

## **Ramsar Standing Committee 43**

### **Statement on Behalf of the International Organisation Partners**

*Delivered by Mark Smith, IUCN*

Thank you Mr. Chair,  
Distinguished Members of the Standing Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to be able to make this statement on behalf of the five International Organisation Partners.

As the Director General of IUCN has just stated, in the Ramsar calendar this is an important meeting of the Standing Committee. It is where the process of setting priorities for the Conference of the Parties and for the next triennium begins.

The IOPs would like to encourage the Parties to make carefully considered use of this opportunity to re-examine the priorities for the Convention. In our view, it will be important to make sure that there is a focus on accelerating progress on wetland conservation and that other distractions are laid aside.

Certainly the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity should rightly be at the centre of priority-setting for the Convention. The 2020 Aichi Targets represent ambitious commitments by governments, and concerted efforts by Ramsar Contracting Parties will make critical contributions to fulfilling them.

The IOPs therefore welcome greater alignment of Ramsar's Strategic Plan with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity. We recognise the mapping of Ramsar's strategies onto the Aichi Targets and Strategic Goals as a valuable step in the right direction – but now may be the time for a more radical and ambitious restructuring of the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

Why not reframe Ramsar's Plan using the same high-level goals and targets as the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity – while retaining Ramsar-related activities?

This would help everybody – the Parties, Secretariat and IOPs - to prioritise and focus the contributions of Ramsar implementation on achieving the Targets.

The urgency of action on the Aichi Targets puts the issue of institutional hosting in sharp relief. The IOPs see no indication that the choice of host per se is holding back the Convention from achieving its aims. We recognise also that either hosting arrangement would be workable for Ramsar.

However, it is clear that a change of host will be costly and time-consuming. We therefore urge Parties to bring this long-running debate to a close and to prevent it from being a continuing and substantial distraction from the Secretariat's main business.

>>>

One of the most important and difficult challenges in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity is contained in Strategic Goal A – the mainstreaming of biodiversity across government and

society. Several documents to be discussed at this Standing Committee deal with issues relevant to this – for example, the draft resolutions on wetlands and energy and on promoting responsible investment, which the IOPs strongly support.

An important tool for mainstreaming biodiversity into decision-making should be the emerging Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - IPBES. In our view it is vital that Ramsar continues to engage actively with the IPBES, and it would be good to see this intention more clearly reflected in the documents relating to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

The IOPs welcome development and coordination of the Global Wetland Observing System partnership (GWOS) as a top priority of the STRP. Led by Wetlands International, this collaborative effort includes many IOPs or their affiliates and is a key element in wetlands conservation: to know comprehensively where wetlands are and what their status is. GWOS will assist Contracting Parties in identifying new Ramsar sites and inform them in developing their national wetland policies.

We also welcome the leadership by the Secretariat of the TEEB Water and Wetlands study. When completed, this report will provide an important means of communicating to the wider policy and decision making community ways to recognize and integrate wetland ecosystem service values in sectoral planning. The IOPs will collaborate actively in the study, to ensure that it makes a practical case for management, restoration and investment in wetlands, including as critical natural water infrastructure.

The Draft Resolutions presented to this Standing Committee make clear that there are an increasing number of resolutions to sectors that are external to wetlands management – for example energy, urban development and so on. This is welcome.

Building on this, we believe also that hydrological services deserve consideration as a criterion for site identification. Water is the key to addressing many of the most important challenges faced by humanity, such as climate change, water supply and food security, as well as economic development more broadly. By making the benefits of wetlands for society explicit, Ramsar has an opportunity to push the role of wetlands in water management up the global agenda – and to thereby help strengthen the imperative of wise use.

We welcome the draft resolutions on climate change, energy and rice paddies and pesticides, given the growing magnitude of impacts from these issues on wetlands around the world. These resolutions are of high importance for the COP in order to highlight these threats and influence other Conventions.

The IOPs share a common concern that the Small Grants Fund seems to be drying up just as requests for support seem to be reaching record levels. The IOPs strongly consider the Small Grants Fund to be a crucially important Ramsar tool which should be maintained and strengthened. It should be a high priority for fundraising by the Secretariat.

In this regard, we encourage Parties to recognise what can be achieved – learning from the example of two other “special funds” which have brought important added value to wetland conservation in the regions they focus on: the Swiss Grant for Africa - created by the Swiss Government - on the one hand, and Wetlands for the Future - created by the United States – in support to the Americas Region. We encourage Contracting Parties to similarly take the lead in other regions, notably in Asia and Oceania.

>>>

Yesterday, the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2011 was – symbolically at least – the day that the world’s human population passed the milestone of 7 billion people. This growth will continue, and is expected to reach 9 billion people in 2045, just a few years before the Ramsar Convention will celebrate its 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. There can be no doubt then that pressures on wetlands and demands on the Convention will continue to intensify.

In 2011, we have been looking back at Ramsar’s 40 years of history. We should look forward too – and ask how is it, in a world facing major global challenges, that the Convention will cope in future?

The IOPs recognise that Ramsar has an efficient and effective Secretariat, but one whose capacity is presently extremely stretched. In practical terms, the Secretariat struggles to develop and maintain the full range of partnerships it seeks. Indeed, at present limited capacity is constraining the full engagement of the IOPs with the Convention, for example in finalising and implementing agreed joint workplans under the revised IOP Memorandum of Co-operation.

We urge, therefore, Contracting Parties to give serious consideration to scaling up the Secretariat’s capacity – to ensure that the intensifying demands on the Convention can be met going forward.

In the much nearer term, we are looking forward at this meeting and at the COP next year to focusing more on the critical priorities for wetland conservation and hence less on administrative reform. It is high time – we hope – for the attention of the Ramsar community to be re-directed to where it is most urgently needed – for Ramsar, as a French proverb says, “to put the church back into the middle of the village”.

Thank you Mr Chair.