



National Ramsar/Wetlands Committees across the six Ramsar regions:
diversity and benefits



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The benefits of National Ramsar/Wetlands Committees

1. The analysis of official documents of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the six case studies presented in this paper, and other information gathered from Ramsar Secretariat staff illustrate that National Ramsar Committees (NRCs) can be a critical tool for the implementation of the Convention and the wetland wise use principle at national level, particularly for their role in mainstreaming information among stakeholders.
2. For example, in the framework of the Convention's Strategic Plan, some NRCs have played a key role in promoting **Wise Use (Goal 1)** by:
 - i) assisting with the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies and management initiatives;
 - ii) helping to mainstream the Convention's wise use of wetlands approach to civil society and NGOs;
 - iii) serving as an information sharing mechanism between the Ramsar Administrative Authority (national focal point), the Scientific and Technical review Panel (STRP), and the CEPA ("Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness") Focal Points, and providing the opportunity for input from all relevant government agencies, including national water management and land use planning authorities, NGOs, the private sector, academic and scientific institutions, local communities, and subnational authorities, where appropriate;
 - iv) helping to prepare National Reports for triennial meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP); and
 - v) raising awareness of wetland conservation through educational activities and campaigns.
3. Similarly, NRCs have been instrumental in encouraging the designation and maintenance of Wetlands of International Importance, also called **Ramsar Sites (Goal 2)** by:
 - i) assisting with the designation process and management of Ramsar Sites;
 - ii) reporting possible threats to sites; and
 - iii) serving as fora for the discussion of disputed wetland issues and helping to solve conservation and wise use issues at Ramsar Sites or wetlands of national importance;
4. NRCs have also played a vital role in fostering **International Cooperation (Goal 3)** by:
 - i) exchanging information with Ramsar Site managers in neighboring countries;
 - ii) helping to designate and manage Transboundary Ramsar Sites (TRS) or other transboundary wetlands;
 - iii) inviting neighboring countries to participate at NRC meetings; and
 - iv) enhancing synergies between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) by working closely with or including national representatives for other MEAs as NRC members.
5. Additionally, the analysis shows that **there is no single model or formula for creating the perfect NRC**, but some broad recommendations with general application can be identified. NRCs vary in structure, composition, and scope from country to country across the regions. They range from government-led committees with NGOs as observers or with wide participation of key stakeholders and subnational governments, to NGO-led

NRCs with government representatives as observers. Many NRCs also include permanent or ad hoc working groups of technical and scientific experts focusing on particular issues.

6. Contracting Parties' experiences show that NRCs can better ensure implementation of the Convention at the national and subnational levels when they are set up to respond to the government's structure and the needs of the country. For instance, in decentralized government systems, where the Convention might be largely implemented through subnational governments or where jurisdiction over wetland issues might be equally divided, strengthening relations with such governments allows NRCs to make their role as coordinating mechanisms for implementation more effective. Likewise, NRCs are more likely to remain active if they are able to modify their structure and functions to respond to emerging political, economic, and environmental issues within Contracting Parties.
7. NRCs seem to work best when they have a leadership structure, whereby officers have specific responsibilities and an active and charismatic leader, driving the activities of the committee. Similarly, NRCs that have adequate funding to ensure continuity of operations and a work plan with a defined mission, detailed goals, and activities to achieve those goals appear to have considerable success in attaining their objectives. To that end, many NRCs derive their funds from national governments; in some cases, however, NRCs generate and administer their own budget from membership dues or donations.
8. Even though a large number of Contracting Parties have created NRCs over the years, not all of them remain active thereafter. The National Reports and regional overviews to the COP suggest that lack of financial and human resources, adequate work plans, and active leadership, as well as government and political changes, are common factors affecting the ability of NRCs to remain active. Other challenges for NRCs include lack of meaningful participation of local communities and private sectors as well as insufficient decision-making power.

Recommendations

9. On the base of the experience of the Secretariat's regional teams in working with Ramsar Contracting Parties as well as from the findings of this paper, a number of broad recommendations can be presented. These recommendations do not intend to prescribe how an NRC should be established and/or operated, but rather they seek to provide useful information to support Parties wishing to establish or to revive an NRC.

A. Recommendations for establishing an NRC

Recommendation 1: Use the Ramsar Convention's Strategic Plan to set the NRC's goals

Look at the Convention's Strategic Plan to identify if there are any gaps between the goals of the Convention and existing mechanisms for national implementation of the Convention. This is important to avoid duplication of work and functions and would help better define the goals and scope of activities of the NRC.

Recommendation 2: Look at the type of government system in your country

Considering the type of government structure within a country can help Parties determine the most desirable composition for the NRC to help it accomplish its goals more efficiently. For example, in countries with a decentralized government system, the NRC should include or establish close working relations with local/provincial government authorities to better coordinate the activities at the national and sub-national levels. Likewise, in countries with dependent territories, it would be beneficial to have an NRC that engages with representatives from those territories;

Recommendation 3: Ensure that the National Ramsar Committee's advice is taken on board

It is also useful to consider the legal status of the NRC, at which level of government the NRC should be created to facilitate the delivery of its objectives, and to ensure that there are clear agreed mechanisms established for the uptake and implementation of the NRC's advice. More specifically, Contracting Parties should determine whether the NRC should be formally created through a ministerial decree or a resolution, or whether establishment through articles of incorporation/association would better suit the needs and capacities of the country. Of equal importance may be the ministry or agency under which the NRC operates.

Recommendation 4: Consider the financial and human resources available

Parties should consider the jurisdiction and resources (financial and human) available to a particular agency or ministry under which the NRC would be created, as this could have an impact on its operations and funding.

Recommendation 5: Collaboration with other sectors

When establishing the NRC, a cross-sectoral approach is often the most beneficial for Parties. Identify and draw representatives from all those government agencies with jurisdiction over wetlands and wetland resources and those whose operations have an impact on wetlands, such as wetland, water, tourism, and land use management agencies. Similarly, the inclusion of a diversity of stakeholders such as NGOs, indigenous communities, regional and local authorities, the private sector, wetland managers, and technical experts, would likely increase a collective sense of commitment among interested persons to achieve the wise use of wetlands;

Recommendation 6: Involve all Ramsar National Focal Points

It would be of considerable benefit to Parties to strive to include or work closely with the Convention's STRP and CEPA National Focal Points, as well as with National Focal Points for other key MEAs, in order to increase synergies amongst them.

B. Recommendations once an NRC is established

Recommendation 7: Develop a clear work plan

It is important to develop a work plan with a defined mission and specific goals and activities to achieve those goals. The Ramsar Strategic Plan could serve as a guide to NRCs developing their own work plans.

Recommendation 8: Define specific roles within the NRC

Having a leadership structure in place, including a definition of members' duties and an active leader, is often beneficial to the achievement of the work plan objectives.

Recommendation 9: Establish procedures to monitor and evaluate the NRC's activities success

When activities are planned, ensure that there are procedures to monitor and evaluate how well these are successfully implemented.

Recommendation 10: Establish permanent or ad hoc working groups

Permanent or ad hoc working groups of technical experts in areas such as science, law, policy, health, land use and planning, and public administration, among others, could significantly help NRCs achieve their goals more efficiently.

Recommendation 11: Secure funds to run the NRC's activities

Most importantly, to remain operational, it is desirable for NRCs to ensure they have adequate funding, especially when they plan to publicize materials, hold workshops, conduct site visits, or carry on CEPA activities, etc. Where NRCs do not administer their own budget, they could fund activities by establishing good working relations and/or including relevant funding organizations as members. Similarly, NRCs could derive funds from membership dues, where appropriate.

Recommendation 12: Hold face-to-face meetings when possible

Where possible, NRCs should hold frequent face-to-face meetings, at least once a year, to discuss progress on ongoing activities, emerging issues, and follow-up actions. One way to encourage participation in meetings is through rotational meetings at different locations to ensure representation of all regions/areas that might not be able to participate otherwise. Additionally, meetings could include field trips to Ramsar Sites, CEPA activities, and discussions about current wetland projects;

Recommendation 13: Plan the NRC activities in coordination with the Convention's main events

It is also desirable that NRCs coordinate their activities with major events of the Convention by, for example, assisting the Administrative Authority (AA) to submit the National Report to the COP in a timely manner and to formulate plans for the implementation of recommendations and guidelines adopted by the COP.

Recommendation 14: Keep the Ramsar Secretariat informed

NRCs should maintain regular contact with the Ramsar Secretariat through the regional teams and National Reports to the COP to ensure that the Secretariat remains knowledgeable on the status of their operations and activities and to enhance opportunities for reciprocal support.

I. Introduction

10. There are a variety of mechanisms to assist Ramsar Contracting Parties implement the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (the Convention) at the national level. Among those are the National Ramsar Committees (NRCs) or National Wetlands Committees. Although the text of the Convention does not explicitly address the creation of NRCs, a number of documents officially adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) encourage their creation. Many Parties have voluntarily established NRCs to help them deliver the goals of the Convention (Ramsar Convention Manual 2006; see also Pritchard 1993). Because the government structures, needs, and capacities within each Party differ, NRCs vary considerably from country to country in composition, structure, scope, and functions. Thus, there is no single model for creating the ideal NRC. Rather, NRCs should be established according to the specific needs and capacities of each Party (Recommendation 5.7 from COP5, Kushiro, 1993).
11. The Secretariat of the Convention regularly receives requests from Parties and other entities (e.g., NGOs) requesting advice on how to create or revive an existing NRC or equivalent body. While establishing uniform guidelines for the creation of an NRC would not be practical, given the social, political, and economic differences within countries, Parties seeking to create or revive an NRC could benefit considerably from learning about the experiences and practices of existing NRCs. This would be particularly helpful since there appears to be limited exchange of information among Parties on this subject (Pritchard 1993).
12. In response, this paper examines the experiences of six NRCs from the six Ramsar regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Neotropics, North America, and Oceania) that, like many other NRCs around the world, have helped deliver the objectives of the Convention and effectively promote the wise use of wetlands:
 - 1) Africa: Uganda's National Wetlands Advisory Group (NWAG);
 - 2) Asia: Thailand's National Committee on Wetlands Management (NCWM);
 - 3) Europe: Austria's National Ramsar Committee (Nationales Ramsar-Komitee);
 - 4) Neotropics: Colombia's National Ramsar Committee (Comité Nacional de Humedales);
 - 5) North America: United States National Ramsar Committee (USNRC); and
 - 6) Oceania: Fiji's National Wetlands Steering Committee (NWSC).
13. The objectives of this examination are to:
 - i) illustrate some of the diverse approaches Parties have utilized to create and operate NRCs;
 - ii) review the different structures, composition, and decision-making processes, as well as successes and obstacles of these NRCs, in delivering the goals and objectives of the Convention;
 - iii) examine the benefits that these different models have provided within Contracting Parties in national implementation of the Convention; and
 - iv) identify a set of common principles of best practices in the creation and operations of NRCs.

II. Background

14. There are a number of official documents of the Convention which encourage the establishment of NRCs, emphasizing their significant role in helping Parties implement the Convention and mainstream its wise use approach to wetlands and water.¹
15. Recommendation 5.7, adopted during COP5 in Kushiro, Japan, in 1993, was the first official document to address the subject of NRCs, encouraging Parties to establish them according to their needs to serve as a broader focus for implementation of the Convention at the national level. It recognized the critical functions that NRCs can perform by facilitating interaction among interested stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental), providing expert input to National Reports for the COP, reviewing implementation of the “Monitoring Procedure,” the “Montreux Record,” and Recommendations and Resolutions adopted by the COP, as well as coordinating submissions to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (*Ibid.*).
16. In addition to the benefits outlined in Recommendation 5.7, NRCs can provide assistance in the formulation and implementation of national policies and science initiatives, the inclusion of new sites in the Ramsar List, and the management of Ramsar Sites (Ramsar Manual 2006). NRCs can also serve as fora for discussing practical implementation matters, reporting threats and impacts to wetlands, helping to develop consensus on disputed issues, and helping to resolve wetland conservation and use conflicts (*Report of the 5th European Regional Meeting* 2004). In some cases, an NRC may be the only forum for NGOs to have a voice in wetland conservation issues and implementation of the Convention.
17. Prior to the adoption of Recommendation 5.7, an information paper prepared for COP5 served as the basis for the Recommendation and provided the first global review of NRCs, highlighting their key role in national implementation (see Pritchard 1993). Subsequently, the Convention’s *Additional guidance on the implementation of the wise use concept* (1993) and the *Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies* (1999) offered some guidance for the creation and operation of NRCs.
18. Additionally, the Convention’s Strategic Plans have encouraged the creation of cross-sectoral NRCs, drawing upon broad representation from all relevant government agencies and key stakeholders. The Strategic Plans have also emphasized that once established, NRCs should remain active, ensuring there is adequate funding and maintaining cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation to attain the goals and objectives of the Convention (as articulated in the Plans), including: Wise Use (Goal 1), Wetlands of International Importance (Goal 2), and International Cooperation (Goal 3), among others (Strategic Plan (SP) 1 (1997-2002), Action 8.1.9; SP2 (2003-2008), Action 18.1.1; SP3 (2009-2015)).
19. Furthermore, Resolutions VIII.5 (2002) and X.11 (2008) urged Parties to ensure the participation in NRCs of institutions and National Focal Points for other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) to enhance synergies and harmonize national

¹ Official documents of the Convention including Resolutions, Recommendations, guidelines, National Reports, and strategic plans can be accessed at www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents/main/ramsar/1-31_4000_0__.

responses to global environmental issues with the goals of the Convention. Finally, Resolutions VII.9 (1999), VIII.31 (2002), and X.29 (2008) reiterated the role of NRCs as a useful mechanism to mainstream the Convention's wise use of wetlands approach beyond government branches in charge of its implementation. To this end, these Resolutions recommend full participation of the National Focal Points for the Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) program and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in NRCs.

20. While there is not an official definition of what an NRC is, it can be understood, from the aforementioned documents, as a body voluntarily created by Parties to help the Ramsar Administrative Authority (AA) implement the Convention (Ramsar Manual 2006; Pritchard 1993). NRCs are usually comprise government officials from all relevant sectors, scientific and technical experts, and representatives from key NGOs and stakeholders (*Ibid.*).

III. Trends in the establishment of NRCs

21. In reviewing National Reports to the COP, it is apparent that a significant number of Parties have established NRCs using a variety of organizational models. For instance, in some countries, such as France and Spain, NRCs are government-led, composed primarily of government officials with NGOs as observers (National Reports (NRs) COP10; Pritchard 1993). In others, such as the U.S. and the Netherlands, NRCs are convened by NGOs with government representatives as observers (NRs COP10; Pritchard 1993). Yet, in other countries NRCs invite NGOs and experts on an ad hoc basis, as is the case in Australia and Colombia (Foster 2011; Ministry of Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development (Ministry of Environment) 2010). Some NRCs, such as Austria's, South Africa's, and the U.K.'s Committees, allow equal participation from NGOs and governments (Schwach 2011a; Pritchard 1993; NRs COP10). Besides government and non-government representatives, many NRCs also include representatives from civil society, like Hungary's NRC; wetland managers, like Brazil's and the Czech Republic's NRCs; the private sector, like Armenia's and Uganda's NRCs; and academic and scientific institutions, like Slovakia's NRC (NRs COP10). In some cases, CEPA and STRP National Focal Points for the Convention are NRC members or invited to participate, as in Samoa and Fiji (NRs COP10; COP10 DOC. 13). Similarly, in some countries, such as Egypt, Argentina, and Belize, the national representatives for other MEAs are NRC members, too, and in Austria, Fiji, and Cameroon they are invited to participate (NRs COP10; COP10 DOC. 8 to COP10 DOC. 13). Other Contracting Parties such as Austria, Spain, and South Africa include representatives from subnational governments in their NRCs (NRs COP10; Pritchard 1993). Furthermore, in some countries NRCs are non-governmental advisory bodies, while in others they are governmental committees, formally established at the highest government levels through ministerial decrees, as in Cameroon, or by resolutions, as in Colombia (NRs COP10).
22. NRCs also vary in their objectives regarding implementation of the Convention. Some NRCs, like the USNRC, seek to increase the designation of Ramsar Sites within the country, and others, such as Austria's and Mexico's NRCs, seek to strengthen information sharing between national and subnational governments and/or between governments and NGOs (NRs COP10). Other countries, such as Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago, have NRCs that focus on the development and implementation of national wetlands policies

(NR COP10, Colombia; *Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies* 1999). Additionally, some Parties create NRCs to deal exclusively with matters related to the Convention, while others address Ramsar matters under committees responsible for broader related issues, such as biodiversity and water, under which Ramsar issues are addressed. This is particularly the case in Japan and the Marshall Islands (COP10 DOC. 9; COP10 DOC. 13). Therefore, those seeking to establish or revive an NRC should take full account of the Party's governmental structure, political and administrative needs, and any existing mechanisms dealing with wetland conservation and wetland resources to maximize the effectiveness of their contribution at all government levels.

23. An analysis of the National Reports submitted to COP8, COP9, and COP10 and the regional overviews for the past decade (COP8 to COP10) reveals some fluctuations in the number of NRCs created within and between Ramsar regions during that period.² For instance, in some cases, as in Africa, the analysis suggests significant progress in the creation of NRCs (see Table 1 below). In other cases, as in Europe, there appears to be regress in the creation of NRCs.

Table 1. The table below illustrates the number of Contracting Parties that have indicated having an NRC in the National Reports (NRs) submitted to COP8, COP9, and COP10.³

Ramsar Regions	COP10 (2008)			COP9 (2005)			COP8 (2002)		
	Number of NRCs	% of total NRs submitted	Total n. of NRs	Number of NRCs	% of total NRs submitted	Total n. of NRs	Number of NRCs	% of total NRs submitted	Total n. of NRs
Africa	24	59%	(41)	11	55%	(20)	20	61%	(33)
Asia	12	44%	(27)	11	73%	(15)	14	67%	(21)
Europe	14	34%	(41)	21	51%	(41)	22	55%	(40)
Neotropics	10	42%	(24)	9	60%	(15)	10	48%	(21)
North America	2	67%	(3)	3	100%	(3)	1	33%	(3)
Oceania	1	20%	(5)		0%	(1)	3	100%	(3)
Total	63	45%	(141)	55	58%	(95)	70	58%	(121)

24. A number of different reasons might help to explain these fluctuations. As an initial matter, is important to note that fewer Parties submitted National Reports to COP9 (2005) compared to COP8 and COP10, where over 90% of National Reports were submitted (NRs to the COP). Thus, some of those Parties who did not submit the National Report might have had an which did not appear in the analysis or the analyses for the COP's regional overviews and other related COP documents. Another reason could be that in some Contracting Parties, like the U.K., Germany, and Sweden, the status of NRCs has evolved over time as other mechanisms (governmental and non-governmental) have undertaken some of the functions traditionally performed by NRCs (NRs COP10). Thus, some of these Parties might no longer indicate having an NRC or might indicate the existence of an NRC only partially (*Ibid.*). Finally, not all NRCs remain operational

² For more information about the National Reports and regional overviews submitted to the COP see National Reports (NRs) to the COP, www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-national-rpts/main/ramsar/1-31-121_4000_0__.

³ Table prepared by Monica Zavagli, Scientific and Technical Support Officer, Ramsar Secretariat, & Alexia Dufour, Regional Affairs Officer, Ramsar Secretariat (July 28, 2011). The information in this table was extracted from the Ramsar Secretariat's National Reports Database.

between COPs for multiple reasons, including lack of human, technical, and economic resources, lack of a proper work program, changes in government composition, and political circumstances (COP10 DOC. 8 to COP10 DOC. 13).

IV. Case studies

25. The following six case studies of NRCs were selected to illustrate some of the diversity of models and experiences of NRCs that have been long established across the world or because the Ramsar Secretariat has had greater familiarity with them.

1) AFRICA: Uganda's National Wetlands Advisory Group (NWAG)



Composition

26. Uganda's National Wetlands Advisory Group (NWAG) was created in 1989 by the government as an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC), but it also included representatives from some NGOs and academic institutions to oversee the formulation of the National Wetlands Policy (Mafabi 2011). The IMC evolved into the NWAG in 2004, which now serves as the country's NRC and includes a broader representation of stakeholders from civil society organizations (UNDP 2009; NR COP10).
27. The NWAG includes cross-sectoral representation from government departments with jurisdiction over wetlands and wetland resources, such as Water Development, Forest, Fisheries, National Environment Management, Wildlife, Farm Management, Lands and Surveys, Finance, Planning and Economic Development, local governments, and Investment. Additionally, it includes representation from NGOs, such as IUCN, Nature Uganda, and Environmental Alert, and research institutions, such as Makerere University's Institute of Environment and Natural Resources and the National Fisheries Resources' Research Institute (NWAG 2001 Terms of Reference; NR COP10). According to its 2011 Terms of Reference (ToR), the NWAG may also include any person, experts, or representatives from other institutions that it considers necessary for the proper functioning of the Committee (NWAG 2011 ToR). Additionally, the NWAG may create subcommittees to address specific issues on behalf of the entire Committee. Finally, the Secretariat of the NWAG is located in the Wetlands Management Department (*Ibid.*).

Scope and Functions

28. The NWAG was created by the Ministry of Water and Environment (the Ministry) as an advisory body to help implement the Convention at the national level and to serve as a forum for intergovernmental dialogue and consultation within and between government ministries (NR COP9). Pursuant to its ToR, the NWAG advises the Ministry on general environmental issues and the Wetlands Management Department on the conservation and wise use of wetlands (NWAG 2011 ToR). More specifically, the NWAG is responsible for promoting inter-institutional and cross-sectoral coordination of wetland-related activities, harmonizing the National Wetlands Policy with other natural resources policies, monitoring implementation of the National Wetlands Policy, and advising on strategies to improve compliance with it (*Ibid.*). It is also responsible for providing advice on conflicts

arising from competing uses of wetland resources and advising on balancing wetland-related sectoral initiatives, as well as recommending and reviewing guidelines on wetland conservation and resource uses (*Ibid*). Therefore, besides implementation of the Convention, the NWAG's activities focus largely on national policy implementation and wetlands management.

Operations

29. According to its ToR, the NWAG must meet once every quarter; due to limited financial resources, however, meetings have not been held regularly (Mafabi 2011). At meetings, members discuss issues extensively, reaching decisions by consensus (*Ibid*).
30. Some of the NWAG's recommendations regarding wetland issues have been incorporated into sectoral policies and laws such as the National Environment Act, the Land Act, and the Local Government Act (UNDP 2009; Mafabi 2011). Additionally, the NWAG's inter-ministerial structure resulted in the creation of a Wetlands Bill Taskforce to provide guidance in the formulation of the country's Wetlands Bill (NR COP10). Furthermore, providing a good example of cross-sectoral collaboration, the NWAG has cooperated with private industries, including companies such as Uganda Breweries, the Manufacturers Association, and the National Water and Sewage Corporation, encouraging them to integrate wise use practices into their operations and to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) when their activities might impact or are near wetlands (*Ibid*). Therefore, the NWAG has served as a mechanism to integrate the Convention's wise use approach and wetland issues into national laws and policies and beyond government branches.

Funding

31. The main source of funds for the NWAG is the national government, through the Wetlands Management Department (Mafabi 2011). Additionally, its ToR allows for donations as a potential source to help it finance its activities (NWAG 2011 ToR).

Benefits

32. The creation of the NWAG has resulted in increased public and governmental awareness of wetlands as a natural resource of vital importance and in incorporation of wetland issues into sectoral policies, programs, and plans (Mafabi 2011).

Achievements and Challenges

33. One of the NWAG's greatest achievements has been reaching consensus between different governmental and non-governmental sectors in the creation of the National Wetlands Policy (Mafabi 2011). However, lack of financial resources has affected the ability of the NWAG to meet regularly (*Ibid*). Similarly, limited technical capacity within the main implementing agency, the Wetlands Management Department, and addressing conflicting policies are other challenges that the NWAG continues to face (UNDP 2009).

2) ASIA: Thailand's National Committee on Wetlands Management (NCWM)



Composition

34. Thailand's National Committee on Wetlands Management (NCWM), created in 1993, precedes ratification of the Convention (ONEP 2002, 9). The NCWM consists of over 23 members including representatives from central government agencies, NGOs, technical and scientific experts, and representatives from the Biological Diversity Division of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), which is the Ramsar Convention's AA (ONEP 2008, 14). A Chairperson from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, a Deputy Permanent Secretary General, and a Vice-Chairperson from ONEP lead the NCWM (*Ibid.*). While comprising mainly high-level government representatives, the NCWM provides an example of inter-ministerial representation by including key government departments such as Marine and Coastal Resources, Fisheries, Royal Irrigation, Local Administration, Royal Forest, and the Royal Navy, among others (*Ibid.*; NR COP10). The NCWM includes participation of national representatives or National Focal Points for other MEAs through ONEP, which is also the AA for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (NR COP10).

Scope and Functions

35. The primary purpose of the NCWM, as defined in ONEP's 2002 and 2008 National Implementation Reports of the Convention, is to provide common guidelines and coordinate action on wetland management through the formulation of a National Wetlands Policy and a national action management plan (ONEP 2002, 7–8; ONEP 2008, 13). Other responsibilities include: supporting and supervising implementation of national policies and the Convention, promoting integration of wetland issues into other sectors, and strengthening awareness through wetland research and education (ONEP 2002, 7–9). For instance, some of the activities that the Committee has helped coordinate to increase public awareness about wetland conservation include overseeing World Wetlands Day celebrations, implementation of local curricula that focus on local wetland issues, and the creation of the Thai Baan research network (ONEP 2008, 23–26). The network, created in cooperation with four villages, collected data for the creation of a database on wetland resource use, social and economic values, and cultural traditions to promote awareness of wetland conservation and existing habitats in the lower Songkhram River Basin (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the NCWM focuses on promoting the wise use approach and conservation of wetlands for the national and local benefit, helping to coordinate local projects such as sustainable crab banks and wetland restoration projects (*Ibid.* at 26–27).

Operations

36. Meeting as frequently as every three months, the NCWM has proven very active in Ramsar-related matters, serving as a mechanism for interdepartmental cooperation to coordinate implementation of the Convention with National Wetland Policies (UNDP, 56; NR COP10). For example, the NCWM endorsed ratification of the Convention, assisted in the formulation of the National Wetland Policy, and supported the government's list of Ramsar Sites (ONEP 2002, 7–17). Of particular significance was the decision of the Council of Ministers, also known as the Cabinet, to allow NGOs to submit

complaints/reports to the NCWM about government development initiatives inconsistent with the Cabinet's decisions regarding wetlands (*Ibid.* at 11). Some of these complaints addressed projects such as the construction of a road at Tan Island, "conversion of Nong Leng Sai into a water reservoir," and construction of flood barriers at Kwan Pha Yao (*Ibid.*). The purpose of the Cabinet's decision was to ensure adoption of national wetland conservation measures at the local level by agencies, communities, and NGOs.

37. To undertake some of its tasks, the NCWM appointed a Technical Working Group on Wetlands in 1999 composed of wetland experts and scientists from different governmental and non-governmental sectors (*Ibid.* at 9). The Group provides technical advice to the NCWM, serving as a preliminary review panel for Ramsar Sites' management plans before they are submitted to the NCWM. The Group also provides technical advice on issues addressed by the Convention's STRP. Furthermore, the NCWM appointed a working group for the formulation of a wetland management plan to draft the National Wetlands Policy and Management Plan (*Ibid.* at 10).

Funding

38. Funding for the activities and operations of the NCWM is derived from the national government's budget (Pipitsombat 2011).

Benefits

39. The creation of the NCWM has resulted in increased interagency cooperation on wetland conservation and a better understanding of wetlands values and functions (Pipitsombat 2011). The NCWM was instrumental in the creation of a National Wetlands Policy and wetland conservation measures which have been implemented and enforced by many of the agencies represented in the Committee (*Ibid.*, ONEP 2002, 15). Furthermore, prior to the creation of the NCWM, the country lacked a cohesive National Wetland Policy (ONEP 2002, 15). Likewise, the NCWM has played an important role in helping mainstream the wise use of wetlands approach at the local level (ONEP 2008, 13, 23-27). For instance, the NCWM agreed to appoint local/provincial wetland management committees to manage existing and newly designated Ramsar Sites (*Ibid.* at 13)

Achievements and Challenges

40. One of the greatest achievements of the Committee has been its support of the Cabinet's Resolution on Wetland Conservation Measures, requiring EIAs for government projects in or near Ramsar Sites or wetlands of national importance (Pipitsombat 2011). However, ensuring that all represented agencies implement the Cabinet's resolution has been a challenge for the Committee (*Ibid.*). Other achievements include: assisting with and coordinating systematic implementation of the Convention and wetland management at the national and local levels, education and awareness campaigns, and designation and management of Ramsar Sites (ONEP 2008).

3) EUROPE: Austria's National Ramsar Committee



Composition

41. The Austrian NRC (Nationales Ramsar-Komitee), operating since 1989, responds to the country's federal government system, comprising nine semi-autonomous federal states, or Länder, which share responsibility with the central government for national implementation of the Convention (Salathé 2005; *Report of the 6th European Ramsar Meeting* 2008).
42. The NRC includes delegates from the Nature Conservation Authorities in each of the nine federal governments (Schwach 2011b). Other Committee members include: the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment, and Water Management (The Federal Ministry), the Ramsar AA; focal points for the STRP and CEPA; representatives from water, nature conservation, navigation, and agriculture authorities; wetland experts; and NGOs such as WWF, BirdLife, and the Austrian League for Nature (*Ibid.*; Salathé 2009). The national focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), while not a member of the NRC, participates in its meetings (NR COP10). Especially noteworthy is the states' representation in the committee, which allows them to provide information on issues directly affecting them and to have a voice in the implementation of the Convention. Additionally, governmental and non-governmental Committee members participate as equal partners in the NRC (Schwach 2011a). Even though the Committee has no strict membership requirements, it includes broad stakeholder participation from national and subnational governments and NGOs (*Ibid.*; Salathé 2009).

Scope and Functions

43. The NRC was created as a task force for wetland conservation and management, primarily to serve as a vital link between the Federal Ministry and the nine federal states (Salathé 2005; Pelikan 2004). It serves as an advisory body to the government on matters related to the Convention (Schwach 2011a). The NRC functions include: leading Ramsar Site designations and assessing possible changes in their ecological character, initiating the Convention's outreach programme, coordinating the wetland inventory, promoting best practices in projects affecting wetlands, and discussing the management and financing of Ramsar information and training centers (Pelikan 2004). It is also responsible for preparing the National Reports for the COP and overseeing the Austrian Wetland Strategy, which is based on the Convention's Strategic Plan (Pelikan 2004; Salathé 2009). While the Committee does not have ToR, the Convention's Strategic Plan is an important basis for national implementation, as reflected in the Austrian Wetland Strategy, and there are currently plans to create a national plan based on it (Schwach 2011a).

Operations

44. Because the Committee is an advisory body, its decisions are not binding on represented government agencies or NGOs, but Committee members follow them on a good will basis (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the Committee reaches decisions by consensus (*Report of the 6th European Ramsar Meeting* 2008).

45. Frequent rotational meetings, taking place at least once a year in each of the federal states, ensure participation of all states in matters related to the Convention (Pelikan 2004). Meetings are usually accompanied by visits to Ramsar Sites, bringing high-level government representatives and key stakeholders in touch with the ecological and management processes at the sites (Salathé 2009). The primary purpose of the meetings is to exchange information on ongoing projects, new ideas at the national level, and new Ramsar-related tools and information from the Standing Committee and the COP (*Ibid.*). The Federal Ministry and its Chairperson prepare the agenda for the meetings (Pelikan 2004). During the meetings, the Federal Ministry reports on international wetland strategies and Transboundary Ramsar Sites (TRSs) developments, while the states report on issues relevant to their wetland sites (*Ibid.*). Similarly, NGOs, STRP, and CEPA National Focal Points report on issues within the scope of their activities (*Ibid.*). This reporting process, whereby each member reports on issues relevant to their activities yet of common interest, provides an effective mechanism for rapid information exchange at the national and subnational levels (*Ibid.*). This format also prevents redundancy.
46. Besides its activities at the national level, the NRC also promotes international collaboration on Ramsar matters by exchanging information on the management of TRSs, such as the Trilateral Ramsar Site Floodplains of the Morava-Dyje-Danube Confluence (between Austria and the Czech and Slovak Republics) and by inviting neighboring countries to participate at its meetings (Salathé 2009; Pritchard 1993).

Funding

47. Because the NRC does not raise its own budget, personnel and project funds originate from the budgets of the Federal Ministry and the federal states. Similarly, NGOs and the Forestry and Water Administrations make financial contributions to specific projects (Pelikan 2004).

Benefits

48. The Austrian NRC has fostered an increase in wetland-related activities, including organizing the first European STRP National Focal Points' Communication Meeting and a comprehensive wetland inventory project, among others (Schwach 2011a; Salathé 2009; Hails 2007). It has enhanced motivation to promote wetland conservation and a more effective implementation of the Convention (Schwach 2011a).

Achievements and Challenges

49. Amongst the greatest achievements of the Committee are assisting with the designation of 19 Ramsar Sites, increasing meaningful participation of all nine federal states and NGOs in the implementation of the Convention, and supporting countrywide wetland campaigns, such as the National Peatland Restoration Campaign (Schwach 2011a; Salathé 2009). However, one of the challenges the Committee faces is to increase participation of the private sector in its activities (Schwach 2011a).

4) NEOTROPICS: Colombia's National Ramsar Committee



Composition

50. The Colombian NRC (Comité Nacional de Humedales) was created informally in 2004 by recommendation of the National Environmental Council, an advisory body to the National Environmental System (NR COP10). The committee included representatives from most national ministries, afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and NGOs (*Ibid.*). The Committee was subsequently formalized through a Resolution (Res. 0301 of 2010) of the Ministry of Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development (Ministry of Environment), the Ramsar AA (Rivera 2011a; Fajardo 2011). The Resolution changed the composition of the Committee and some of its functions (discussed below). The formalization of the NRC responded in part to the National Wetlands Policy, which called for the formal establishment of the NRC as an advisory body to the National Environmental System on the conservation and wise use of wetlands (Ministry of Environment 2010).
51. The Committee provides an example of good cross-sectoral representation. It is composed of over 13 members, including a representative from the Ministry of Environment, the Special Administrative Unit of the National Natural Parks System, national universities (public and private), technological, scientific, and research institutions affiliated with the National Environmental System, and the Association of Regional Autonomous Corporations, an NGO (Ministry of Environment 2010; Fajardo 2011). It is worth noting that regional environmental authorities with jurisdiction over Ramsar Sites are also represented in the Committee, providing direct representation at the ground level (Ministry of Environment 2010). National and international experts can be invited to participate on an ad hoc basis as observers. Furthermore, the Ministry of Environment coordinates the administrative aspects of the Committee, through a technical secretariat headed by the Direction of Ecosystems (*Ibid.*).
52. The Committee, however, is currently undergoing structural and operational adjustments due to changes within national ministries, which have significantly modified their mission (Saenz 2011). These institutional changes, in addition to the changes implemented in response to the 2010 Resolution, have also made it necessary to make changes to the composition of the Committee. Additionally, in response to the country's national winter emergency, caused by heavy rain and flooding, the Committee's functions will include providing specific recommendations on wetland management to help prevent and mitigate the consequences of these types of natural disasters (*Ibid.*). The current situation of the Committee illustrates how the NRC's functions can evolve overtime in order to respond to government changes and emerging issues.

Scope and functions

53. The Committee was created primarily to help implement the National Wetlands Policy and the Convention (Ministry of Environment 2010). Its functions include: supporting the Ministry of Environment in the development of national wetland-related policies, plans, and norms, as well as mechanisms to implement Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Ramsar COP. Other functions include supporting scientific, technical, and

educational initiatives and serving as a forum for the discussion of wetland-related issues (*Ibid.*).

Operations

54. The NRC advises the Ministry of the Environment on wetland-related matters, but the Ministry has the ultimate decision-making authority (Fajardo 2011). Pursuant to the 2010 Resolution, the NRC will meet twice a year (as it did in the past) (Ministry of Environment 2010). While the Committee does not currently have a work plan, the strategies set forth in the National Wetlands Policy – including wise use and management, conservation and rehabilitation, and raising awareness – guide the activities of the Committee (Fajardo 2011; National Environmental Council 2002).
55. The NRC has operated through four thematic working groups, which have helped it coordinate and implement its work (Politics-Regulation, Financing, and Monitoring; Scientific and Technical; Awareness and Training; and Management and Wise Use) (Rivera 2011b). Each thematic group established annual work plans based on the National Wetlands Policy, its regional action plans, and the Policy for Sustainable Development of Marine Spaces, Coastal, and Insular Zones (*Ibid.*). These work plans sought to ensure implementation of the aforementioned policies; for instance, the Awareness and Training working group created the ToR for the development of the National CEPA program and the criteria for the national wetland conservation and education award to celebrate World Wetlands Day in 2006 (*Ibid.*). Thus, besides changes in membership composition and some of its functions, is still unclear what effect the Resolution will have in the operations of the Committee (Saenz 2011).

Funding

56. To finance its general meetings, the Committee derives its funds from the national budget through the Ministry of Environment (*Ibid.*). Institutions represented on the Committee are responsible for covering their own traveling expenses (*Ibid.*).

Benefits

57. Reported benefits derived from the creation of the Committee include: raising awareness about the Convention at the national and local levels and having an advisory body providing guidance to the Ministry of Environment on decisions and plans affecting wetland ecosystems (Fajardo 2011).

Achievements and Challenges

58. The Committee's greatest achievement has been its ability to foster inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral cooperation, integrating government ministries and research institutions to formulate recommendations for the conservation and wise use of wetlands (Fajardo 2011). This has been possible primarily because of the inter-ministerial structure of the Committee (Rivera 2011a). Through its four thematic working groups, the Committee has served as a mechanism to effectively engage other government ministries in the implementation of the Convention and the National Wetlands Policy (*Ibid.*). For instance, the NRC has been able to raise awareness about the importance of ecosystem goods and services and sustainable development, working closely with the Ministry of Mines and

Energy and the Ministry of Economic Development (currently Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism) (Rivera 2011a). However, participation at the regional and local levels has not been sufficiently effective and presents one of the biggest obstacles for the Committee (Fajardo 2011). The Committee has also had difficulty ensuring participation of all members from different regions at its meetings, which are generally held in Bogota, the Capital District of the country (Fajardo 2011).

**5) NORTH AMERICA:
United States' National Ramsar Committee (USNRC)**



Composition

59. Established around 1990 as a non-profit, non-government organization to provide a forum for broad community involvement in the implementation of the Convention, the USNRC is an NGO-led organization (Mason 2011).
60. The USNRC is composed of voting members, NGOs that have an interest in wetland conservation, and observer members, federal government agencies (USNRC Members & Observers, www.ramsarcommittee.us/members.asp). Represented federal agencies include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Ramsar AA; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Geologic Survey and Wetlands Research Center, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (*Ibid.*). While the Bylaws/Articles of Association of the USNRC encourage local and state government participation, there are currently no representatives from local or state governments in the Committee (Gardner 2011). Additionally, there are presently no National Focal Points for other MEAs as members of the USNRC, but they have been invited to participate at its meetings. For example, one of the USFWS representatives in the USNRC is the Director of the USFWS Division of International Conservation, which is also responsible for implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) (*Ibid.*). The Committee's leadership consists of a rotating Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, a Secretary, and a Treasurer, all of whom are elected to serve for a one-year term.

Scope and functions

61. The USNRC operates under a set of Bylaws/Articles of Incorporation and a Strategic Plan (the Plan), which details the mission, goals, and activities of the USNRC (USNRC Documents, available at www.ramsarcommittee.us/documents.asp). Its mission is to advise and support initiatives promoting the conservation and wise use of national and international wetlands (USNRC Plan). Among its goals to help deliver the Convention nationally are to promote the designation and conservation of Ramsar Sites, foster interaction between domestic and international wetland communities, support education and public awareness of wetlands, and strengthen the USNRC's institutional framework (*Ibid.*). While the USNRC was created to further the goals and objectives of the Convention at the national level, the bulk of its activities focus on designation of Ramsar Sites and education and awareness (Gardner 2011). For example, the USNRC is currently working on the creation of a communications network among Ramsar Sites; it has conducted site management activities (discussed below) and online seminars about U.S. Ramsar Sites (*Ibid.*).

Operations

62. The Committee meets at least once a year and holds meetings in different places across the country (NR COP10). While there is a distinction between voting and observer members, the USNRC operates by consensus (Gardner 2011).
63. The USNRC's Plan has helped implement the goals of the Convention through the designation of Ramsar Sites, wetland education, and increased international cooperation (*Ibid.*). For example, in 2007, the USFWS' Wildlife Without Borders programme awarded to USNRC member, Environmental Concern, a USD 99,400 grant to create a small grants program on behalf of the USNRC (COP10 DOC. 12). The programme assists organizations embarking on CEPA programs, including creation of a national CEPA task force and a CEPA Action Plan, and supports efforts to designate new Ramsar Sites. Additionally, the USNRC collaborated with Canadian wetland experts to organize the First National Training Course for Canadian Ramsar Site Managers at the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, a Ramsar Site in British Columbia (Gardner 2011; USNRC Calendar, www.ramsarcommittee.us/calendar.asp). During the workshop, a USNRC representative exchanged information with wetland managers about the benefits of having an NRC in the United States (Gardner 2011).

Funding

64. The USNRC operates and generates its budget, which it raises from membership dues (USNRC Bylaws; Pritchard 1993).

Benefits

65. Among the benefits derived from the creation of the USNRC are: spreading knowledge about the Convention beyond government branches, increasing designation of Ramsar Sites, and fostering international cooperation (Gardner 2011). Prior to the creation of the USNRC, the USFWS oversaw most aspects related to the Convention (Mason 2011). However, even though the USFWS met frequently with NGOs and other national stakeholders, there was not an organized process for the input of national interests (*Ibid.*).

Achievements and Challenges

66. Some of the greatest accomplishments of the USNRC include informing people about the Convention and helping to increase the designation of Ramsar Sites (currently 30) in the United States, (Gardner 2011). Despite its accomplishments, the USNRC also faces obstacles. For instance, manpower can be a challenge since current Committee members contribute their time on a voluntary basis (*Ibid.*). Additionally, the USNRC has to adopt a cautious approach when commenting on development projects or activities that might affect Ramsar Sites, because making specific recommendations could create conflict among member organizations, whose internal rules might prohibit them from weighing in on matters that could be construed as political (*Ibid.*). For instance, while a USNRC survey showed that site managers would welcome the Committee's intervention in the form of letters of support regarding threats to Ramsar Sites, the Committee must limit these letters to educating decision-makers about the importance of the site and the obligations under the Convention (USNRC, Guidelines for USNRC Letters of Support).

6) **OCEANIA: Fiji's National Wetlands Steering Committee (NWSC)**



Composition

67. Fiji's National Wetlands Steering Committee (NWSC), previously the Wetlands Working Group (WWG), has been operating since 1999 to, *inter alia*, identify and document sites of national and international importance into Fiji's Wetlands Information Database (Jupiter, *et al.*). The WWG included various government ministries, NGOs, landowners, research institutions, and an ecotourism venture (Tokaduadua 2008). Following Fiji's accession to the Convention in 2006, the WWG was formally reconstituted as the NWSC to provide advice to the AA, the Department of Environment (DOE), on wetland management and conservation (*Ibid.*; COP10 DOC. 13).
68. The NWSC includes cross-sectoral representation from key government departments and ministries such as Environment, Forestry, Lands, Fisheries, Land and Water Resource Management, and the I-Taukei Ministry (Jungblut 2011). The Committee also includes representatives from the Native Land Trust Board, landowner groups, Rivers Fiji Ltd, academia, NGOs, and the private sector, allowing civil society, wetland managers, and other stakeholders to have a voice in the implementation of the Convention (*Ibid.*). Finally, Ramsar's CEPA and STRP National Focal Points are represented in the Committee. While representatives of other MEAs are not Committee members, they are invited to participate (NR COP10). For instance, the national focal point for the Convention is also the national focal point for the CBD, CITES, UNFCCC, and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and participates in the committee's activities (COP10 DOC. 13; NR COP10). The Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an observer member (Jungblut 2011).

Scope and functions

69. The NWSC was created to assist the DOE with implementation of the Convention and to facilitate integration of wetland issues into the government's priorities (Jungblut 2011; DOE 2007). Among the functions of the Committee are: advising the National Environment Council (NEC) on wetlands policies, assisting with reporting requirements under the Convention, monitoring potential impacts on wetlands, carrying national awareness campaigns, and assisting with policies or legislation for the wise use and protection of wetlands (Jungblut 2011).
70. Additionally, the NWSC is responsible for submitting proposals to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, integrating the Convention's objectives into sectoral policies, identifying wetlands for future Ramsar listing, facilitating research work, overseeing management of Ramsar Sites and national implementation of the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands (2011–2013), and serving as an information exchange between stakeholders (*Ibid.*). More specifically, the Committee has assisted the government with the nomination of its only Ramsar Site, the Upper Navua Conservation Area, and has updated and identified the status of the country's wetlands to help the DOE prioritize its activities (DOE 2007). Thus, besides assisting with implementation of the Convention at the national level, the NWSC's activities also focus on site management.

71. The work of the NWSC, while not specifically based on the Convention's Strategic Plan, adequately addresses the goals of the current Plan (2009-2015). This is particularly the case with the Committee's supervision of the national implementation of the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands (*Ibid.*).

Operations

72. The NWSC meets twice a year (more often in extraordinary circumstances), and it reaches decisions by consensus (Jungblut 2011; Tokaduadua 2008). It is an advisory body and its decisions are reviewed by other government committees, such as the NEC (NR COP10). The NEC is also in charge of discussing the country's duties under the Convention and other MEAs, as well as regional agreements (COP10 DOC. 13). Similarly, wetland issues have been included as one of the principal thematic areas in the National Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Framework (2010–2014) (Tavenisa 2011). Thus, wetland and Ramsar-related issues and activities are not addressed in isolation or exclusively within the province of the NWSC, but rather require coordination among various committees and are "implemented strategically through other crosscutting activities" (Tavenisa 2011; COP10 DOC. 13).
73. The NWSC provides an example of cross-sectoral collaboration to deliver the goals of the Convention. For instance, the Committee works closely with NGOs and academic institutions that conduct scientific studies to identify the diverse plant and animal species inhabiting the country's wetlands and produce reports on wetland issues (Tokaduadua 2008; Jungblut 2011; *Report of the Fourth Oceania Regional Meeting for COP10*, 2010). Additionally, the NWSC has also provided the opportunity for interested persons to become involved with wetland issues and the Convention. The designation of the country's Ramsar Site, which included participation of multiple governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and the site's management provide an example of such involvement. Furthermore, Rivers Fiji Ltd., an ecotourism venture, currently leases the Ramsar Site and disseminates educational and awareness information about wetland protection to visitors and locals (Jungblut 2011). Moreover, to help the NWSC deliver its functions, it created a CEPA working group, which is responsible for coordinating the awareness activities of the Committee and the Convention (Tavenisa 2011).
74. The Committee has also served as a forum for addressing issues affecting the country's Ramsar Site. During one of its meetings, Committee members and site managers discussed the encroachment by logging operations on the site in attempt to find a solution (*Report of the Fourth Oceania Regional Meeting for COP10*, 2010). The Committee also works closely with other government ministries and departments regarding legal protection of wetlands in the country (Jungblut 2011). In the absence of specific Fijian legislation for wetland protection, the NWSC advises agencies on the different laws that do address wetland protection (*Ibid.*).

Funding

75. The Committee derives its funds to finance its meetings and activities from the DOE (*Ibid.*).

Benefits

76. Since its inception, the Committee has served as a mechanism for disseminating knowledge about the Convention and wetlands at the local and national levels. For example, the NWSC worked with multiple stakeholders in the designation process of the country's Ramsar Site and to improve the quality of information about the country's wetland sites. Furthermore, the NWSC provides a forum for interested stakeholders to address implementation problems and wetland issues in general (Jungblut 2011).

Achievements and Challenges

77. The Committee's primary achievement has been the designation of the country's Ramsar Site – the Committee was instrumental during this process in providing advice and gathering the relevant documentation (Tokaduadua 2008). The greatest challenge to the Committee has been ensuring adequate boundary demarcation and protection of the Ramsar Site, as logging operations have been encroaching upon it (Jungblut 2011). Compounding this issue is the lack of specific legal protection mechanisms for wetlands, including Ramsar Sites (*Ibid.*). Another obstacle is lack of sufficient human resources to implement the Convention (COP10 DOC. 13).

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VII. Research methodology

- 1) **Sources of Information:** the information provided in this paper was gathered from the following sources:
 - a) Existing documents in the Ramsar Convention's website, including: National Reports to the Eight, Ninth, and Tenth meetings of the COP; Guidelines, Recommendations, and Resolutions adopted by the COP; Reports from regional meetings and meetings of the Convention's bodies; and Ramsar publications and news articles;
 - b) Existing documents at the Secretariat, such as Parties' national implementation reports provided by the AAs and documents provided by STRP members;
 - c) Face-to-face interviews with the four Senior Regional Advisors, the CEPA Programme Officer, and the Deputy Secretary General of the Convention; and
 - d) Phone, Skype, and e-mail interviews with focal points (CEPA, STRP) and NRC members.

- 2) **Research Process:** the information in this paper was gathered through the following process:
 - i) First, the authors undertook a desktop analysis reviewing background information on NRCs in the Ramsar Convention website, including recommendations, guidelines, resolutions, publications, and news articles. The authors also reviewed

existing print materials in the Secretariat and documents provided by STRP members.

- ii) Second, the authors reviewed the Regional Overviews of the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan for COP8, COP9, and COP10, along with reports from pre-COP regional meetings, to obtain information on existing NRCs across the Ramsar regions.
- iii) Third, the authors reviewed the National Reports to COP10, to identify the number of Parties with NRCs and the different existing models of NRCs.
- iv) Fourth, the authors met with Senior Regional Advisors, the CEPA Programme Officer, and the Deputy Secretary General to identify and select one National Ramsar Committee per region to illustrate in the paper. The six case studies were selected either for their long establishment or because of the Secretariat familiarity with them.
- v) Fifth, the authors contacted National Focal Points (past and present) and NRC members (past and present) to gather information about the operations and outcomes of the selected NRCs; information was gathered consistently through the use of a standard template; and
- vi) Sixth, when necessary, the authors conducted Internet searches to integrate additional information about each of the case studies in this paper.

The final component of the study was to propose a set of recommendations based on the findings of the research to support Parties that wish to establish NRCs.

The information provided in this paper might carry some bias from the interviewed people and personal interpretation from the authors. However, these assumptions and limitations were in part addressed by the desktop review of documents.