

World Wetlands Week 2010 Celebration
Victoria, Seychelles
4th February 2010

The fifth day of WWW2010 in the Seychelles was one of sharing knowledge. As fittingly said by Mr Jean Claude Labrosse of the Ministry of Environment, ‘...to celebrate wetlands, we must know wetlands’.

The day was launched by Mr Didier Dogley (Permanent Secretary) and Mr Abou Bamba (Ramsar Senior Advisor, Africa), both putting forward the fact the Seychelles should be proud that the political and civil will to ensure the protection of wetlands is apparent to all. A particularly strong point was also the open cooperation of the private sector with the government and local communities.

Participants came from varied backgrounds ranging from Non-Governmental Organisations, Grassroots community organization representatives, UN administered project office representatives, IUCN staff, school children, Government Ministry representatives amongst others.

The presentations began with ‘The Way Forward’ by Ambassador Marc MRM Marengo (Rd), Secretary General of The Ecotourism Society of Seychelles (TESS). He told of Sweet Escott wetland and the important role it had played throughout his life from childhood as well as to the culture of the community of Anse Royale.

He noted that following land reforms in the Seychelles, many of the wetlands were neglected as tourist developments gained more favour. With severe threats from invasive flora and lack of maintenance of dykes and channels, effects from siltation and repeated flooding in the area were some of the problems faced.

Through TESS the Sweet Escott wetland is being rehabilitated, with the support of funding from the European Commission through the Indian Ocean Commission. The objective here is to develop an ecologically sustainable management plan that will return the wetland and the surrounding areas affected to its previous state, thereby promoting once again Sweet Escott as an eco-tourist gem.

Dr Fleischer Dogley of the Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) was next to address the participants. The SIF is responsible for the management of the Vallee de Mai and Aldabra Atoll World Heritage Sites.

Dr Dogley introduced the near pristine Atoll to all as the newly designated Ramsar site (No. 1887). Recognised for its varied habitat types that allow for the support of many different species such as the endangered and vulnerable green turtle *Chelonia mydas* and the Aldabra giant tortoise *Geochelone gigantean*; endemic species of flora (40 species) and fauna such as the Madagascar sacred ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus abbotti* and 100% of the populations of two species of endemic insectivorous bat (*Chaerephon pusillus* and *Triaenops pauliani* amongst others.

She noted that amongst the challenges facing the management of the site was the logistics of travel to the Atoll (1150 km from Mahe). A point stressed however was that it is essential to develop long term conservation strategies for any protected area. It is hoped that with this further designation of the Atoll as a Ramsar site, further opportunities for support of the activities being carried out to maintain the Aldabra Atoll in its natural state will be more forthcoming.

The representative for Sustainability for Seychelles, Mrs Michelle Martin, was next to take the podium where she shared the organisations experience acting as facilitator between the local community of Port Glaud (district in which the Port Launay Ramsar site is found) and the representatives of the newly opened Ephelia Resort in Port Glaud.

It was clear that with the current Seychelles Strategy promoting doubling of the GDP by 2017, there would be increased promotion of high end tourism developments. In this particular case, lack of sharing information led to conflicts between community members and the hotel representatives.

Sustainability for Seychelles bridged this communication gap and while reservations still remain, stakeholders from as wide a range as the local authority, small enterprises, fishermen, church representatives etc. have had the opportunity to tour the development and discuss their concerns with the hotel representatives.

As a result there is a newly formed Environment Group in Port Glaud, which includes all stakeholders. It aims to take all necessary measures to conserve the beauty and resources of this area, which will benefit not only the hotel and the local and national community, but the global community by implementing proper conservation and maintenance measures.

The next presentation, introduced the study conducted recently on the freshwaters of the Seychelles Islands; Praslin, Mahe and Silhouette.

There has been a lack of detailed study in this area and the findings of this study conducted in conjunction with the Paris Natural History Museum, such as the discovery of species such as Larkansyel (*Parioglossus multiradiatus*) in the mangroves and brackish zones of the rivers in Seychelles, it is expected that there will be an increased interest in the inland wetlands. Other species inventoried were *Anguila bicolor* (Short fin eel), monkey river prawn and crabs.

Mr. Kevin Erwin of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) was next to deliver a presentation to the participants concerning Wetland Restoration, Mitigation and Management of impacts from climate change and other more localized issues. This presentation and ensuing discussions led by the Ramsar Senior Advisor for Africa continued onto the next day.

This session focused on the current pressures on the Seychelles wetlands and the need to know what are the state of these wetlands. The discussions also included the rapid assessment of the policy responses that the Government and other stakeholders proposed to address the problems. Participants insisted on the need to have accurate data available before new policies are elaborated and implemented. One of the recommendations of this session was the preparation of

an inventory report of all the Seychelles wetlands. This segment of the workshop provided an occasion to adapt the wetlands issues to the UNEP assessment and environmental reporting model PSIR (Pressure-State-Impacts-Responses).

This was an enlightening opportunity for all concerned, as not only was there the chance to discuss the issues that the participants felt were most pressing with regards to the pressures facing the wetlands, but with the Ministry of Environment representative responsible for elaboration of the Environmental Management Plan of Seychelles (EMPS) 2010-2020 present, these issues and the resulting recommendations from the discussions are to be included in the final document with the possibility to have a standalone Wetland Section highly likely as a result.