

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**26th Meeting of the Standing Committee,
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001**

DOC. SC26-20

Agenda item 21 (b)

World Wetlands Day 2003, International Year of Freshwater

Action requested. The Standing Committee is requested to consider the proposal of the Secretary General to place the celebration of World Wetlands Day in 2003 within the context of the International Year of Freshwater.

1. The UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater (Resolution 55/196) and invited the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to serve as the coordinating entity for the year and to develop proposals on possible activities. Within the Subcommittee the programme will be coordinated by UNESCO and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).
2. In the report of the Subcommittee to the General Assembly in July 2001 on the Status of preparations for the Year, it is indicated that “the secretariats of the related United Nations Conventions ... and the Ramsar Convention will be invited to make the information materials and brochures on the International Year of Freshwater available to their parties through their respective clearing-house mechanisms, with links from their respective Web sites to the official Web site of the Year”.
3. In addition, during 2003, a major conference dedicated to freshwater issues, the Third World Water Forum, organized by the World Water Council and hosted by the Government of Japan, will be held in Kyoto. The Ramsar Bureau has been in touch with the Forum secretariat and is considering initiating soon two virtual forum discussions, one on wetland management and the other one on the River Basin Initiative as the stepping stones to participate in the 2003 event.
4. The 2003 International Year of Freshwater will follow the 2002 International Year of the Mountains and the International Year of Ecotourism, both also of great interest to Ramsar.
5. According to the report to the General Assembly cited in paragraph 2 above, “the International Year of Freshwater should provide an opportunity to initiate processes that advance issues of sustainable water resource development and management far beyond 2003. The Year should follow a participatory approach and involve the whole range of relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, it should:
 - (a) Increase awareness about the importance of water resources for human life and nature, as well as the necessity of sustainable approaches to water resource development and management;

- (b) Generate long-term research and development projects initiated to address critical water resource issues, such as efficient use and allocation of scarce and shared water resources and increased understanding of aquatic ecosystems;
 - (c) Facilitate the development of appropriate policies for sustainable development and management of water resources at the international and national levels;
 - (d) Increase the number of local activities aimed at improving livelihood opportunities. Those activities should stress participatory approaches and could be targeted towards vulnerable groups, such as women, children, low-income groups, indigenous people and people in dry-land areas.
6. On the basis of the above, the Secretary General proposes that the celebration of World Wetlands Day in 2003 be planned within the context of the activities of the International Year of Freshwater, in coordination and cooperation with the UN Subcommittee on Water.