



42 years of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

42 “the answer to life, the universe and everything”
Douglas Adams

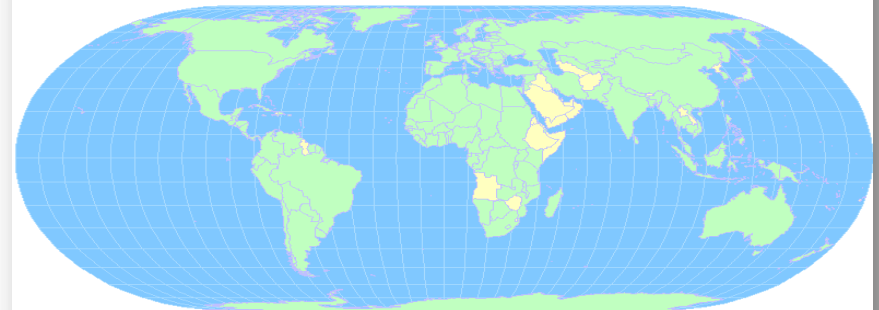
Prof. Nick Davidson
Deputy Secretary General,
Ramsar Convention Secretariat

Why a Convention on Wetlands?

- The Ramsar Convention was developed in the 1960s because of **concerns over destruction of wetlands** and its impact on **people** and **biodiversity** – especially waterbirds
- Opened for signature in the town of Ramsar, I.R. Iran on 2 February 1971
- First of the modern global intergovernmental environmental agreements
- Pre-dates significant UN environmental attention
- Now 164 Contracting Parties (member governments) globally



USSR A. FIROUZ (chair) S-AFRICA M.F.MÖRZER BRUIJNS G.MATTHEWS E. CARP



It started in 1962 ...



1962

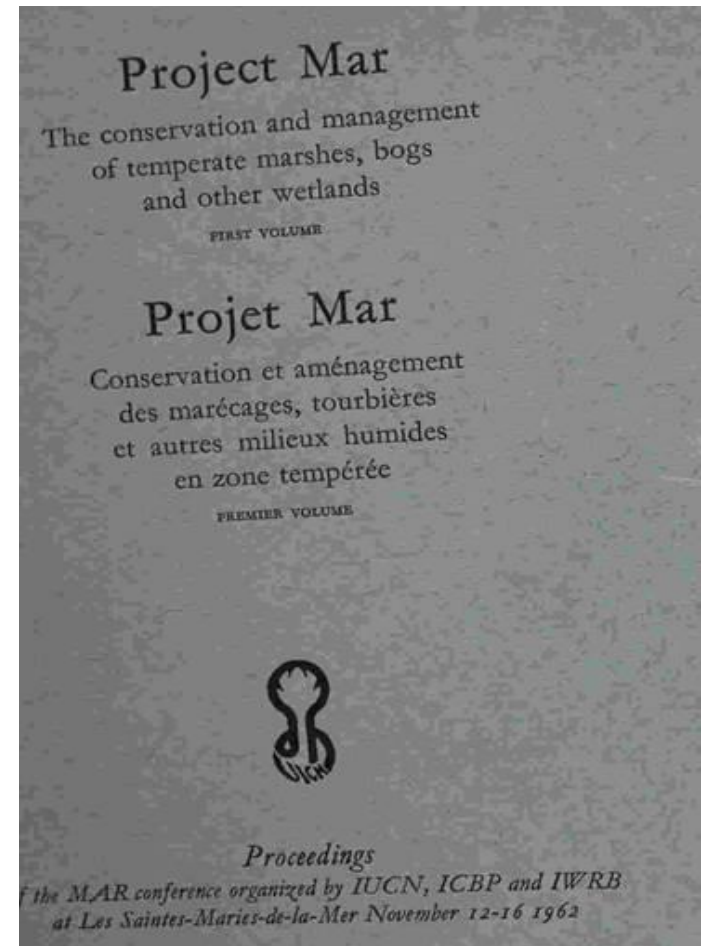
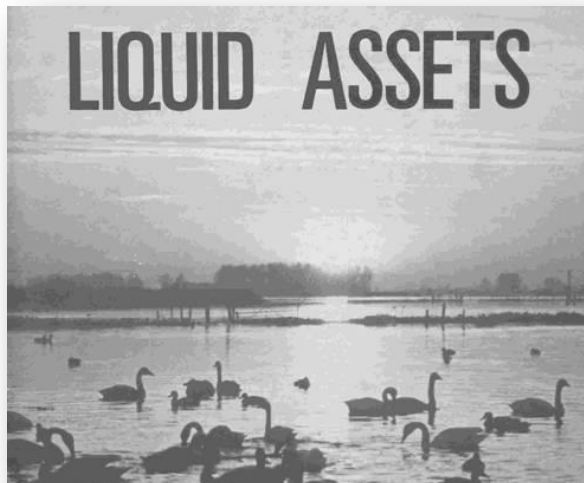
1962

First call for an intergovernmental convention on wetlands

“Project MAR” final conference

1964

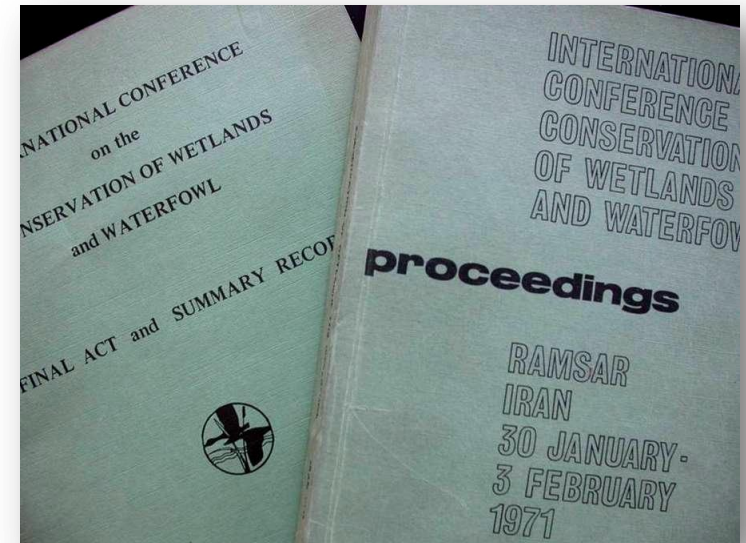
‘*Liquid Assets*’ IUCN, with UNESCO support



1971: The Convention's text

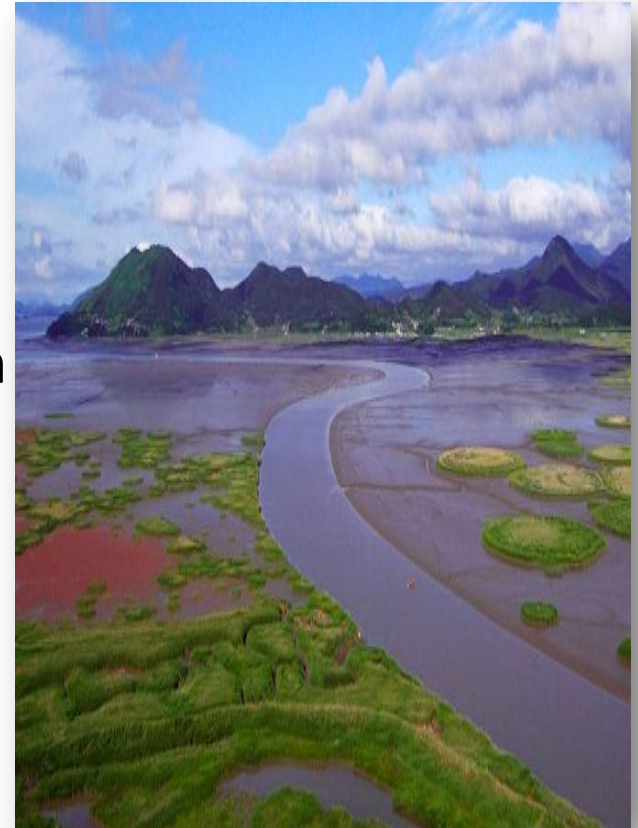
Three 'pillars' of implementation

1. “wise use” of all wetlands
2. Designation & management of **Wetlands of International Importance** (Ramsar sites)
to maintain their *ecological character*
3. International cooperation



1971: The Convention's text

- **Inspirational and far-sighted**
- Scope: *wetlands & water; ecosystems & people*
 - Initial focus on waterbirds, and Ramsar sites
 - 42 years evolution of implementation to respond to full scope of water and wetlands
- **First intergovernmental agreement to combine conservation and sustainable use of resources**



1971: The Convention's text

- Text recognises:
 - that “**wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable**”; and
 - “**the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands as regulators of water regimes**”
- So to deliver “**wise use**” requires landscape and waterscape-scale, ecosystem-based, approaches to decision-making and management
 - Managing wetlands to support basin-scale water management and delivery (and *vice versa*) is essential



1971: The Convention's text

Recognised the inter-connectivity of all wetlands **from the mountains to the sea**, including:

Marine/Coastal Wetlands

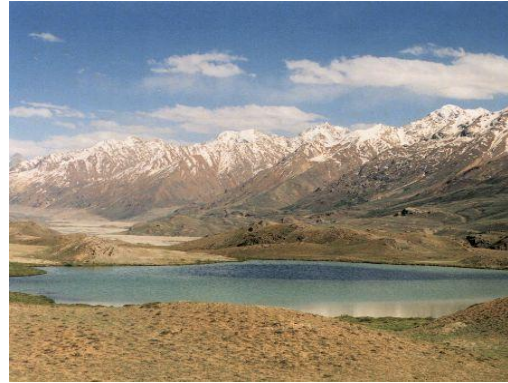
Mangroves, coral reefs, sea-grass beds, tidal-flats, estuaries, up to 6m depth at low tide

Inland Wetlands

Marshes, lakes, rivers, floodplain forests, peatlands, oases, wadi, karst and caves

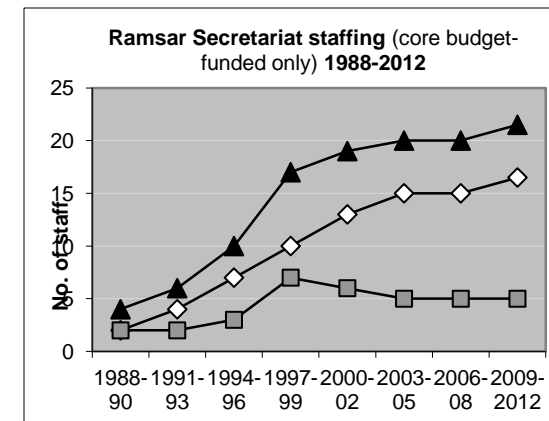
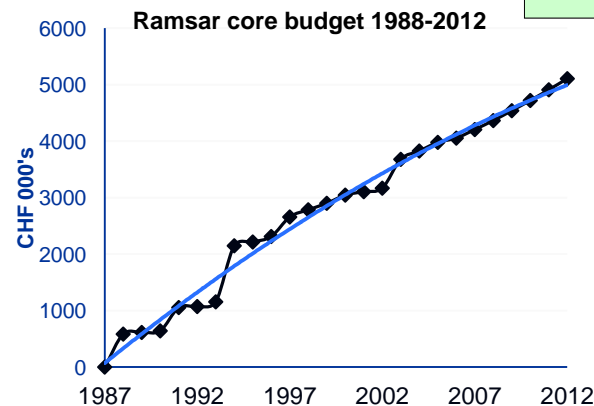
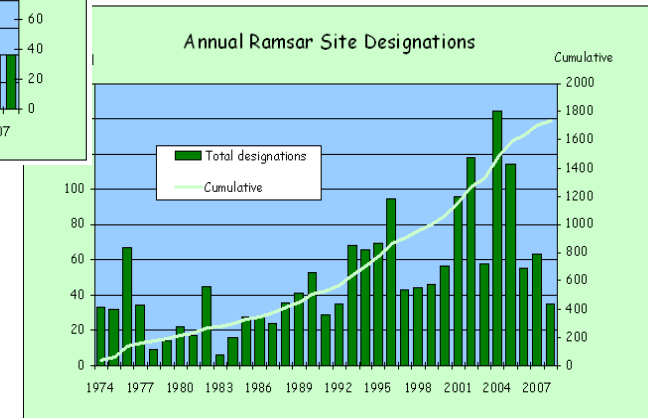
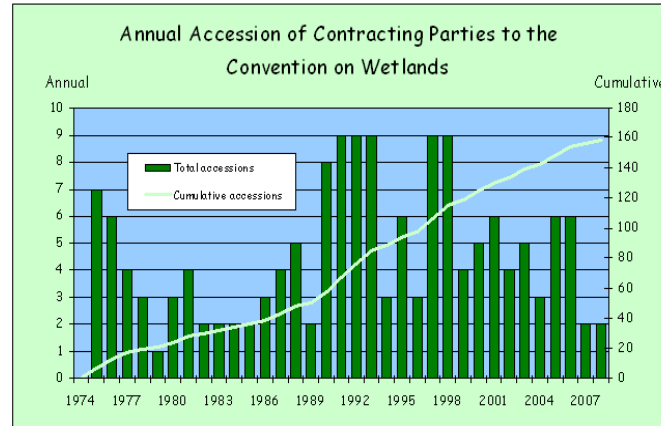
Human-made wetlands:

Rice fields, fish ponds, reservoirs, ditches and canals



Ramsar Convention growth since 1971

- Convention membership
- Ramsar sites
 - >2000 Sites
 - >200 Million hectares
 - Largest global ‘protected areas’ network
- Budget
 - not established until 1987!
- Secretariat
 - IUCN/IWRB provided role until 1987
 - Now 22 people: hosted by IUCN, Switzerland



Convention & its bodies

- **Convention** is a UN-recognised intergovernmental treaty (MEA)
- **Convention Secretariat** not *administered* by UN body (e.g. UNEP)
 - Facilitated since 1971 by IUCN

Contracting Parties

- Governments who are member states
 - Appoint an Administrative Authority (AA) responsible for national Convention implementation
 - May be Gvmt ministry, department or agency

Convention & its bodies

- **Contracting Parties (CPs)** are ultimate governance & decision-making body
- Meet every 3 years in **Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP)**
 - Decide budget and Convention implementation & priorities for next triennium
 - Most recent COP: COP11 Bucharest (Romania) July 2012
 - Next COP: COP12 Uruguay, mid-2015
 - All other Convention bodies responsible to COP

Convention & its bodies



- In each Contracting Party:
 - AA Head and National Focal Point (for day-to-day communications)
 - STRP NFP
 - CEPA NFPs (one gvmt & 1 NGO)
 - National Ramsar/wetland Committee
 - Ramsar Site managers

Convention & its bodies

- **Standing Committee (SC)**
 - Intersessional governance body
 - CP membership pro-rata by 6 Ramsar geopolitical regions
 - Africa, Asia, Europe, N America, Neotropics, Oceania
 - Meets annually (except COP year)
 - Sub-groups:
 - Finance
 - Management Working Group
 - COP
 - Others as needed (e.g. Strategic Plan redevelopment)

Convention & its bodies

- **Secretariat**
 - Executive group responsible for facilitating Convention processes and meetings
 - 22 staff, hosted by IUCN, Gland, Switzerland
 - 1 out-posted officer – Oceania (in SPREP, Samoa)
 - **Secretary General**
 - **Deputy Secretary General**
 - **Regional advisory teams:** 4 Senior Regional Advisors (each with an Assistant)
 - **Partnerships Coordinator**
 - **Communications team** (CEPA Officer, Documentation Officer, Communications Officer)
 - **Finance Officer**
 - **Danone Project Management Officer**
 - **Technical Staff** (Regional Affairs Officer, Sci. & Tech. Support Officer)
 - **Administrative staff**

- **Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP)**
 - Established in 1993 (COP5) by COP decision (Resolution)
 - Responsible for providing scientific & technical advice and guidance at the request of Parties
 - Also ‘horizon-scanning’ to pro-actively advise on new and emerging issues
 - Core group of 18 Members appointed for expertise “in their own right”
 - Supported by: invited experts; Observer Organisations etc.

- Work governed by STRP *modus operandi* adopted by COP
- Meets in 2 plenary sessions per triennium
- Plus mid-term workshops
- Intersessionally through Working Groups
 - Electronically through STRP Web-portal & work space

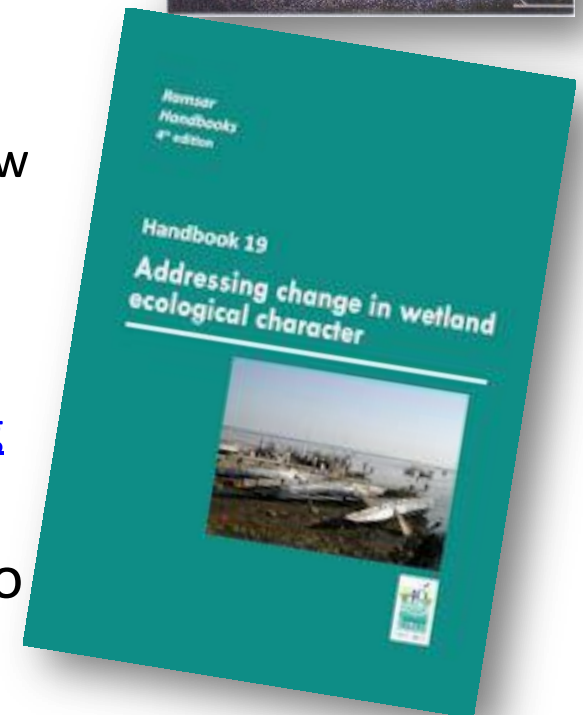
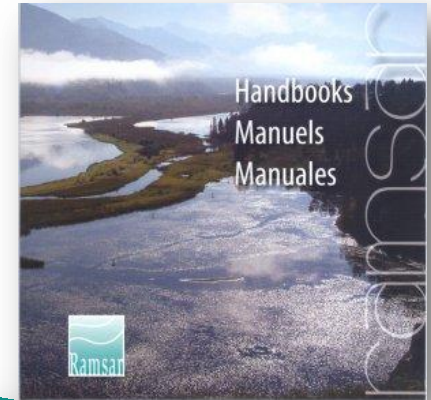
Types of STRP outputs/products



- **Draft Resolutions** (DRs) to COP (on scientific & technical issues)
- **Guidelines** on aspects of Convention implementation (annexed to COP DRs)
- **COP Information Papers** (supporting sci/tech DRs)
- ***Ramsar Technical Reports (RTRs)***
 - More detailed reviews and methodologies (peer reviewed)
 - Previously only as COP Information Papers (v grey literature)
- ***Scientific & Technical Briefing Notes (BNs)***
 - Issues papers, often preceding preparation of guidance for COP
- **other types of outputs** – flexible (e.g. Training/capacity building tools for Parties)
- In designing 2013-2015 outputs, be very clear about who each is for, and design fit-for-purpose products

Ramsar Toolkit: *Wise Use Handbooks*

- *Since 1993, major range of guidelines to support for implementation by Parties*
 - Provide all STRP guidance prepared over the years (adopted at different COPs)
 - Plus additional supporting materials
 - Compiled **thematically** for ease of use by Parties and others
 - English, French & Spanish
- **4th edition**
 - including 2008 COP10-adopted substantive new guidance
 - 21 *Handbooks*
 - Published in 2010/2011
 - CD-ROM and Ramsar Website www.ramsar.org
 - Also being translated into Arabic and Russian
- **5th edition** (with COP11 materials) about to be prepared



Ramsar

**We *must* all work better together
to maintain our source of life and
livelihoods**

*The natural infrastructure of
wetlands for water and other
benefits to people*