, wetlands and ecosystems.
24. Last, but not least, we attended the 4th IUCN Conservation Congress held in Bangkok, November 2004. As with previous Congresses this was a very rich smørgasbord, with the Convention contributing to, or organising, a range of symposia. A special one was on the Convention and its implementation with high-level ministerial and governmental representation, well attended and with good discussion. At the Congress we also were able to mount the Convention's display, which also attracted good responses. This was also the venue for the signing by the CEOs together of new MoCs between the IOPs and the Convention.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES DURING THE PERIOD FROM SC30

The Africa Region

General Objective 1: Wise use of wetlands

25. The National Wetlands Policy of Mali is now ready for implementation.
26. We have made provision for the preparation of National Wetlands Policies/Strategies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tunisia and Cote d'Ivoire in a Swiss Grant for Africa (SGA) project in 2005. And we are assisting Ghana to turn its National Wetlands Policy into an action plan.
27. Preparation of a documentary on poverty reduction and wetland management in the Niger River Inner Delta in collaboration with Wetlands International and the University of California, Berkeley.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of International Importance

28. About 10 Africa sites have been added to the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Eighty are in the pipeline and we expect to designate them before COP9. The regional distribution of these proposed sites are in favour of North and West Africa (50%).
29. However, many Ramsar sites of international importance are threatened by various natural and anthropogenic activities in the region (oil industry in the Gulf of Guinea countries and emerging invasive species such as *Typha*).

30. Twelve African sites are on the Montreux Record, and Algeria has requested the withdrawal of its two sites (Lac Tonga and Oasis de Ouled Saïd) from the Record.

General Objective 3: International cooperation

31. Collaboration with NEPAD-ENV Secretariat, AMCEN and Zambia for a better coordination in the implementation of the wetlands component program of the NEPAD Environment Action Plan.
32. Collaboration with the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development to develop a capacity building project for Ramsar site managers on wetland management for four Africa French-speaking countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Madagascar and Senegal). We are now in the implementation phase.
33. Development of a major Capacity Building Program for Africa French-speaking countries to be presented in Kampala.
34. The collaboration with Lake Chad Basin Commission and Niger River Authority has led to the inclusion of Ramsar in their GEF-funded projects Steering Committees as observers for NBA and full member for LCBC.
35. Collaboration with the African Development Bank for the preparation of a handbook on wetland assessment, planning, management and monitoring in Africa.
36. Subregional Ramsar Initiatives for the Lake Chad Basin (ChadWet) and for the Niger Basin (NigerWet) have received support from participants to the Arusha regional preparatory meeting to be presented for endorsement by Ramsar COP9

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

37. Since the last SC meeting, Ramsar National Committees have been established in Burkina Faso, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritius and Congo and are now functional.
38. A training workshop was organised with funds from UNESCO on wetlands inventories for West Africa countries (May 04).
39. A series of 12 projects were developed under the Swiss Grant for Africa 2004 and 2005 and the Secretariat assisted Parties to develop 15 projects under Small Grants Funds 04 and 05.
40. The Secretariat has provided technical assistance for the implementation of the Convention to the following countries: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sénégal, Seychelles, South Africa, etc.
41. The Naivasha International Training Course on Wetlands Management is among the only institutional training mechanisms that exist for African sites managers in the continent.

General Objective 5: Membership

42. Seychelles, Mozambique, Lesotho and Sudan have joined the Convention since the last SC meeting.

43. Field missions were organised in Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Rwanda to speed up the ratification process. We expect that Cameroon and Rwanda will join very soon.
44. With the accession of Sudan, the North Africa region now a 100% rate of membership in the Convention.

The Americas Regions

General Objective 1: Wise use of wetlands

45. In preparation for COP9, the III Pan-American Ramsar Meeting took place in Merida, Mexico, November 2004, sponsored by Canada, Mexico and the USA. The meeting attracted 117 participants, i.e., all Parties except France (observer in region), all non-Parties except Dominica, St Kitts, Haiti, Grenada. The meeting produced a Merida declaration, which had overarching guidelines for the Americas and key issues for next triennium, including:

- development of financial mechanisms
- capacity building – a strong CREHO
- transnational and transboundary projects
- alternatives for wise use of wetland products
- public information and environmental education

South American Priorities

- Finish South American wetlands strategy
- High Andean wetlands strategy (Salta, Feb-05)
- Management plans and exchange of good practices
- Ramsar national committees
- National wetland policies
- Control and eradication of exotic invasive species

Central America, Caribbean, North America Priorities

- Research, monitoring and evaluation (indicators)
- Community participation in planning and management
- Evaluate impact of natural disasters
- Coordination among conventions
- Regional communication networks (CREHO to support)

General Objective 2: Wetlands of International Importance

46. Considerable assistance was provided for the designation of 47 sites in 2004 and 2005. Argentina (Humedales Chaco & Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur), Chile (Bahía Lomas & Laguna Conchali), Colombia (Delta del Rio Baudó), Jamaica (Palisadoes - Port Royal), Mexico (38 sites), Paraguay (Laguna Teniente Rojas S.), United States (Grassland Ecological Area (GEA) & Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR)) and Uruguay (Esteros de Farrapos).

47. 2004 was a record year for complaints about threats to Ramsar sites in the Americas.
- infrastructure projects (ports, oleoducts) (Paracas - Perú, Ciénaga Grande – Colombia, Llanquihue - Argentina)
 - impact of dams (Iberá - Argentina, Terraba-Sierpe – Costa Rica)
 - drainage, desiccation (Caño Negro – Costa Rica)
 - tourism (Dominican Republic)
 - overfishing and aquaculture (Fonseca Gulf - Honduras)
 - water contamination (Río Cruces - Chile)
 - climate change: drought, fires (Chaco Lodge - Paraguay, Caño Negro – Costa Rica).

General Objective 3: International cooperation

48. The development of the High Andean Strategy as per Resolution VIII.39 was a key priority for 2004 and 2005, and a lot of progress was made reaching consensus and advancing with a draft strategy. We managed to work very closely with the Administrative Authorities of all pertinent governments, IUCN and WWF, and the two networks of high-Andean scientists in the region. Funding and involvement of the private sector assisted in carrying out activities related to the High-Andean Wetlands Strategy.
49. The Secretariat participated actively in and contributed to the development of the Western Hemisphere Strategy for Migratory Species, as well as to the White Water to Blue Water Initiative Partnership conference.

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

50. The Wetlands for the Future Initiative and Small Grants Fund: 26 proposals were assessed, of which 12 were approved. For SGF we had to assess 9 and 2 were approved. During 2004 and 2005 we closed 17 WWF and 7 SGF projects and assessed progress of many of the ongoing projects. In 2005 we have closed 8 WWF and 1 SGF files.
51. CREHO was established and its development strategy, fund raising strategy, workplan, operation rules, etc., were prepared and approved last year. The Secretariat has actively contributed to its establishment, providing technical advice and guidance. Its first training course was on Wetland Management for Spanish speakers, Merida, Mexico, 13-20 December 2004.
52. Parties continue to be encouraged to establish and operate their National Ramsar Committees, with Ecuador being particularly successful.

General Objective 5: Membership

53. Antigua & Barbuda and Barbados are finalizing their accession processes.

The Asia and Oceania regions

General Objective 1: Wise use of wetlands

54. National Wetland Policies have now been implemented in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Israel, China and Nepal, with Jordan and Bangladesh in process.
55. The Mekong Wetland Ambassadors were appointed during World Wetlands Day and are helping to carry the message of wise use more broadly.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of International Importance

56. Thirty-five new Ramsar sites were added to the List, with more previewed before COP9. New sites were listed in Mongolia 5, China 9, India 6 (+3 pending), Nepal 3, Malaysia 3, Myanmar 1, Sri Lanka 1, Korea 1, Pakistan 5, Indonesia 1, Kyrgyz 1 (pending).
57. Montreux Record – no sites were requested to be removed from the Record. Third party complaints on site management, or potential ecological change, have been considerable.

General Objective 3: International cooperation

58. **Himalayan Initiative.** Since the 2002 Urumqi Workshop, which produced the “Urmqi Call” for the Conservation of High Altitude Wetlands, Lakes and Catchments in the Himalayan region, the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan and Tajikistan have effectively participated into a series of workshops. The workshops share information and experience, develop a common strategy and a framework agreement for this initiative, and were held in Sanya Workshop (2004) and Evian in 2004.
59. **Asia Pacific Migratory Water Bird Conservation Strategy.** Up to now, the total number of sites in the three networks is 85 across 13 participating countries, with over 56 percent of these also designated under the Ramsar List of internationally important wetlands. These sites cover an area of nearly 12, 400,000 hectares.
60. **Lower Mekong wetland conservation.** UNDP/IUCN/MRC have a wetland project which involve parties in the lower Mekong region, which will assist implementation of the Convention.

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

61. There are also a number of international training programs that the Ramsar Secretariat coorganised for the parties, specifically, we have:
 - UNITAR Kushiro Workshop on Wetlands for Asia Pacific region;
 - RIZA Training of Trainers (TOT) training workshop on wetlands;
 - Hong Kong Mai Po Wetland Training Course; and
 - Iran Ramsar Center for Central and West Asia officially launched
62. The SGF has been rather popular in the Asia region, and the quality of proposals has been improved significantly. However, due to limited financial resources in the Convention, less than 20% of the proposals can be funded, which is significantly lower than other regions, where the American and African regions have additional funding sources. In 2004, we received 20 proposals from 13 parties, but only two were funded initially, which makes the

funding rate as low as 10%. Thanks to the government of Japan providing additional funds, we can support two additional projects in Asia.

General Objective 5: Membership

63. Asia still has 17 countries yet to ratify the Convention, which remains the largest share of non-Contracting Parties. However, we are making progress with at least the Government of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Turkmenistan, and Yemen. Lao PDR, with the assistance of IUCN, has organised a series of workshops on wetlands, and the Ramsar Secretariat was also very pleased to meet with their government delegation headed by their Vice Prime Minister in 2004. Kazakhstan, with the help of a UNDP wetland project, has made significant progress in ratifying the Convention. We have been in touch with the government of Turkmenistan, the government of Yemen, the government of Afghanistan, the government of Bhutan, and the government of Brunei on their accession.
64. A number of organisations which work on wetland conservation in UAE approached the Ramsar Convention Secretariat enquiring about accession.

Europe

General Objective 1: Wise use of wetlands

65. The European regional meeting in Yerevan, Armenia, in December 2004, recognised that wetland management is intrinsically linked to water management at catchment/river basin level. The Meeting recognized the close link between wetlands and water as a fact, mirrored by the presence of many water managers and the focus on this vital link was stressed in many presentations and discussions.
66. The meeting also agreed that Ramsar's initial "wise use" principle needs a new definition that is consistent and compatible with the conceptual framework devised by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the "ecosystem approach" advocated by the Convention on Biodiversity and others (see COP9 DR1, Annex A). In the context of wetlands, the hydrological catchment basin delineates the functional ecosystem. Such ecosystems should essentially be looked at as water providers, rather than be seen only as water users.
67. More formal working relationships need to be established with the European Union. Ramsar and EU instruments need to complement each other with their respective strengths. They should not be seen as competing "labels". Focusing wetland conservation exclusively on the objectives of the "Natura 2000" network (or the "Emerald" network in non-EU countries) would be a trap. Ramsar's focus is wider than only natural habitats and species and relates for example to the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive. However, EU instruments have jurisdictional strength which Ramsar is lacking. This should be applied to Ramsar sites, whenever possible.

General Objective 2: Wetlands of International Importance

68. For only five European countries (11% of the Parties) good quality Ramsar Information Sheets and maps exist for all or most of their Ramsar sites. Only in six European countries

are site-specific management plans being implemented at all or most Ramsar sites. The number of Ramsar sites in each European Party varies between 1 and 159, covering collectively a surface between 0.1% and 19% of each country's national territory. Compiling up-to-date information on Ramsar sites is a basic requirement to implement the strategic vision for the Ramsar List. Such information is also likely to provide baseline indicators to monitor ecological change.

69. Currently, 25 European Ramsar sites are listed in the Montreux Record. A rapid analysis shows that most of them could probably be removed before COP9, as the reasons for listing them no longer exist. For a minority of the sites, the Secretariat invites the Parties concerned to identify specific actions to address the problems that led to their inclusion in the Montreux Record (e.g., proposing a Ramsar Advisory Mission).

General Objective 3: International cooperation

70. Hydrological catchments often transcend political and administrative boundaries. Thus, transboundary cooperation is an essential prerequisite and an urgent necessity for many shared wetland sites and water catchments throughout Europe.

General Objective 4: Implementation capacity

71. Only 21 (48%) of 44 European Ramsar Parties have designated a technical expert as national STRP focal point and a governmental and a non-governmental focal point for CEPA programmes. Seven Parties have not designated any focal point at all. The absence of national focal points is likely to prevent these countries from participating in information exchange and profiting from coordinated approaches through the network of national focal points.

General Objective 5: Membership

72. The process of accession by the Government of Andorra is ongoing and expected to be completed shortly.

OUTREACH

73. **World Wetlands Day** continues to be a key event in the Ramsar Outreach calendar. This year's theme proved attractive to Parties, and many have used the CD-ROM version of the materials to create posters and/or stickers with local languages, and, in some case, local images. This is a quite excellent development. While WWD2006 will be business as usual, as every one of our resources will be focused on the COP, we are already thinking about novel approaches to WWD 2007, the theme of which will be discussed at SC34 post-COP9.
74. The need to more effectively incorporate CEPA processes into the work of STRP has been more fully recognised, and an encouraging start has been made in this area in the work of Working Group 3. While the CEPA Specialist Group will continue to serve the needs of both Wetlands International and the Ramsar Convention, there has been a clear need to include CEPA expertise at STRP meetings. This meeting will be considering a more formal inclusion of CEPA expertise on STRP.

75. The CEPA Focal Points (Government and NGO) are considered the driving force at the national level of the CEPA Programme, and they are the key contacts between the Secretariat and the Parties for CEPA matters. At present almost 70% of Parties have nominated Government Focal Points, while only 57% have nominated NGO Focal Points. Since there is very clear evidence of the vital role that INGOs and NGOs play in wetland CEPA activities, there is a need to rectify this imbalance. Those Parties without either Focal Point are, of course, strongly encouraged to consider nominating suitable individuals.
76. The CEPA e-mail lists continue to grow in membership with the English list now standing at over 400 members. Spanish and French lists continue to grow only slowly, reflecting the lack of capacity within the Secretariat to effectively manage this area of the Programme. In the long term we have discussed with the Panama Centre the very positive role that it could play, once fully operational, in gathering and disseminating useful CEPA materials in Spanish to support the CEPA programme and in assisting with capacity building of the CEPA Focal Points.
77. The Wetland Link International (WLI) network of education centres has grown quickly since its relaunch in 2003, with the number of registered centres increasing significantly in 2004 and 2005. Parties are encouraged to ensure that their wetland education centres register with the network. There are plans to develop an Asian regional network (which will sit within the global network) in the coming months to facilitate the exchange of news, resources, and expertise in the region. The Secretariat will continue to work with WLI (and its parent body Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) to encourage the development of new centres.

Danone Partnership

78. The Danone/Evian Fund for Water is an ongoing process. We are now at the end of a three-year cycle, but the Danone Group has already indicated its willingness to keep this fund among its priorities for the future. The close relationship has been improved with Danone, especially with the development and monitoring of the Ramsar game, but also through other projects, including possible on-ground projects in countries where Groupe Danone has a strong presence.
79. Several presentations have been made during the year to explain the Danone/Ramsar partnership, e.g., in Paris for the IUCN-France steering committee, and in Bangkok, during the IUCN congress, with a special intervention of Danone's CEO, Franck Riboud. In the future, this joint effort to promote the Danone/Evian Fund will continue, and it will be, for example, presented at an OECD workshop on Multilateral Environment Agreements and the Private Sector to be held in June.
80. The Ramsar game, a key new development in 2004/5 of the Danone/Evian Fund for outreach, is currently being tested through 700 schools from UNESCO's Associated Schools Network. At the same time, we're starting to plan the distribution process, trying to find the best arrangements to give the game the best distribution. One thousand copies of the game will be printed for COP9 and distributed to the participants. A test marketing campaign in French-speaking Switzerland has shown the interest which can be raised by the game and already more than 1500 games have been ordered by the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud.

EcoFilms Festival

81. The first edition of the EcoCinema/EcoFilms festival took place in Rhodes in June 2004. It was the first time Ramsar was involved in an event like this, through the joint initiative of the Ramsar/MedWet award for the best film on water and wetlands. The winner was the movie "The Turtle People" from the Indian director Surabhi Sharma. The second edition of the Ramsar/MedWet award will be given in June 2005 in Rhodes, and more than 20 films from around the world are in the competition this year.

New communication strategy

82. After the success of the Ramsar game, we were approached by the developers of the game to seek a solution to wider promotion of it, and through that the promotion of the Convention more widely. Some of the ideas are scheduled for discussion during SC31 and offer exciting new possibilities to develop outreach activities with zero impact on the budget.

MedWet Coordination Unit

Institutional development

83. **Legal status and hosting of the unit:** On the development of the legal status of MedWet as a foundation governed by the Ramsar Convention under Greek law, draft documents have been submitted for review to the Ministry of Environment Physical Planning and Public Works. In June 2004 the Deputy Minister of Environment Physical Planning and Public Works of Greece communicated in writing to the Ramsar Secretary General Greece's interest to extend the hosting of the MedWet Coordination Unit in Athens for the triennium 2006-2008.
84. **Funding:** Although the financial operation of the MedWet Coordination Unit is kept strictly within the COP-approved budget limits, delays in the countries' financial contributions for MedWet to the Ramsar Secretariat as well as in that of the hosting country continue to create considerable concern about cash flow and financial stability of the Coordination Unit.

Meetings

85. **MedWet/Com:** The sixth meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee was hosted by the Algerian Government in Tipaza, Algeria, 12-14 December 2004. The Committee welcomed the addition of the Italian "*Agenzia Regionale per la Protezione Ambientale della Toscana*" (ARPAT) to the MedWet Team and received among other documents the proposed Terms of Reference for the MedWet Initiative and the qualitative assessment of the status of Mediterranean wetlands presented in the Technical Session.
86. **MedWet Team:** The MedWet Team held a meeting in Valencia, Spain, in March 2004 to coordinate actions on programme development and implementation. The next meeting of the MedWet Team is planned for July 2005, where new project concepts will be presented and discussed and the MedWet Initiative Terms of Reference will be concluded.

Programme development

87. Responding to the requests formulated by the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee at its 5th and 6th meetings respectively (Izmir, Turkey 2003 and Tipaza, Algeria 2004), the MedWet Initiative has devoted significant efforts in developing new projects and expanding its scope of work to address issues related to integrated water resources management and agriculture. In all, the Coordination Unit has contributed and participated to the launching of five major projects representing a total of over 6.5 Million €:
- LIFE 3rd countries *Protection of North African wetlands' (Maghreb wetlands project)*, for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, with a total budget of 1.2 million €, started on January 2004;
 - 'MedWet/CODDE - Information and knowledge network for the sustainable development of wetland ecosystems' aiming to update the MedWet inventory methods by incorporating spatial observation technology providing a wetland assessment tool and a pan Mediterranean web-based Data base. The total budget is 1.4 million €, for the triennium 2005–2007. Implementation in Greece (MedWet/CU and EKBY), France (Tour du Valat), Italy (ARPAT), Portugal (ICN), Estonia (Tartu University) with pilot applications in other Mediterranean countries;
 - 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 €, completed in early 2005;
 - INTERREG-SUDOE (*MedWet/Sudoe* project) for wetland inventory in Portugal and Spain. Total budget 700,000 €, in progress;
 - Programme on Agriculture, Water and Wetlands for North Africa and Middle East in collaboration with IWMI. Funded by Inwent (Germany), GWP-Med, FAO. Total budget of activities 150,000 €. Ongoing.

Transboundary activities

88. **Prespa:** As member of the trilateral Prespa Park Coordination Committee (shared among Albania, Greece, and FYR Macedonia), MedWet has participated in the preparation of the PDF-B phase of a project with a total of approx. €700,000 for one year. Approved by GEF-UNDP and co-funded by KfW (Germany), the launching of a full GEF project for the region is expected soon.
89. **Neretva Delta:** Following the signing of a Memorandum of Collaboration at ministerial level among Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Monaco and MedWet in June 2003 for the protection of the transboundary Neretva River Delta, MedWet catalyzed the establishment of Neretva Delta Coordination Committee. The Committee, which is to lead the development of a management plan for the delta, held a meeting in Metkovic, Croatia in September 2004, at which it was agreed that the Committee will establish a secretariat locally to manage the development of the project.

Communications, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)

90. The following actions were undertaken by the MedWet Coordination Unit, led by the MedWet CEPA Officer:

- The MedWet website was restructured and redesigned in order to address increasing needs for improved user friendliness and make use of new web-based technologies;
- Publishing of an electronic newsletter, replacing the printed version in April 2003, and widely disseminated to over 500 recipients across the Mediterranean and beyond;
- Launching of events on World Wetlands Day both in 2004 and 2005 with the participation of the DSG and SG respectively, featuring high-profile meetings of political decision-makers, thus helping raise recognition of the need to promote wise use of wetlands;
- Launching of a Ramsar/MedWet film award on Water and Wetlands at the Ecofilms Festival, promoting excellence in film making addressing issues related to water and wetlands.

Partnerships

91. MedWet has continued working in the existing partnerships, as follows:

- **Barcelona Convention:** In collaboration with the Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan), MedWet has prepared the renewal of the Memorandum of Collaboration between the Ramsar and Barcelona Conventions.
- **Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean:** MedWet, as a founding member of the GWP-Med, has led the development of GWP-Med's programme on Water, Food and Environment, and in this context it organised the Dialogue on Agriculture, Water and Wetlands (see above), and in collaboration with IWMI and FAO are planning the launching of a regional project on the same theme for the South and East Mediterranean subregions.