



The Ramsar Convention Manual

A Guide to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

3rd edition



The Ramsar Convention Manual: a Guide to the Convention on Wetlands
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2 February – World Wetlands Day

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Foreword to the 3rd English edition

When the *Ramsar Manual* was first compiled by T. J. Davis and published in 1994, it was enthusiastically welcomed as an essential *vade mecum* through the sometimes bewildering world of Ramsar resolutions, guidelines, and terminology. It grew out of date quickly, however, especially because the work completed by the Conference of the Contracting Parties at its 6th meeting, held in Brisbane in 1996, added a large number of new tools to the Convention's armamentarium.

Accordingly, a second edition was published in 1997, incorporating all of the institutional changes of the preceding three years and including as annexes all of the major documents associated with the Convention.

Following COP7 in San José in 1999, however, it was felt that the volume of Ramsar documentary material had simply grown too large to be included as appendices to the *Manual*, and that the growing use by the public of the Ramsar Web site had made the descriptive body of the *Manual* less necessary. At that time, then, the *Ramsar Manual* was let go out of print, and the 9-volume "Ramsar Toolkit" (*The Ramsar Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands*) was published separately in January 2000 in order to make available all of the major guidance adopted by the COP.

The Handbooks have proved to be invaluable, and a second edition, including the guidance documents emerging from COP8 in Valencia in 2002, will be available on CD-ROM in early 2004. The judgment about the explanatory body of the *Manual*, however, turned out to be wrong, and many people have argued that there is still a need for a brief, printed introduction to the Convention and its processes.

Thus this third edition contains a thorough update of the second, taking account of all that has changed since 1997. In place of the 2nd edition's 17 documentary appendices, however, in this edition we have substituted merely a list of references to the Web addresses of all of the documents mentioned in the text and a list of the contents of the forthcoming 14-volume Handbooks series. **For Ramsar documents and resources mentioned that the text without references, those links can be found in Appendix 3.**

Suggestions for additions and improvements to this Manual in an eventual fourth edition will be very welcome.

Note: Parts of the following text have been cross-referenced to other sections of the text by use of the symbol § to indicate section numbers.

March 2004



1. The Ramsar Convention

1.1 What is the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands?

The *Convention on Wetlands* is an intergovernmental treaty adopted on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Thus, though nowadays the name of the Convention is usually written “Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)”, it has come to be known popularly as the “Ramsar Convention”. Ramsar is the first of the modern global intergovernmental treaties on the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, but, compared with more recent ones, its provisions are relatively straightforward and general. Over the years, the Conference of the Contracting Parties has further developed and interpreted the basic tenets of the treaty text and succeeded in keeping the work of the Convention abreast of changing world perceptions, priorities, and trends in environmental thinking.

The official name of the treaty, *The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat*, reflects the original emphasis upon the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily as habitat for waterbirds. Over the years, however, the Convention has broadened its scope to cover **all aspects** of wetland conservation and wise use, recognizing wetlands as ecosystems that are extremely important for biodiversity conservation and for the well-being of human communities. For this reason, the increasingly common use of the short form of the treaty’s title, the “Convention on Wetlands”, is entirely appropriate. (Changing the name of the treaty requires amending the treaty itself, a cumbersome process that for the time being the Contracting Parties are not willing to undertake.)

The Convention entered into force in 1975 and now (as of February 2004) has 138 Contracting Parties, or member States, in all parts of the world. Though the central Ramsar message is the need for the sustainable use of all wetlands, the “flagship” of the Convention is the **List of Wetlands of International Importance** (the “Ramsar List”) – presently, the Parties have designated for this List more than 1,370 wetlands for special protection as “Ramsar Sites”, covering 120 million hectares (1.2 million square kilometres), larger than the surface area of France, Germany, and Switzerland combined.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) serves as Depositary¹ for the Convention, but the Ramsar Convention is not part of the United Nations and UNESCO system of environment conventions and agreements. The Convention is responsible only to its Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP), and its day-to-day administration has been entrusted to a secretariat under the authority of a Standing Committee elected by the COP. The Ramsar Secretariat is hosted by IUCN–The World Conservation Union in Gland, Switzerland.

The mission of the Ramsar Convention, as adopted by the Parties in 1999 and refined in 2002, is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”.

1.2 What are wetlands?

Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by shallow water.

The Ramsar Convention takes a broad approach in determining the wetlands which come under its aegis. Under the text of the Convention (Article 1.1), wetlands are defined as:

“areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”.

In addition, for the purpose of protecting coherent sites, the Article 2.1 provides that wetlands to be included in the Ramsar List of internationally important wetlands:

¹ The Depositary receives, reviews, and accepts the instruments of accession of each county member of the treaty, keeps the official text of the Convention in six official languages, and provides legal interpretations of the text when required. The Depositary does not have a role in the administration and/or implementation of the treaty.



“may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands”.

Five major wetland types are generally recognized:

- ❑ **marine** (coastal wetlands including coastal lagoons, rocky shores, and coral reefs);
- ❑ **estuarine** (including deltas, tidal marshes, and mangrove swamps);
- ❑ **lacustrine** (wetlands associated with lakes);
- ❑ **riverine** (wetlands along rivers and streams); and
- ❑ **palustrine** (meaning “marshy” – marshes, swamps and bogs).

In addition, there are **human-made wetlands** such as fish and shrimp ponds, farm ponds, irrigated agricultural land, salt pans, reservoirs, gravel pits, sewage farms and canals. The Ramsar Convention has adopted a Ramsar Classification of Wetland Type which includes 42 types, grouped into three categories: Marine and Coastal Wetlands, Inland Wetlands, and Human-made Wetlands.

According to the text of the Convention, marine wetlands are considered to be wetlands up to a depth of **six meters** at low tide (the figure is thought to come from the maximum depth to which sea ducks can dive whilst feeding), but the treaty also provides for waters deeper than six meters, as well as islands, to be included within the boundaries of protected wetlands. It is also worth noting that lakes and rivers are understood to be covered by the Ramsar definition of wetlands in their entirety, regardless of their depth.

Wetlands occur everywhere, from the tundra to the tropics. How much of the earth’s surface is presently composed of wetlands is not known exactly. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre has suggested an estimate of about 570 million hectares (5.7 million km²) – roughly 6% of the Earth’s land surface – of which 2% are lakes, 30% bogs, 26% fens, 20% swamps, and 15% floodplains. Mitsch and Gosselink, in their standard textbook *Wetlands*, 3d ed. (2000), suggest 4 to 6% of the Earth’s land surface. Mangroves cover some 240,000 km² of coastal area, and an estimated 600,000km² of coral reefs remain worldwide. Nevertheless, a global review of wetland resources prepared for Ramsar COP7 in 1999, while affirming that “it is not possible to provide an acceptable figure of the areal extent of wetlands at a global scale”, indicated a ‘best’ minimum global estimate at between 748 and 778 million hectares. The same report indicated that this “minimum” could be increased to a total of between 999 and 4,462 million hectares when other sources of information were taken into account.

1.3 Why conserve wetlands?

Wetlands are among the world’s most productive environments. They are cradles of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival. They support high concentrations of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species. Wetlands are also important storehouses of plant genetic material. Rice, for example, which is a common wetland plant, is the staple diet of more than half of humanity.

The multiple roles of wetland ecosystems and their value to humanity have been increasingly understood and documented in recent years. This has led to large expenditures to restore lost or degraded hydrological and biological functions of wetlands. But it’s not enough – the race is on to improve practices on a significant global scale as the world’s leaders try to cope with the accelerating water crisis and the effects of climate change. And this at a time when the world’s population is likely to increase by 70 million every year for the next 20 years.

Global freshwater consumption rose sixfold between 1900 and 1995 – more than double the rate of population growth. One third of the world’s population today lives in countries already experiencing moderate to high water stress. By 2025, two out of every three people on Earth may well face life in water stressed conditions.

The ability of wetlands to adapt to changing conditions, and to accelerating rates of change, will be crucial to human communities and wildlife everywhere as the full impact of climate change on our ecosystem lifelines is felt. Small wonder that there is a worldwide focus on wetlands and their services to us.

Policy- and decision-makers frequently make development decisions based upon simple calculations of the monetary pros and cons of the proposals before them – the importance of wetlands for the environment and for human societies has traditionally been under-rated in these calculations because of the difficulty of assigning dollar values to the wetland ecosystem’s values and



benefits, goods and services. Thus, more and more economists and other scientists are working in the growing field of the valuation of ecosystem services. This is a difficult task, but in order for decision-makers to have the correct information before them about the comparable monetary values of a healthy wetland, the economic losses of a lost or degraded wetland, there is no choice but to progress in this direction. Some recent studies have indicated that ecosystems provide at least US\$ 33 trillion worth of services annually, of which about US\$ 4.9 trillion are attributed to wetlands.

In addition, wetlands are important, and sometimes essential, for the health, welfare and safety of people who live in or near them. They are amongst the world's most productive environments and provide a wide array of benefits.

(a) Functions

The interactions of physical, biological and chemical components of a wetland, such as soils, water, plants and animals, enable the wetland to perform many vital functions, for example:

- water storage;
- storm protection and flood mitigation;
- shoreline stabilization and erosion control;
- groundwater recharge (the movement of water from the wetland down into the underground aquifer);
- groundwater discharge (the movement of water upward to become surface water in a wetland);
- water purification;
- retention of nutrients;
- retention of sediments;
- retention of pollutants;
- stabilization of local climate conditions, particularly rainfall and temperature.

(b) Values

Wetlands frequently provide tremendous economic benefits, for example:

- water supply (quantity and quality);
- fisheries (over two thirds of the world's fish harvest is linked to the health of wetland areas);
- agriculture, through the maintenance of water tables and nutrient retention in floodplains;
- timber and other building materials;
- energy resources, such as peat and plant matter;
- wildlife resources;
- transport;
- a wide range of other wetland products, including herbal medicines;
- recreation and tourism opportunities.

In addition, wetlands have special attributes as part of the cultural heritage of humanity – they are related to religious and cosmological beliefs and spiritual values, constitute a source of aesthetic and artistic inspiration, yield invaluable archaeological evidence from the remote past, provide wildlife sanctuaries, and form the basis of important local social, economic, and cultural traditions.

These functions, values, and attributes can only be maintained if the ecological processes of wetlands are allowed to continue functioning. Unfortunately, and in spite of important progress made in recent decades, wetlands continue to be among the world's most threatened ecosystems, owing mainly to ongoing drainage, conversion, pollution, and over-exploitation of their resources.

The Convention's 11-sheet information pack on "Wetland Values and Functions" and 10-sheet info pack on "The Cultural Heritage of Wetlands" are available from the Secretariat and on the Ramsar Web site.



1.4 Why an intergovernmental convention on wetlands?

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was developed as a means to call international attention to the rate at which wetland habitats were disappearing, in part due to a lack of understanding of their important functions, values, goods and services. Governments that join the Convention are expressing their willingness to make a commitment to helping to reverse that history of wetland loss and degradation.

In addition, many wetlands are international systems lying across the boundaries of two or more States, or are part of river basins that include more than one State. The health of these and other wetlands is dependent upon the quality and quantity of the transboundary water supply from rivers, streams, lakes, or underground aquifers. The best intentions of countries on either side of those frontiers can be frustrated without a framework for international discussion and cooperation toward mutual benefits.

Human impacts on water sources, such as agricultural, industrial or domestic pollution, may occur at considerable distances from wetland areas, often beyond the borders of the States affected. Where this occurs, wetland habitats can be degraded or even destroyed, and the health and livelihood of local people put at risk.

Many of the wetland fauna, for example some fish species, many waterbirds, insects such as butterflies and dragonflies, and mammals such as otters, are migratory species whose conservation and management also require international cooperation.

In sum, wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value to human life; wetlands and people are ultimately interdependent. As such, the progressive encroachment on and loss of wetlands needs to be stemmed, and measures must be taken to conserve and make wise use of wetland resources. To achieve this at a global level requires cooperative, intergovernmental action. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands provides the framework for such international, as well as for national and local action.

1.5 Why do nations join the Ramsar Convention?

Membership in the Ramsar Convention:

- ❑ entails an endorsement of and commitment to the principles that the Convention represents, facilitating the development at national level of policies and actions, including legislation, that help nations to make the best possible use of their wetland resources in their quest for sustainable development;
- ❑ presents an opportunity for a country to make its voice heard in the principal intergovernmental forum on the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
- ❑ brings increased publicity and prestige for the wetlands designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, and hence increased possibility of support for conservation and wise use measures;
- ❑ brings access to the latest information and advice on adoption of the Convention's internationally-accepted standards, such as criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance, advice on application of the wise use concept, and guidelines on management planning in wetlands;
- ❑ brings access to expert advice on national and site-related problems of wetland conservation and management through contacts with Ramsar Secretariat personnel and collaborators and through application of the Ramsar Advisory Mission when appropriate; and
- ❑ encourages international cooperation on wetland issues and brings the possibility of support for wetland projects, either through the Convention's own small grants assistance programmes or through the Convention's contacts with multilateral and bilateral external support agencies.

According to National Reports submitted by Contracting Parties, the Convention has frequently been instrumental in halting or preventing negative developments affecting wetlands. Some examples include:

- ❑ modification of the development adjacent to Åkersvika Ramsar Site in Norway, leading to greater protection of the site, an increase in its size, and extension of the buffer zone (1992);



- ❑ replacement of a project for mining heavy metals in the dunes of the St. Lucia Ramsar Site in South Africa by environmentally friendly development alternatives (Cabinet decision, 1996);
- ❑ measures to end illegal agriculture that was having a negative impact in the Nariva Swamp in Trinidad and Tobago, and development of an integrated management plan for the site (1996);
- ❑ abandonment of plans to construct a garbage dumping site at Fujimae, the last remaining major mudflat system near Nagoya City, Japan, when in 2001 the city government joined the momentum to designate Fujimae as a Ramsar Site.

Many Contracting Parties have noted that their conservation efforts have been greatly assisted by the inclusion of a wetland site in the Montreux Record of Ramsar Sites requiring priority attention (§4.1.5). For example:

- ❑ The **Azraq Oasis** in Jordan benefited from being placed on the Montreux Record and from the related Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) that was applied, as early as 1990, to study the threats to the wetland and recommend solutions. Its status as a Ramsar Site also played an important role in the approval of a significant project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- ❑ The Austrian Ramsar Committee noted in 1996 that inclusion of the **Donau-March-Auen** in the Montreux Record, and application of the Ramsar Advisory Mission in 1991, has been beneficial for the ecological character of the site. A wise use plan has been drawn up, with the close involvement of NGOs, and LIFE funding for management work has been received from the European Commission.
- ❑ Based on the findings of a first Ramsar Advisory Mission in 1992 to make recommendations concerning negative changes to the ecological character of the **Srebarna Nature Reserve** in Bulgaria, the Ramsar and World Heritage site was placed on the Montreux Record and the authorities undertook to carry out the recommendations. The Ramsar Small Grants Fund provided the means for the development of a management plan for the site, and a second RAM, conducted jointly with IUCN and the World Heritage Convention in October 2001, observed “a stable and sustained trend towards improvement of the ecological character”, concluding that “Bulgaria has demonstrated the determination, legislative framework, scientific and management capacity and public support to achieve and maintain” the wetland’s values. The mission recommended that, following the provision of additional information, the authorities should begin the procedure for removing Srebarna from the Montreux Record and the List of World Heritage in Danger.
- ❑ **Chilika Lake**, the largest lagoon on the east coast of India, was designated as a Ramsar Site in 1981. Because of serious degradation brought about mainly by siltation and choking of the seawater inlet channel, resulting in the proliferation of invasive freshwater species, the decrease in fish productivity, and an overall loss of biodiversity, Chilika was added to the Montreux Record in 1993. Created in 1992 to address these problems, the Chilika Development Authority has implemented a bold programme of action to restore the ecosystem and improve the socio-economic conditions of the local communities. The restoration of Chilika lagoon was marked by the strong participation by the communities, linkage with various national and international institutions, and intensive monitoring and assessment systems. In 2001, a Ramsar Advisory Mission visited the site and concluded that it should be removed from the Montreux Record, provided that the management measures are continued and monitored. The case is a good example of how the listing of a site on the Montreux Record can be used to promote measures to correct change in ecological character and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the population living in and around the site. The Chilika Development Authority won the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award in 2002 for its innovative efforts.

Wetlands need not be of international importance for the Ramsar Convention to play a part in their conservation and wise use. The very fact that a State is a Contracting Party to the Convention can be used to establish the necessary legislative and management framework to ensure the long-term productivity and effective environmental functions of all its wetlands.

1.6 Who may join the Ramsar Convention?

According to Article 9.2 of the Convention on Wetlands, “Any member of the United Nations or of one of the Specialized Agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency or Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may become a Party to this Convention”. Unfortunately, supranational bodies, such as the European Community, are thus not eligible to join the Convention, but may nevertheless develop bilateral working agreements with the Convention secretariat.



No state is too small to join as long as it can designate a wetland which meets one or more of the Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance (§4.1.1) adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention.

1.7 What are the commitments of Parties joining the Ramsar Convention?

Because wetlands are important for maintaining key ecological processes, for their rich flora and fauna, and for the benefits that they provide to local communities and to human society in general, the broad objectives of the Convention are to ensure their conservation and wise use. States that join the Convention accept four main commitments, which are:

1.7.1 Listed sites (Article 2 of the Convention. See Appendix 1)

The first obligation under the Convention is for a Party to designate at least one wetland at the time of accession for inclusion in the **List of Wetlands of International Importance** (the “Ramsar List”) (Article 2.4) and to promote its conservation, and in addition to continue to “designate suitable wetlands within its territory” for the List (Article 2.1). Selection for the Ramsar List should be based on the wetland’s significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology, or hydrology. The Contracting Parties have developed specific criteria and guidelines for identifying sites that qualify for inclusion in the Ramsar List.

In Article 3.2 (§4.1.7), the Parties have committed themselves “to arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay” to the Ramsar Secretariat.

1.7.2 Wise use (Article 3 of the Convention)

Under the Convention there is a general obligation for the Contracting Parties to include wetland conservation considerations in their national land-use planning. They have committed themselves to formulate and implement this planning so as to promote, as far as possible, “**the wise use of wetlands in their territory**” (Article 3.1 of the treaty).

The Conference of the Contracting Parties has approved guidelines and additional guidance on how to achieve “wise use”, which has been interpreted as being synonymous with “sustainable use” (§4.2). The COP has also adopted detailed guidance on the development of National Wetland Policies and on management planning for individual wetland sites.

1.7.3 Reserves and training (Article 4 of the Convention)

Contracting Parties have also undertaken to establish nature reserves in wetlands, whether or not they are included in the Ramsar List, and they are also expected to promote training in the fields of wetland research, management and wardening.

1.7.4 International cooperation (Article 5 of the Convention)

Contracting Parties have also agreed to consult with other Contracting Parties about implementation of the Convention, especially in regard to transfrontier wetlands, shared water systems, and shared species.

1.7.5 Compliance with the commitments

The Ramsar Convention is not a regulatory regime and has no punitive sanctions for violations of or defaulting upon treaty commitments – nevertheless, its terms do constitute a solemn treaty and are binding in international law in that sense. The whole edifice is based upon an expectation of common and equitably shared transparent accountability. Failure to live up to that expectation could lead to political and diplomatic discomfort in high-profile international fora, and would prevent any Party concerned from getting the most, more generally, out of what would otherwise be a robust and coherent system of checks and balances and mutual support frameworks. Failure to meet the treaty’s commitments may also impact upon success in other ways, for example, in efforts to secure international funding for wetland conservation. In addition, some national jurisdictions now embody international Ramsar obligations in national law and/or policy with direct effect in their own court systems.



1.8 Further interpretation of the commitments

Over the years, the Conference of the Contracting Parties has interpreted and elaborated upon these four major obligations included within the text of the treaty, and it has developed guidelines for assisting the Parties in their implementation. These guidelines are published in the Ramsar Handbook series and on the Ramsar Web site.

Although Resolutions do not have the same legal force as commitments specified in the convention text itself, the Contracting Parties further spelt out their interpretation of their responsibilities in Resolution 5.1 (1993) of the Conference of the Parties (“Framework for the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention”), as follows:

(a) Conservation of wetlands

- to designate wetlands for the List of Wetlands of International Importance;
- to formulate and implement planning so as to promote conservation of listed sites;
- to advise the Secretariat of any change in the ecological character of listed sites;
- to compensate for any loss of wetland resources if a listed wetland is deleted or restricted;
- to use Ramsar criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance;
- to use the Ramsar datasheet and classification system for describing listed sites;
- to consider appropriate management measures after designation and, where appropriate, to use the Montreux Record and [Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanisms];
- to formulate and implement planning so as to promote the wise use of wetlands;
- to adopt and apply the Guidelines for Implementation of the Wise Use Concept, notably as regards elaboration and implementation of national wetland policies, and the Additional Guidance on Wise Use;
- to make environmental impact assessments before transformations of wetlands;
- to establish nature reserves on wetlands and provide adequately for their wardening;
- to increase waterfowl populations through management of appropriate wetlands;
- to make national wetland inventories which will identify major sites for wetland biodiversity;
- to train personnel competent in wetland research, management, and wardening.

(b) Promotion of international cooperation in wetland conservation

- to promote conservation of wetlands by combining far-sighted national policies with coordinated international action;
- to consult with other Contracting Parties about implementing obligations arising from the Convention, especially concerning shared wetlands and water systems and shared species;
- to promote wetland conservation concerns with development aid agencies;
- to establish wetland restoration projects.

(c) Fostering communication about wetland conservation

- to encourage research and exchange of data;
- to produce national reports for Conferences of the Parties;
- to increase the number of Contracting Parties.

(d) Supporting the work of the Convention

- to convene and attend Conferences of the Parties;
- to adopt the Paris Protocol and Regina Amendments;
- to make financial contributions to the Convention budget and to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund.

1.9 Reporting

One extremely important part of the Parties’ responsibilities, suggested in the text and subsequently confirmed by COP decisions, has to do with reporting on the implementation of the Convention within their territories. The Parties report on their progress in meeting their commitments under the Convention by submitting triennial National Reports (§3.1) to the Conference of the Contracting Parties – these are prepared following a format adopted by the Parties which follows the Strategic Plan of the Convention, and they become part of the public record. In addition, under Article 3.2 of the treaty



(§4.1.7), Parties are expected to report to the Secretariat any changes or threats to the ecological character of their listed wetlands and to respond to the Secretariat's inquiries about such reports received from third parties.

1.10 The Ramsar Convention today

As of February 2004, there are 138 Contracting Parties, or member States, in all parts of the world. More than 1,370 wetlands have been designated for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, covering 120 million hectares (1.2 million square kilometres), larger than the surface area of France, Germany, and Switzerland combined.

Representatives of the Contracting Parties convene at least every three years in meetings of the "Conference of the Contracting Parties", or COP (§3.1), to discuss the implementation of the Convention and its further development, to consider national experiences, to review the status of sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, to adopt technical and policy guidance for the Parties on matters affecting the wetlands in their territories, to promote cooperative activities, to receive reports from international organizations, and to adopt the budget for the Convention secretariat for the ensuing three years.

The Convention is administered by a secretariat (§3.3), an independent body hosted by IUCN–The World Conservation Union under the authority of the Ramsar Standing Committee. Its headquarters are located in Gland, Switzerland.

1.11 The Ramsar Strategic Plan and the "three pillars" of the Convention

The 6th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP6), held in Brisbane, Australia, in 1996, adopted an innovative Strategic Plan 1997-2002 which became a model for the planning processes of other conventions. Following on from the success of that plan, COP8, in Valencia, Spain, 2002, concluded three years of consultation and drafting by adopting the **Strategic Plan 2003-2008**. Its purpose is not only to continue the thrust of the first plan but also to take account of the fact that a still broader approach to wetland conservation and sustainable development was needed, notably in relation to poverty eradication and food and water security, integrated approaches to water management, climate change and its predicted impacts, increasing globalization of trade and reducing of trade barriers, the increasing role of the private sector, and the increasing influence of development banks and international development agencies.

In the second Strategic Plan, Contracting Parties seek to deliver their commitments to wetland conservation and wise use through "three pillars" of action. These are:

- a) working towards the **wise use of their wetlands** through a wide range of actions and processes contributing to human well-being (including poverty alleviation and water and food security) through sustainable wetlands, water allocation, and river basin management, including establishing national wetland policies and plans; reviewing and harmonizing the framework of laws and financial instruments affecting wetlands; undertaking inventory and assessment; integrating wetlands into the sustainable development process; ensuring public participation in wetland management and the maintenance of cultural values by local communities and indigenous people; promoting communication, education and public awareness; increasing private sector involvement; and harmonizing implementation of the Ramsar Convention with other multilateral environmental agreements;
- b) devoting particular attention to the further identification, designation and management of a coherent and comprehensive suite of sites for **the List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List)** as a contribution to the establishment of a global ecological network, and ensuring the effective monitoring and management of those sites included in the List; and
- c) **cooperating internationally** in their delivery of wetland conservation and wise use, through the management of transboundary water resources and wetlands and shared wetland species, collaboration with other conventions and international organizations, sharing of information and expertise, and increasing the flow of financial resources and relevant technologies to developing countries and countries in transition.

Each of these "three pillars" is addressed by a General Objective of the Strategic Plan. Two further General Objectives provide the means to undertake effective implementation of the objectives related to the three pillars of the Convention. The five General Objectives give structure to a total of 21 Operational Objectives, covering the following subject areas:



1. Inventory and assessment
2. Policies and legislation, including impact assessment and valuation
3. Integration of wetland wise use into sustainable development
4. Restoration and rehabilitation
5. Invasive alien species
6. Local communities, indigenous people, and cultural values
7. Private sector involvement
8. Incentives
9. Communication, education, and public awareness
10. Designation of Ramsar Sites
11. Management planning and monitoring of Ramsar Sites
12. Management of shared water resources, wetlands and wetland species
13. Collaboration with other institutions
14. Sharing of expertise and information
15. Financing the conservation and wise use of wetlands
16. Financing of the Convention
17. Institutional mechanisms of the Convention
18. Institutional capacity of Contracting Parties
19. International Organization Partners and others
20. Training
21. Membership of the Convention

The Strategic Plan 2003-2008 is available in English, French, and Spanish on the Ramsar Web site and can be obtained in hard copy or CD-ROM from the Ramsar Secretariat.

1.12 Synergies with other environment-related conventions

The benefits of coordination and collaboration amongst conventions and international organizations with related or overlapping missions have been widely recognized for some time. The Ramsar Secretariat has devoted a great deal of effort to developing synergies with other environment-related instruments, and continues to do so. In some cases, follow-up assessments of the tangible progress of these relationships have shown that the initiative has been well worth it to all parties concerned. Similarly, the Secretariat has been taking vigorous steps to encourage Ramsar's "Administrative Authorities" (national focal points, §3.4) to build close working relationships with their counterparts for the other conventions at national level. (Synergies with other organizations and institutions besides the conventions can be found in §3.9.)

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

In January 1996, the secretariats of the Ramsar Convention and the CBD signed a Memorandum of Cooperation, and in November 1996, the CBD's COP3 invited Ramsar "to cooperate as a lead partner" in implementing CBD activities related to wetlands. Accordingly a Joint Work Plan 1998-1999 between the two conventions was developed and implemented, and then a second Joint Work Plan was successfully carried out for the period 2000-2001 – presently a third Joint Work Plan, for the period 2002-2006, endorsed by the 6th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, April 2002, and by Ramsar COP8 (Resolution VIII.5) in November 2002, is continuing to provide a blueprint for mutual cooperation between the conventions. The Conferences of the Parties of both conventions have also called for increased communication and cooperation between their subsidiary scientific bodies, the CBD's Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP, §3.5), and members of both of these bodies regularly participate in the work and meetings of one another.

The Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

The Ramsar Secretariat and the CMS Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding in February 1997. It seeks to ensure cooperation between the two secretariats in the fields of joint promotion of the two conventions; joint conservation action; data collection, storage and analysis; and new agreements on migratory species, including endangered migratory species and species with an unfavorable conservation status. Some concrete results of this relationship have already been observed, particularly with regards to coordinated work between Ramsar and the CMS's African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). A three-way joint work plan between the secretariats of the CMS, AEWA, and the Ramsar Convention is presently being developed and was signed in early 2004.



UNESCO World Heritage Convention

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ramsar Secretariat and the World Heritage Centre in May 1999. The Ramsar Secretariat and the World Heritage officer in charge of natural sites maintain a close working relationship with a view to:

- ❑ promoting nominations of wetland sites under the two conventions;
- ❑ reviewing reporting formats and coordinating the reporting about shared sites;
- ❑ contributing to both conventions' training efforts;
- ❑ coordinating fundraising initiatives concerning shared sites;
- ❑ and encouraging the establishment of joint national committees.

In particular, World Heritage and Ramsar have worked extraordinarily closely on joint expert advisory missions recently to Ichkeul in Tunisia, to Djoudj and Diawling in Senegal and Mauritania, and to Lake Srebarna in Bulgaria.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Wetlands are crucially important everywhere, and even more so in arid lands. Thus the Ramsar Secretariat was present at the first UNCCD Conference of the Parties in October 1997, where it distributed to the delegates an information document on "*Wetlands in Arid Zones*". In December 1998, during the second UNCCD Conference of the Parties in Dakar, the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention and the Executive Secretary of the CCD signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the secretariats to help to increase communication between them, coordinate efforts, and avoid duplication. Practical cooperation between the secretariats has been developing only slowly so far, however.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

In preparation for UNFCCC COP5, the Ramsar Secretariat commissioned IUCN to prepare a technical document entitled *Wetlands and Climate Change: exploring collaboration between the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*. The paper was translated into the six UN official languages and distributed to the UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and to delegates to its COP5.

As a result SBSTA "requested the secretariat [of UNFCCC] to liaise with the secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands on the specific issues identified in the oral report delivered by the representative of that secretariat in order to determine how cooperation between the conventions could be strengthened. The SBSTA requested the secretariat to report back to it on this matter at its twelfth session." The Ramsar Secretariat is working with the UNFCCC secretariat to prepare an official document for submission to SBSTA and to an upcoming UNFCCC Conference of the Parties. In Resolution VIII.3 (2002), the Conference of the Parties requested the Ramsar STRP to work further with the UNFCCC and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on the relationships between wetlands and climate change.

Regional conventions and basin commissions

The Ramsar Secretariat has also effected Memoranda of Cooperation with UNEP's **Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region** (Cartagena Convention), signed in May 2000, and with the **Coordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean** (Barcelona Convention), signed in February 2001. The **South Pacific Regional Environment Programme** (SPREP) is a partner with the Ramsar Convention under a Joint Work Plan that covers the period 2002-2003, and the **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River** (ICPDR) cooperates under the terms of an agreement signed in November 2000. Furthermore, the Ramsar Convention and WWF's Living Waters Programme are both closely involved in the work of the **Lake Chad Basin Commission** and the **Niger Basin Authority**, with both of which the Ramsar Secretariat has memoranda of cooperation signed in November 2002.

Coordination among conventions

The Ramsar Secretariat participates in the conventions' coordinating meetings organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and has welcomed the tendency of these meetings to focus less on purely administrative matters and more upon substantive coordination issues. The Ramsar Secretariat has contributed staff time and financial resources to joint working groups and studies aimed at harmonizing the requirements of the biodiversity-related conventions, as for example a study carried out by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) on the feasibility of harmonizing



reporting requirements under the different instruments, and has participated in UNEP's Environmental Management Group (EMG).

A decision by the UNFCCC's COP8 (December 2002) recently invited the Ramsar Convention to participate in the work of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) of UNFCCC, the CBD, and UNCCD. In addition, the five biodiversity-related conventions – the CBD, CITES, CMS, Ramsar, and World Heritage – have a Joint Web site hosted by the CBD secretariat, initiated in March 1999.



2. A brief history of the Ramsar Convention

2.1 Background

The initial call for an international convention on wetlands came in 1962 during a conference which formed part of Project MAR (from “MARshes”, “MARécages”, “MARismas”), a programme established in 1960 following concern at the rapidity with which large stretches of marshland and other wetlands in Europe were being “reclaimed” or otherwise destroyed, with a resulting decline in numbers of waterfowl.

The MAR Conference was organized by Dr Luc Hoffmann, with the participation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (now IUCN–The World Conservation Union), the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, IWRB (now Wetlands International), and the International Council for Bird Preservation, ICBP (now BirdLife International), and was held in Les Saintes Maries-de-la-Mer in the French Camargue, 12-16 November 1962.

Over the next eight years, a convention text was negotiated through a series of international technical meetings (St. Andrews, 1963; Noordwijk, 1966; Leningrad, 1968; Morges, 1968; Vienna, 1969; Moscow, 1969; Espoo, 1970), held mainly under the auspices of IWRB, the guidance of Prof. G.V.T. Matthews, and the leadership of the Government of the Netherlands. Initially the envisaged convention was directed specifically at the conservation of waterfowl through the creation of a network of refuges, but as the text developed, especially with the expert advice of legal consultant Mr Cyrille de Klemm, conservation of wetland habitat (rather than species) took prominence.

Finally, at an international meeting organized by Mr Eskander Firouz, Director of Iran’s Game and Fish Department, and held in the Caspian seaside resort of Ramsar in Iran, the text of the Convention was agreed on 2 February 1971 and signed by the delegates of 18 nations the next day.

The Convention entered into force in December 1975, upon receipt by UNESCO, the Convention Depositary, of the seventh instrument of accession to or ratification of the Convention, which came from Greece. The Convention celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2001 and now has Contracting Parties from all regions of the world.

Since its adoption, the Ramsar Convention has been modified on two occasions: by a protocol (a new treaty which amends the original treaty) in December 1982, and by a series of amendments to the original treaty, known as the “Regina Amendments” of 1987.

2.2 The Paris Protocol and the Regina Amendments

The **Paris Protocol** was adopted at an Extraordinary Conference of the Contracting Parties which was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in December 1982. The Protocol, which came into force in 1986, established a procedure for amending the Convention (Article 10 bis) and adopted official versions of the treaty in Arabic, French, English, German, Russian and Spanish. Almost all Contracting Parties have now accepted the Paris Protocol, and new Contracting Parties normally join the Ramsar Convention as amended by the Paris Protocol and the Regina Amendments (Appendix 1).

The **Regina Amendments** are a series of amendments to Articles 6 and 7 that were accepted at an Extraordinary Conference of the Contracting Parties (§3.1) held in Regina, Canada, in 1987. These did not affect the basic substantive principles of the Convention, but related to its operation – briefly, the amendments defined the powers of the Conference of the Parties, established an intersessional Standing Committee, and established both a permanent secretariat and a budget for the Convention. These amendments came into force on 1 May 1994, although the Parties, in the spirit of Resolution 3.4 from the 1987 meeting, observed the provisions of the amendments on a voluntary basis throughout the interim period.



2.3 A Ramsar chronology – key events

2 February 1971

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat is agreed by representatives of 18 nations meeting in the Iranian town of Ramsar, and signed the following day.

January 1974

Australia becomes the first State to deposit an instrument of accession to the Convention.

December 1974

An International Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl is held in Heiligenhafen, Germany, and adopts the first “Criteria to be used in identifying Wetlands of International Importance” as a recommendation; the conference was intended to be the first meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, but an insufficient number of countries had ratified the Convention to bring it into force in time.

December 1975

The Ramsar Convention comes into force four months after the seventh nation, Greece, deposits an instrument of accession. (The first six were Australia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, and Iran.)

August 1979

Contracting Parties are invited to prepare the first National Reports on the implementation of the Convention in their territories, for presentation to the First Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

November 1980

First Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Cagliari, Italy:

- ❑ adopts new criteria for identifying wetlands suitable for designation to the List of Wetlands of International Importance;
- ❑ approves the elaboration of a protocol (later to become the Paris Protocol) to amend the treaty.

December 1982

A Protocol modifying the original text of the Ramsar Convention is adopted by an Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris.

May 1984

Second Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Groningen, Netherlands:

- ❑ establishes the framework for implementing the Convention, a list of agreed commitments and priorities for the next triennium.

October 1986

Paris Protocol enters into force (after acceptance by two-thirds of Contracting Parties in 1982).

May-June 1987

Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties adopts the Regina Amendments to Articles 6 and 7 of the Convention.

Third (ordinary) Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Regina, Canada:

- ❑ adopts revised criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance;
- ❑ adopts guidelines for the implementation of the wise use of wetlands concept;
- ❑ establishes the Standing Committee, which meets for the first time;
- ❑ approves the establishment of the Ramsar “Bureau” (or secretariat) in two units, one within IUCN headquarters in Gland, Switzerland, and one within IWRB headquarters in Slimbridge, UK;
- ❑ establishes formal scientific and technical links with IUCN and IWRB;
- ❑ establishes a Wise Use Working Group.



January 1988

The Ramsar Secretariat (called the “Bureau”) is formally established as the Convention’s permanent secretariat, with Mr Dan Navid (USA) as the first Secretary General.

The Ramsar Advisory Mission (then called the ‘Monitoring Procedure’, and later the ‘Management Guidance Procedure’) is established by the Ramsar Standing Committee at its fourth meeting in Costa Rica.

1989

Adoption of the first Ramsar logo (a soaring blue bird of unknown species, trailed by splashes of pastel blue and green).

January 1989

Viet Nam becomes 50th Contracting Party to the Convention.

August 1989

Ramsar publishes its first book, *A Legal Analysis of the Adoption of the Implementation of the Convention in Denmark*, by Veit Koester (in the IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Papers series).

July 1990

Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Montreux, Switzerland:

- ❑ approves the framework for the implementation of the Convention;
- ❑ develops and adopts revised criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance;
- ❑ expands the guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept;
- ❑ consolidates the Ramsar Secretariat into a single unit within IUCN headquarters in Gland, Switzerland;
- ❑ continues to charge IWRB with responsibility for maintaining the Ramsar Database of Listed Sites;
- ❑ formalizes the Management Guidance Procedure;
- ❑ establishes the Montreux Record (though not formally known by this name until June 1993);
- ❑ establishes the Wetland Conservation Fund (later renamed “the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use”);
- ❑ adopts Spanish as the third working language of the Convention, alongside English and French.

December 1991

First Ramsar Regional Meeting (Asia) takes place, Karachi, Pakistan.

June 1993

Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Kushiro, Japan:

- ❑ adopts the Kushiro Statement as the basis for the Contracting Parties’ priorities for the coming triennium;
- ❑ establishes the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP);
- ❑ adopts additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use of wetlands concept;
- ❑ adopts management planning guidelines for wetland sites.

June 1993

Publication of *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Its History and Development*, by G.V.T. Matthews.

October 1993

Publication of *Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands*, the report of the Wise Use Project.

December 1993

Lithuania becomes 80th Contracting Party to the Convention.

January 1994

First meeting of the STRP takes place in association with the IUCN General Assembly in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

May 1994

Regina Amendments to Articles 6 and 7 of the Convention enter into force.



December 1994

Mr James McCuaig, seconded from Environment Canada, serves for six months as Interim Secretary General, replacing Mr Dan Navid.

August 1995

Mr Delmar Blasco (Argentina) becomes the Convention's second Secretary General.

January 1996

Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the secretariats of the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the first of many memoranda between the Ramsar Secretariat and the secretariats of other Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs). In subsequent years, Joint Work Plans are developed to increase synergies between the two conventions.

February 1996

The Ramsar Convention's Web site is inaugurated.

March 1996

Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Brisbane, Australia:

- adopts the Strategic Plan 1997-2002;
- adopts criteria based on fish for identifying wetlands of international importance;
- adopts working definitions of ecological character and guidelines for describing and maintaining the ecological character of listed sites;
- adopts a resolution on Ramsar and water.

October 1996

The Standing Committee formally establishes 2 February as World Wetlands Day.

The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) is established as the first regional arrangement under the Convention.

February 1997

Bahamas and Georgia both accede to the Convention on 7 February, becoming the 99th and 100th Contracting Parties.

2 February 1997

The first World Wetlands Day is celebrated in about 50 nations and becomes an annual event.

May 1997

The Ramsar Forum, a public e-mail discussion group for Ramsar-related issues, is established by the Secretariat.

The Ramsar Secretariat's Internship Programme begins with the arrival of the first group of four assistants to the Senior Regional Advisors (then called "Regional Coordinators").

Ramsar publishes *The Economic Valuation of Wetlands* in English, French, and Spanish.

October 1997

First three-year phase of the Wetlands for the Future initiative begins by agreement between the Ramsar Secretariat, the United States State Department, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service; later renewed.

December 1997

Wetlands, Biodiversity and the Ramsar Convention: the role of the Convention on Wetlands in the conservation and wise use of wetlands, edited by A.J. Hails, is published by the Ramsar Secretariat.

January 1998

The Evian Project, to assist communications and training activities under the Convention, is established by an agreement signed among the Ramsar Secretariat, the Groupe Danone from the private sector, the French GEF, and the Government of France.



October 1998

The Standing Committee adopts the new Ramsar logo (the word Ramsar on a blue-green background with two white lines suggesting waves).

May 1999

Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, San José, Costa Rica:

- ❑ adopts a “toolkit” of guidelines on National Wetland Policies, reviewing laws and institutions, river basin management, education and public awareness, international cooperation, and more;
- ❑ adopts a Strategic Framework for the development of the Ramsar List;
- ❑ revises the system of regional representation under the Convention and reconstitutes the membership of the Standing Committee and STRP;
- ❑ confers the first Wetland Conservation Awards upon five recipients;
- ❑ formally confirms BirdLife International, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Wetlands International, and the World Wide Fund for Nature as ‘International Organization Partners’ of the Convention.

July 1999

Honduras designates the Sistema de Humedales de la Zona Sur de Honduras, the Convention’s 1000th Ramsar Site.

September 1999

The Society of Wetland Scientists inaugurates its annual Ramsar Support Framework grants programme.

May 2000

The “Ramsar Toolkit” (the Ramsar Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands) is published in nine booklets in a boxed set. A CD-ROM version is published by the United Nations University in September 2002.

February 2001

Inauguration of a joint Web site between Ramsar and UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme. A Programme of Joint Work is agreed between the two secretariats in March 2002.

November 2001

The MedWet Coordination Unit is opened in Athens, Greece, a 5-member outposted branch of the Ramsar Secretariat, headed by new MedWet Coordinator Spyros Kouvelis and funded by the Government of Greece.

June 2002

Surface area coverage of the world’s Wetlands of International Importance surpasses 100 million hectares with the designation of Peru’s Abanica del río Pastazo.

November 2002

Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Valencia, Spain:

- ❑ adopts further guidance for the Parties, covering allocation and management of water, site management planning, integrated coastal zone management, wetland inventory, under-represented wetland types, wetland restoration, peatlands;
- ❑ adopts a new Strategic Plan for the period 2003-2008;
- ❑ adopts a new *modus operandi* for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP);
- ❑ adopts a Communications, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA) programme for 2003-2008, as a successor to the Outreach Programme 1999-2002;
- ❑ confers the second set of Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award to three organizations.

August 2003

Dr Peter Bridgewater (Australia) takes over as the Convention’s third Secretary General, succeeding Delmar Blasco.



2.4 Further reading

Two Ramsar publications (§4.5.7) provide a detailed background to the Ramsar Convention's historical and legal development up to 1993:

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Its History and Development, by G.V.T. Matthews, 1993; and

The Legal Development of the Ramsar Convention, by C. de Klemm and I. Créteaux, 1993.

Additional background resources:

Clare Shine and Cyrille de Klemm, *Wetlands, Water and the Law*. Gland: IUCN and Bonn: IUCN Environmental Law Centre, 1999.

Michael Bowman, "The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Has it Made a Difference?", in *Yearbook of International Co-operation on Environment and Development 2002/2003* (London: Earthscan), 61-8.
[reprinted http://ramsar.org/key_law_bowman2.htm]



3. How does the Ramsar Convention work?

The implementation of the Ramsar Convention is a continuing partnership between the Contracting Parties, the Standing Committee, and the Convention Secretariat, with the advice of the subsidiary expert body, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and the support of the International Organization Partners (IOPs). Every three years, representatives of the Contracting Parties meet as the Conference of the Contracting Parties, the policy-making organ of the Convention which adopts decisions (Resolutions and Recommendations) to administer the work of the Convention and improve the way in which the Parties are able to implement its objectives.

The “Framework for Implementation of the Ramsar Convention”, first adopted at the 1984 Conference of the Parties (Recommendation 2.3), set out both the long-term commitments and the priorities for the attention of the Contracting Parties to the Convention – subsequent meetings of the Conference have updated the Framework in light of decisions of the COP, and, within this framework, priority objectives have been agreed for the Parties, the Standing Committee, and the Secretariat for each coming triennium. Since 1996, this has been done instead by means of a **Strategic Plan** and associated Work Plan which set out, in the context of the priority objectives, the actions expected or requested of the Parties, the Standing Committee, the Secretariat, the STRP, the IOPs, and other collaborators. The Convention is presently operating under its second Strategic Plan, for the period 2003-2008.

3.1 The Conference of the Contracting Parties

The Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) is the policy-making organ of the Convention. Government representatives from each of the Contracting Parties meet every three years to receive national reports on the preceding triennium, approve the work programme and budgetary arrangements for the next three years, and consider guidance for the Parties on a range of ongoing and emerging environmental issues. (Articles 6 and 7 of the Convention set out the duties of the Conference (see Appendix 1)).

Representatives of non-member States, intergovernmental institutions, and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may participate in these meetings as non-voting observers. There is a procedure stipulated in the treaty and the “Rules of Procedure” for voting by the Parties, but in fact there has not yet been a vote on any substantive decision and all decisions have in the end been made by consensus.

The programme of each meeting of the COP includes a series of technical sessions which analyze ongoing and emerging issues of importance in the field of wetland conservation and wise use, including further interpretation and development of the key Convention concepts and guidance for the Parties on key areas of implementation. The technical sessions submit reports to the plenary session, which normally lead to the adoption of Resolutions and Recommendations. Ramsar COPs have gained the reputation of being highly effective events, allowing an active involvement and participation of the non-governmental and academic communities.

The Proceedings of each meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties are published subsequently by the Convention Secretariat, most recently on CD-ROM. Normally, the Proceedings contain:

- ❑ a summary report of Plenary Sessions;
- ❑ the Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Conference;
- ❑ a list of the participants; and
- ❑ (beginning with COP8) the National Reports from the Parties; and
- ❑ other documentation provided to the COP for consideration or information.

The Proceedings of all of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties have also been published on the Ramsar Web site, with additional materials, including photographs, for recent meetings.



National Reports and the 'National Planning Tool'

Recommendation 2.1 (1984) urged Parties to submit detailed National Reports (NRs) to the Secretariat at least six months before each ordinary meeting of the Conference, and this tradition has continued unbroken to this day. The Ramsar Convention enjoys the highest percentage of NRs received of all the environment-related conventions – of 113 Parties at the time of COP7 in 1999, 107 NRs were received and 3 newly-acceded Parties were exempted; of 133 Parties at the time of COP8 in 2002, 119 NRs were received and 8 Parties that had recently joined the Convention were exempted.

The National Reports are submitted in one of the three official languages and become part of the public record. They are studied and summarized by the Ramsar Secretariat in the form of regional overviews, which are submitted to the COP as official working documents. The texts of the National Reports themselves are published on the Ramsar Web site, and their contents are analyzed into a database which allows the production of statistical reports on the implementation of the Convention over a wide range of variables.

National Reports provide:

- ❑ a valuable overview of national experiences;
- ❑ continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Convention;
- ❑ a means of sharing information relating to wetland conservation measures that have been taken, any problems that may have arisen, and appropriate solutions to such problems.

National Reports on implementation of the Convention are structured according to the current Strategic Plan and seek information on each Party's success in progressing the Operational Objectives and their respective Actions called for in that Plan. Each triennium, the Standing Committee adopts a "National Planning Tool / National Report Format" to be distributed to the Parties well in advance of each meeting of the COP – the purpose of this document is not only to facilitate reporting on past achievements but perhaps more importantly to assist the Parties in structuring their activities within the framework of the Strategic Plan. When the National Planning Tool is being used as foreseen by the COP, triennial national reporting becomes much less burdensome for the Parties, requiring only a "snapshot" in time of their ongoing work.

Ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

1. Cagliari, Italy, 1980
2. Groningen, Netherlands, 1984
3. Regina, Canada, 1987
4. Montreux, Switzerland, 1990
5. Kushiro, Japan, 1993
6. Brisbane, Australia, 1996
7. San José, Costa Rica, 1999
8. Valencia, Spain, 2002
9. Kampala, Uganda (scheduled for 2005)

Extraordinary meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

1. Paris, France, 1982
2. Regina, Canada, 1987

3.2 The Standing Committee

The Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention is the intersessional executive body which represents the COP between its triennial meetings, within the framework of the decisions made by the COP. The Contracting Parties that are members of the SC are elected by each meeting of the COP to serve for the three years until the next one. The SC was established by Resolution 3.3 of the 1987 Conference of the Contracting Parties. Its tasks were first set out in the "Framework for Implementation of the Ramsar Convention" (Resolution 5.1, 1993), but are presently defined by Resolution VII.1 (1999):

"The Contracting Parties that have accepted to be elected as Regional Representatives on the Standing Committee shall have the following tasks:



- ❑ To designate their delegates to the Standing Committee taking into account their significant responsibilities as Regional Representatives, according to paragraph 10 of this resolution, and to make every effort that their delegates or their substitutes attend all meetings of the Committee.
- ❑ When there is more than one Regional Representative in a regional group, to maintain regular contacts and consultations with the other regional representative(s).
- ❑ To maintain regular contacts and consultations with the Contracting Parties in their regional group, and to use the opportunities of travel within their regions and of attending regional or international meetings to consult about issues related to the Convention and to promote its objectives.
- ❑ To canvass the opinions of the Contracting Parties in their regional group before meetings of the Standing Committee.
- ❑ To advise the Secretariat in setting the agenda of regional meetings.
- ❑ To assume additional responsibilities by serving as members of the subgroups established by the Standing Committee.
- ❑ To provide advice as requested by the Chairperson and/or the chairs of subgroups and/or the Secretariat of the Convention.
- ❑ In the regions concerned, to make deliberate efforts to encourage other countries to join the Convention.”

The Standing Committee normally meets once each year, traditionally at the offices of the Secretariat in Switzerland – in addition, it meets just prior to each meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, at which time it transforms itself into the Conference Committee for the duration of the COP; and then again on the last day of the COP, when the newly elected members choose their chair and vice chair and set the date for their first full business meeting.

There are presently 14 regional and two *ex officio* members of the Standing Committee, chosen on a proportional basis from the Ramsar regions:

- a) one representative for regional groups with 1 to 12 Contracting Parties,
- b) two representatives for regional groups with 13 to 24 Contracting Parties,
- c) three representatives for regional groups with 25 to 36 Contracting Parties,
- d) four representatives for regional groups with 37 to 48 Contracting Parties,
- e) five representatives for regional groups with 49 to 60 Contracting Parties.

In addition to the Regional Representatives, the host countries of the most recent and the upcoming meetings of the COP are full members, and the host countries of the Ramsar Secretariat and Wetlands International, as well as the four International Partner Organizations themselves, serve as permanent observers. All other Contracting Parties are always welcome to participate in Standing Committee meetings and working groups as observers, and other countries and non-governmental organizations may participate as observers in the absence of objections.

The composition of the Standing Committee for 2003-2005 is:

Africa:	Botswana, Ghana, Morocco
Asia:	Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan
Europe:	Armenia, Austria, Romania, Slovenia
Neotropics:	Argentina, Nicaragua. (Bahamas will join as soon as the Convention comes into force for the 25 th Party from this region.)
North America:	Canada
Oceania:	Papua New Guinea
COP8 host:	Spain
COP9 host:	Uganda
Permanent observers:	Netherlands, Switzerland, BirdLife International, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Wetlands International, WWF International.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Standing Committee for 2003-2005 are Dr Gordana Beltram (Slovenia) and Mr Javad Amin Mansour (Islamic Republic of Iran).

The core budget of the Convention includes provisions for assisting Regional Representatives from developing countries and countries with economies in transition to attend the meetings of the Standing Committee.



3.3 The Secretariat

The **Ramsar Convention Secretariat** carries out the day-to-day coordination of the Convention's activities. It is located in the headquarters facilities of IUCN-The World Conservation Union in Gland, Switzerland, and Secretariat staff are legally considered to be employees of IUCN.

The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary General who answers to the Standing Committee and who supervises the work of a small number (currently 15) of policy/technical, communications and administrative staff, four interns, and five members of the MedWet Coordination Unit based in Athens, Greece. The Policy and Technical staff in the Secretariat itself comprise the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General and four Senior Regional Advisors to assist the Parties (in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Americas); the interns serve as Assistant Advisors for the regions to form two-person "regional advisory teams". The communications team is responsible for promoting the Convention and the activities of its Secretariat staff and partners through news releases, educational and awareness-raising products, and documentation. Ramsar staff members work in several languages (notably the Convention's three official languages, English, French, and Spanish) and provide expertise in a range of disciplines. Additional staff are occasionally seconded to the Secretariat for special purposes, and consultants are recruited from time to time as needed.

The functions of the Secretariat are to:

- ❑ provide administrative, scientific, and technical support to Contracting Parties, especially in relation to the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan;
- ❑ assist in recruiting new Contracting Parties;
- ❑ assist in convening and organizing the Conference of the Parties, the meetings of the Standing Committee and the STRP, and Ramsar regional meetings;
- ❑ make known the decisions, Resolutions, and Recommendations of the Conference and the Standing Committee;
- ❑ provide secretariat functions for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (in collaboration with Wetlands International's newly-formed STRP Support Service);
- ❑ secure financial contributions for the Small Grants Fund (§4.4.6), circulate an annual call for applications, and evaluate the project proposals received from Contracting Parties, and evaluate proposals received for the Wetlands for the Future assistance programme;
- ❑ administer projects funded with earmarked contributions;
- ❑ keep the Contracting Parties, and the Ramsar community in general, informed of developments related to the Convention;
- ❑ maintain the List of Wetlands of International Importance (§4.1) and note any additions and changes to the List and the Ramsar Sites Database (day-to-day development of the Database is subcontracted to Wetlands International);
- ❑ organize Ramsar Advisory Missions at the request of Contracting Parties (§4.1.6) and contribute to follow-up of RAM reports;
- ❑ develop avenues of cooperation with other conventions, intergovernmental institutions, and national and international NGOs.

3.4 The Administrative Authorities and diplomatic notifications

The head of state or government or the Foreign Office of each Contracting Party designates a national agency to act as the implementing agency, or "Administrative Authority", of the Convention in the country. The Administrative Authority is the focal point for communications with the Ramsar Secretariat and the main agency responsible for the application of the treaty. (Unlike many other conventions, Ramsar treats the designated agency as its "national focal point", not any individual within it.) It is expected that the Administrative Authority will consult and cooperate with as many other government agencies and non-governmental institutions as possible in order to ensure the best possible results in achieving the goals of the Ramsar Convention (see also §3.8, National Ramsar Committees).

Formal communications concerning Convention business are transmitted by the Secretariat through diplomatic notifications sent to either the permanent mission in Geneva or the embassy in Bern as determined by each Contracting Party. Copies of notifications are normally sent to the Administrative Authority in each Contracting Party. When a country has no diplomatic representation in Switzerland, notifications are normally forwarded to its embassy in another European capital or to the country's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York.



3.5 The Scientific and Technical Review Panel

The Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention was established by Resolution 5.5 (1993) as a subsidiary body of the Convention to provide scientific and technical guidance to the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee, and the Ramsar Secretariat. Its individual members, who are not paid for their services, are elected by the Standing Committee based upon nominations from the Parties on the same regionally proportionate basis that is used for electing the Standing Committee itself, but they serve in their own capacities as experts in the scientific areas required by the STRP's Work Plan and not as representatives of their countries. Resolution VII.2 (1999) modified the composition of the STRP, and Resolution VIII.28 (2002) established the present *modus operandi* and terms of reference of the STRP.

In addition to the 15 individual STRP members, delegates from the four International Organization Partners – BirdLife International, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Wetlands International, and WWF International – represent their organizations as full members of the Panel. In addition, representatives of the 18 subsidiary bodies of other Multilateral Environment Agreements and non-governmental organizations and associations specified in Resolution VIII.28 are also invited to participate as permanent observers during each triennium, and representatives of other organizations are invited to participate in the work of the STRP as required by the nature of the tasks under study.

The STRP's Work Plan for each triennium is built around the priority tasks determined by the Standing Committee, which are based upon requests from the Conference of the Parties by means of its Strategic Plan and COP Resolutions and Recommendations. The STRP members and observers are assisted in their work by a network of STRP National Focal Points who advise them directly on STRP matters and provide a liaison between the STRP and the networks of other relevant experts within each of their countries. The STRP's Working Groups and the STRP National Focal Points communicate by means of electronic mail and Internet discussion groups.

The work of the STRP is further assisted by the **STRP Support Service**, which is operated by Wetlands International under contract with the Convention. The purpose of the Support Service is to provide the STRP Working Groups and National Focal Points with additional contacts among the expert networks of the International Organization Partners and other groups, identify gaps in needed expertise and endeavor to fill them, assemble a clearinghouse of additional information resources for the tasks of the STRP's Work Plan, and facilitate communication amongst the Working Groups, the Focal Points, and other sources of expertise.

3.6 The Ramsar Convention budget

The Conference of the Contracting Parties reviews the financial regulations of the Convention and adopts a core budget for the next triennium at each of its ordinary meetings. The Convention uses the Swiss franc as its working currency. Draft budgets and explanatory notes are prepared by the Secretariat and are submitted for endorsement to the Standing Committee prior to ordinary meetings of the Conference. The core budget basically covers the following costs:

- ❑ functioning of the Convention Secretariat (see list of activities in §3.3);
- ❑ some of the costs of the meetings of the Standing Committee and STRP, including the cost of participation of members from developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- ❑ a contribution for the management of the Ramsar Sites Database and for the STRP Support Service (both provided by Wetlands International);
- ❑ a contribution to IUCN for costs incurred in hosting the Secretariat offices;
- ❑ a contribution towards the Secretariat costs related to the meetings of the COP; and
- ❑ a contribution to support regional initiatives under the Convention.

Until recently the core budget has not covered any of the costs involved in the organization and running of meetings of the Conference of the Parties, which have chiefly been met by the host country of each meeting, but for the triennium 2003-2005 a small sum has been earmarked each year to contribute to the Secretariat's costs for the next COP. Travel costs of COP delegates from developing countries and countries with economies in transition are normally met by voluntary contributions from other Contracting Parties.

The budget is approved by consensus among the Contracting Parties present and voting at an ordinary meeting of the Conference (if a formal vote is required, Article 6.5 stipulates that a two-thirds majority is needed for adoption). Each Contracting Party contributes to the core budget the same percentage that it contributes to the United Nations budget, on



the basis of the scale approved by the UN General Assembly, but with a minimum contribution of 1,000 Swiss francs for those Parties whose calculated shares would be less than that amount.

The core budget for the triennium 2003-2005 is Swiss francs 3,678,564 (ca. US\$ 2.8 million or €2.4 million at June 2003 exchange rates), 3,825,707, and 3,978,735 for each of the three years.

In addition to the annual dues paid by member countries to cover the core budget, the Ramsar Secretariat receives voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties, NGOs, and other donors to implement special projects or carry out contractual agreements. Examples include contributions to defray the costs of Ramsar Advisory Missions (\$4.1.6); to support projects through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, Wetlands for the Future initiative (\$4.4.6), and the Swiss Grant for Africa; to carry out additional communications activities; and to organize regional and other meetings and training workshops.

3.7 The Ramsar regions

The Convention's system of regionalization came into effect with the adoption of Resolution 3.3 (1987) on the establishment of a Standing Committee to oversee the implementation of the Convention between triennial meetings of the Conference of the Parties. Regionalization is a significant factor in the operation of the Convention, in terms of the structure of the Standing Committee, the organization of Secretariat staff and duties, and the ways in which Contracting Parties cooperate through regional representation and meetings.

This system was reviewed at COP7 (1999), so that now, for technical and administrative purposes, the Ramsar Convention has established six regions:

- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Neotropics (South and Central America and the Caribbean area)
- North America (Canada, Mexico, and the United States)
- Oceania

The full list of countries under each region (both those that are Parties and countries which have not yet joined) has been determined by Resolution VII.1 (1999).

At the Ramsar Secretariat, there are four "Regional Advisory Teams", each consisting of a Senior Advisor and an Intern/Assistant Advisor, for the following regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Americas (Neotropics and North America).

Regional meetings

Since 1991, the Ramsar Secretariat has organized regional and subregional meetings, usually in preparation for meetings of the Conference of the Parties. These meetings give Parties from the regions and subregions an opportunity to network and discuss common problems and solutions and to prepare common region-specific responses, when appropriate, to the issues and documents to be considered at the COP. Funding to cover the meeting costs, especially for travel and subsistence expenses, is sought by the Secretariat on a case-by-case basis from voluntary contributions by the Parties, development assistance agencies, and interested NGOs.

Reports of these meetings can be found on the Ramsar Web site, http://ramsar.org/cop8_regionalmeetings_schedule.htm.



Ramsar Regional and Subregional Meetings in preparation for COP8

<i>Region/subregion</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Location</i>	
Africa	Southern Africa/East Africa	12-14 November 2001	Lusaka, Zambia
	Central and North Africa	20-22 March 2002	Algiers, Algeria
	West Africa, Comoros, & Madagascar	5-7 June 2002	Cotonou, Benin
Americas	South America	10-12 September 2001	Buenos Aires, Argentina
	Central America/Caribbean & North America	26-28 September 2001	San Pedro Sula, Honduras
	Pan-American - Neotropics & North America	1-5 July 2002	Guayaquil, Ecuador
Asia	East Asia	1-3 October 2001	Bangkok, Thailand
	West and Central Asia	3-5 February 2002	Teheran, Iran
	Middle East	7-9 October 2002	Beirut, Lebanon
Europe	Pan-European	13-18 October 2001	Bled, Slovenia
Oceania	Oceania	6-8 May 2002	Apia, Samoa

3.8 National Ramsar Committees

Recommendation 5.7 of the COP and the Strategic Plan encourage Contracting Parties to establish National Ramsar Committees (or National Wetland Committees) which can:

- provide a broader focus at national level for the implementation of the Convention, involving relevant government agencies, scientific and technical institutions, regional and local authorities, local communities, NGOs, and the private sector, to deal with such issues as:
 - national wetland policies
 - management of Ramsar Sites
 - application of the Montreux Record and Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanisms (§4.1.5 and 6)
 - inclusion of new sites in the Ramsar List
 - submissions to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (§4.4.6)

In addition, National Committees may:

- provide expert input to National Reports for meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
- review implementation of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

A considerable number of Contracting Parties have already established National Ramsar Committees, though they vary considerably in form from one country to another. For example, some committees consist of representatives of government agencies and relevant non-governmental organizations, sometimes also including individuals with relevant expertise, whilst others may be organized as governmental committees (including regional governments in federal States), or as essentially non-governmental bodies. Ideally, National Committees should include as many sectors of government and representatives of stakeholders as possible.

Information about existing National Committees and contact details can be obtained from the Ramsar Secretariat.

3.9 Cooperation with other organizations

The Ramsar Convention, through the Secretariat and its other bodies, maintains close working links with other international, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations to achieve a strategic alliance for wetland conservation. The links with other environment-related conventions are reviewed in §1.12.



UNESCO

The Secretariat maintains close relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which:

- ❑ acts as Depositary for instruments of accession and ratification to the Convention (§5.1);
- ❑ may receive from Contracting Parties details of new wetland sites designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, where such designations are not sent directly to the Secretariat. UNESCO forwards details of all listed sites to the Secretariat;
- ❑ contributes to Ramsar publications;
- ❑ produces certified copies of the Convention in the United Nations' official languages and others.

UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme

The Ramsar Secretariat has very close relations with the MAB Programme, including a Joint Programme of Work accepted by the Ramsar Standing Committee (Decision SC26-51, December 2001) and MAB's International Coordinating Council (at its 17th session in March 2002) and a joint Web site (<http://www.unesco.org/mab/ramsarmab.htm>) featuring, among other things, wetlands that have been designated both as Ramsar Sites and as Biosphere Reserves.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

A memorandum of understanding was signed in September 2002 between the Ramsar Secretariat and UNCTAD, providing for the sharing of information and ideas concerning trade and investment in wetland products and services.

International Organization Partners

The Convention works especially closely with four global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have been associated with the treaty since its beginnings and which, in Resolution VII.3 (1999), were confirmed in the formal status of International Organization Partners of the Convention. They are:

- ❑ BirdLife International (formerly ICBP)
- ❑ IUCN–The World Conservation Union
- ❑ Wetlands International (formerly IWRB, the Asian Wetlands Bureau, and Wetlands for the Americas)
- ❑ WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) International

The IOPs provide invaluable support for the work of the Convention at global, regional, national, and local levels, chiefly by providing expert technical advice, field level implementation assistance, and financial support, both from their headquarters units and from their national and regional offices and affiliates and from their expert networks. In addition, they themselves embody the philosophy of the Ramsar Convention and its wise use concept and support the use of the Ramsar guidelines in their own work around the world. The IOPs also participate regularly as observers in all meetings of the Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee, and as full members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

Other non-governmental organizations and related bodies

In many countries, there is also an “NGO constituency” around the Ramsar Convention that works with the government and is active in promoting and implementing the goals of the treaty. The Ramsar Secretariat tries to maintain as much contact as possible with as many local, national, and international NGOs (in addition to the four partners listed above) as are in sympathy with Ramsar principles and whose work intersects with the Convention's objectives.

Specifically, as of December 2003, the Ramsar Secretariat benefits from formal cooperative agreements of various kinds with

- ❑ the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University (USA),
- ❑ Ducks Unlimited,
- ❑ Eurosite,



- ❑ the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA),
- ❑ LakeNet,
- ❑ the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS), and
- ❑ The Nature Conservancy.

Moreover, several additional organizations have been officially invited to participate as observers in the work of the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), including

- ❑ the Global Wetlands Economics Network (GWEN),
- ❑ the International Association of Limnology,
- ❑ the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG),
- ❑ the International Peat Society (IPS), and
- ❑ the World Resources Institute (WRI).

An increasing number of national and international NGOs make a point of participating in the meetings of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties, which are perceived as good opportunities for networking and influencing government policy and action. The 8th meeting of the COP (2002) was attended by 27 international NGOs and 109 national non-governmental organizations working directly or indirectly in the field of wetland conservation and sustainable use.

External support agencies and the private sector

The Ramsar Secretariat maintains active contacts with a number of external support agencies, such as the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, and the regional development banks. All of them provide funding both for wetlands projects and for projects that affect wetlands. Contacts are also maintained with the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and with the European Commission. Financial assistance for projects, meetings, reports, and Ramsar-related work on the ground in the developing world has frequently been provided by a number of national development assistance agencies, with which the Secretariat maintains close contacts.

Since 1998, the private sector Danone Groupe has been providing generous financial support to the Convention's communications, public awareness, and training activities in the so-called "Evian Project".

Other agencies and initiatives

In addition, the Ramsar Secretariat seeks to develop its contacts and working relations with other global institutions dealing with water resource issues in general and wetlands in particular. These include the World Water Forum, the Global Water Partnership, and the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI).



4. Assisting the Contracting Parties

This section describes the assistance available to Contracting Parties to help them meet their obligations under the Convention. The first four subjects (§4.1 – 4.4) correspond to the four commitments made by the Parties when they join the Convention.

4.1 Listed sites

At the time of joining the Convention, each Contracting Party undertakes to designate at least one site for inclusion in the **List of Wetlands of International Importance** (the “Ramsar List”). The inclusion of a site in the Ramsar List confers upon it the prestige of international recognition and obliges the government to take all steps necessary to ensure the maintenance of the ecological character of the site. While inscription on the Ramsar List acknowledges the international importance of the site, Article 2.3 of the Convention established that “the inclusion of a wetland in the List does not prejudice the exclusive sovereign rights of the Contracting Party in whose territory the wetland is situated.”

Following accession, Contracting Parties are expected to designate additional “suitable” wetlands for the List (Article 2.1) or extend the boundaries of those already included. They select wetlands within their territories on the basis of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology, as measured by reference to the Convention’s Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance. The information on each listed site is included in the Ramsar Sites Database maintained by Wetlands International under contract with the Ramsar Convention.

The 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (May 1999) adopted a *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)* (Resolution VII.11). The Vision for the List adopted under the framework is:

*“To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands
which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity
and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions they perform.”*

The *Strategic Framework* establishes five general objectives for the List as well as a concrete target: “To ensure that the List contains at least 2000 sites by the time of Ramsar’s 9th Conference of the Parties in the year 2005”.

Wetlands to be added to the Ramsar List must be designated **by the national government**, specifically by the agency within the national government that has been authorized to represent the nation in implementing the Ramsar Convention, i.e., the “Administrative Authority” (§3.4). Thus, by designating a new Ramsar Site, the national government is making a commitment to “promote the conservation” of the site. The various Parties have their own procedures for the nomination of potential Ramsar Sites within their countries prior to the national decision to designate them (e.g., the policy of the USA can be found at <http://international.fws.gov/fedregister/ramsarfr.html>), and individuals and NGOs wishing to have wetlands added to the Ramsar List would do well to contact the Administrative Authority in their country at an early stage.

At the time of its accession to the Convention, a new Party must send by diplomatic channels directly to the Director-General of UNESCO (with a copy to the Ramsar Secretariat) the information about at least one wetland that meets the Criteria for inclusion in the Ramsar List, with a map with boundaries clearly delineated. UNESCO, the Ramsar Convention’s Depository, forwards this information to the Ramsar Secretariat with official notification of the new Party’s accession. **But please note: all subsequent designations of wetlands for the Ramsar List should be sent by the Administrative Authority directly to the Ramsar Secretariat** – following the Party’s accession, UNESCO is not involved in designations for the Ramsar List in any way. Communicating subsequent new designations through diplomatic channels may unnecessarily complicate and retard the process of evaluating new nominations and adding new sites to the List.

Exceptionally, a Contracting Party may, because of its “**urgent national interests**”, delete or restrict the boundaries of a wetland already included in the List (Article 2.5 of the Convention). The Convention provides, however, that such deletions or restrictions should be compensated for by the designation as a Ramsar Site of another wetland, either in the same area or elsewhere (Article 4.2). In practice, only a handful of boundary restrictions have occurred, and for the only sites ever deleted from the Ramsar List, the “urgent national interests” clause was not invoked – they were three which had been designated



prior to the adoption of the Criteria and were then found not to fulfil any of them (three new sites were designated in compensation). Resolution VIII.20 (2002) offers guidance on interpretation of these issues.

In Resolutions VII.11 (1999) and VIII.10 (2002), the Contracting Parties have strongly urged the use of the *Strategic Framework* by Parties seeking to implement the Vision for the Ramsar List, that of developing a coherent international network of important wetlands.

In addition, the *Strategic Framework* covers the issue of Wetlands of International Importance and the Ramsar principle of “wise use”; includes guidelines for a systematic approach to identifying priority wetlands for designation under the Ramsar Convention; and updates the Convention’s **Criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance** (§4.1.1), as well as the guidelines for their application and long-term targets.

A **Classification System for Wetland Type** (§4.1.4) has also been formulated, by which means the different wetland types within a site can be recorded in the Ramsar Sites Database in a simple and consistent manner.

Sites on the List at which changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur can be placed by the Contracting Party concerned on a special register known as the **Montreux Record** (§4.1.5), a list of Ramsar Sites requiring priority conservation attention. These sites may benefit from the application of the **Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism** (§4.1.6), by which the Ramsar Secretariat organizes technical missions to seek solutions and provide advice to the relevant authorities. **Article 3.2** of the Convention (§4.1.7) commits the Parties to make themselves aware of potential changes to the ecological character of listed sites and to report these to the Ramsar Secretariat without delay.

The establishment of **wetland inventories** (§4.2.2), based on the best scientific information available at both national and international level, constitutes an effective basis to achieve the designation for the Ramsar List of the largest number and most coherent network of wetland sites. Some Contracting Parties, such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have applied the Ramsar Criteria to a national inventory of wetlands, drawn up a detailed list of sites which meet these Criteria, and designate the sites progressively, as formalities are completed at national level. The Conference of the Parties has adopted a *Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory* (Resolution VIII.6, 2002) to provide assistance to the Parties in preparing their inventories.

When requested, the Secretariat and its technical partners may assist Contracting Parties and States preparing to join the Convention with inventory preparation, particularly in States where no national scientific inventory is already available. Those Contracting Parties with established national scientific inventories are encouraged to provide technical and/or financial support to member States without such inventories.

Designating a wetland for the Ramsar List does not in itself require the site previously to have been declared a protected area. In fact, listing under the Ramsar Convention, especially in the case of sites subject to intensive use by human communities – either to extract resources or to benefit from the natural functions of the wetland – should provide the necessary protection to ensure its long-term sustainability. This can best be achieved by preparing and implementing an appropriate management plan, with the active participation of all stakeholders.

The **Ramsar List** is kept up to date by the Ramsar Secretariat. Arranged alphabetically by member State, it shows the site name, date of designation, location, total area, and geographical coordinates of each Ramsar Site. Fuller descriptions of all the sites in the List are published periodically in the *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance*, the most recent edition of which is available on Wetlands International’s Web site (<http://www.wetlands.org/rsdb/default.htm>). In addition, the Ramsar Secretariat has prepared an annotated version of the List, including a descriptive paragraph about each Ramsar Site – the 320-page printed version (updated every three months) is available free of charge from the Ramsar Secretariat, and the continuously updated texts are also available on the Ramsar Web site, http://ramsar.org/profile_index.htm.

At its October 1996 meeting, the Standing Committee invited Parties to adopt a standard text (translated into the local language) for signs at all Ramsar Sites, identifying the site as a Wetland of International Importance (§4.5.8).



4.1.1 Criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance

The text of the Convention (Article 2.2) states that:

“Wetlands should be selected for the List on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology” and indicates that “in the first instance, wetlands of international importance to waterfowl at any season should be included”.

The process of adopting specific criteria for the identification of wetlands of international importance began in 1974, but the first official Criteria were agreed at COP1 in 1980. In 1987 and 1990, the Conference of the Parties revised the Criteria further, and COP6 in 1996 added new Criteria based on fish and fisheries. The Criteria were reorganized into two groups – based upon representativeness/uniqueness and upon biodiversity – by the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List* (adopted by Resolution VII.11, 1999).

CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Group A. Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types

Criterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.

Group B. Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity

Criteria based on species and ecological communities

Criterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

Criterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

Criterion 4: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

Specific criteria based on waterbirds

Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

Specific criteria based on fish

Criterion 7: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.

Criterion 8: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.



The *Strategic Framework* provides extensive guidelines for the consistent application of the Criteria. Ramsar COP8 (2002) requested the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to review Ramsar's Criteria for site designation in relation to the indicative components of biological diversity listed in Annex I of the Convention on Biological Diversity, notably in relation to criteria and guidelines for socio-economic and cultural features of wetlands, with a view to possibly harmonizing the site selection criteria with the CBD's priorities for site conservation.

Recognizing that cases may arise where a Ramsar Site was designated for the List prior to the adoption of the latest version of Criteria and may no longer meet any of those current Criteria, or where a Ramsar Site has subsequently lost the ecological values for which it was originally designated, the practice has been that the Secretariat, in consultation with the Contracting Party concerned, evaluates what measures might be necessary to extend, enhance or restore the wetland's functions and values to the degree that it would qualify for inclusion in the List. Where there is no possibility of extension or enhancement/restoration of its functions or values, the Contracting Party concerned instructs the Secretariat to remove the site from the List, and the Party then applies the provisions for compensation, as provided in Article 4.2 of the Convention. This has only occurred in a very few cases. Resolution VIII.22 (2002) urges the Standing Committee to study these situations more closely with a view to proposing more detailed guidance for the Parties to be considered at a future meeting of the COP.

4.1.2 The Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

The **Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands ("RIS")** is the means by which Contracting Parties present information on wetlands designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, and by which the List is kept up to date. The items to be reported on by means of the Information Sheet – including factual data on surface area, altitude, wetland types, location, legal jurisdiction, etc.; justifications for the Criteria cited for determining international importance; and an array of additional data on, *inter alia*, hydrological values, flora and fauna, land uses, socio-cultural factors, conservation measures, and potential threats – were approved by the 1990 Conference of the Parties (Recommendation 4.7) and have been updated regularly since then, mostly recently in Resolution VIII.13 (2002). The information presented in the Information Sheets is entered into the Ramsar Sites Database (§4.1.3) and forms a basis both for monitoring and analysis of the ecological character of the site and for assessing the status and trends of wetlands regionally and globally.

The Information Sheet provides an internationally standardized format for describing wetlands and must be accompanied by the most detailed and up-to-date map available, which shows the boundaries of the Ramsar Site precisely. Completed Information Sheets on Ramsar Wetlands and maps are to be sent directly to the Ramsar Secretariat, with a letter signed by the head of the Administrative Authority representing the national government which requests that the wetland be added to the Ramsar List (RISs and maps accompanying a new Party's obligatory **first Ramsar Site** designation should be sent to the Director-General of UNESCO with the instrument of accession, with copies to the Secretariat).

To assist compilers in filling in the form, the following additional items are provided and should be read first: an *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* on how to complete the Information Sheet; the "Classification System for Wetland Type" (§4.1.4); and the *Strategic Framework* with its explanations of the Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance (§4.1.1).

Resolution 5.3 recognizes that some Contracting Parties might have insufficient data and/or resources to complete the RIS adequately. The Resolution urges such Parties to consult existing regional wetland inventories and relevant expert bodies, including NGOs, where appropriate, and to seek assistance from the Ramsar Secretariat – financial and technical assistance for the studies leading to a new site designation have frequently been secured through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund or the good offices of the International Organization Partners and other NGOs.

In addition, the Secretariat's regional advisory units, when receiving completed RISs for which the data or maps may be inadequate, will work with the Party's Administrative Authority to bring the information and presentation up to the standard stipulated by the Conference of the Parties in its Resolutions, **before the new site is actually added to the Ramsar List.**

4.1.3 The Ramsar Sites Database

The List of Wetlands of International Importance and the Montreux Record (§4.1.5) are based upon information stored in the Ramsar Sites Database, which is maintained under contract with the Ramsar Convention by Wetlands International at its headquarters in Wageningen, the Netherlands. The Database services provided by Wetlands International are intended to:

- ❑ enable the Secretariat to respond rapidly to reports of changes in ecological character at listed sites;
- ❑ prepare briefs for Secretariat staff and consultants engaged in special projects;



- provide information for Secretariat technical staff working on wise use and management plan projects;
- process inquiries and data requests from Contracting Parties, partner organizations, and researchers;
- prepare site-based texts and illustrations for Ramsar publications;
- provide essential data to those developing global, regional and national inventories of wetlands.

Wetlands International (post@wetlands.org) also responds to similar inquiries from the public and has developed its Web site (<http://www.wetlands.org>) in such a way that a broad array of site information and maps can be viewed directly. Efforts are presently nearing completion to make the Ramsar Sites Database directly queryable by the public over the Internet.

4.1.4 Classification System for Wetland Type

The Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands asks for details of all wetland types present within the designated Ramsar Site boundaries. A prescribed “Classification System for Wetland Type” was approved by the 1990 Conference of the Contracting Parties (Recommendation 4.7) and subsequently amended.

The categories listed in the classification were not intended to be scientifically exhaustive, but only to provide a broad framework for the rapid identification of the main wetland habitat types represented at each site, with the “dominant wetland type” clearly indicated. Forty-two wetland types are identified in the system, grouped into the categories “coastal/marine”, “inland”, and “human-made”.

4.1.5 The Montreux Record

The **Montreux Record** is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. It is maintained as part of the Ramsar List. The Conference of the Parties has adopted a working definition of “ecological character” and of “change in ecological character”, as well as a *Wetland Risk Assessment Framework*.

The Montreux Record was established by Recommendation 4.8 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1990). Resolution 5.4 of the Conference (1993) determined that the Montreux Record should be employed to identify priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention. As they expressed it in Resolution VIII.8 (2002), the Parties believe that “the voluntary inclusion of a particular site on the Montreux Record is a useful tool available to Contracting Parties in circumstances where:

- a) demonstrating national commitment to resolve the adverse changes would assist in their resolution;
- b) highlighting particularly serious cases would be beneficial at national and/or international level;
- c) positive national and international conservation attention would benefit the site; and/or
- d) inclusion on the Record would provide guidance in the allocation of resources available under financial mechanisms.”

Resolution VI.1 (1996) established more precise procedures for the utilization of the Montreux Record mechanism, with guidelines on the steps to be taken for including Ramsar Sites on the Record and removing sites from it. Sites may be added to and removed from the Record only with the approval of the Contracting Parties in which they lie. As of December 2003, 55 sites are present in the Montreux Record – 23 sites which had been listed on the Montreux Record have since been removed from it (though one of those has been placed upon it again).

At the request of the Contracting Party concerned, the Secretariat may send a technical mission, known as the “Ramsar Advisory Mission”, to analyze the situation at one or more particular Montreux Record sites, provide advice on the measures to be taken, and assess the desirability of removing a site from the Montreux Record when measures have been implemented successfully.

4.1.6 The Ramsar Advisory Mission

Special attention is given to assisting member States in the management and conservation of listed sites whose ecological character is threatened. This is frequently carried out through the **Ramsar Advisory Mission**, a technical assistance mechanism formally adopted by Recommendation 4.7 in 1990. (The Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism was formerly known as the Monitoring Procedure and the Management Guidance Procedure.)

The main objective of this mechanism is to provide assistance to developed and developing countries alike in solving the problems or threats that make inclusion in the Montreux Record necessary.



In most cases, the application of this mechanism consists of a visit by a team of two or more experts who will produce a report on their findings and recommendations. Upon receiving a request from a Contracting Party, the Secretariat agrees upon the terms of reference for the mission with the concerned authorities and determines the type of expertise that will be required for the visiting team. The team's draft report is submitted for review to the competent authorities who have requested the mission, and its revised final report then becomes a public document, which can provide the basis for conservation action at the site. In some cases, the recommendations of Ramsar Advisory Mission reports have provided the framework for financial assistance from the Small Grants Fund and external support agencies.

Between 1988 and 2003, the Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism has been applied at 53 Ramsar Sites or groups of sites. Early missions sometimes consisted of a brief visit by one member of the Secretariat's technical staff, but over the years the missions have tended to become more formal and frequently more detailed, involving multi-disciplinary teams, sometimes in collaboration with other bodies such as the World Heritage Convention, IUCN, and the Man and the Biosphere Programme.

The Secretariat maintains a separate project account to receive voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties and NGOs to defray the expenses of Ramsar Advisory Missions to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Applications of the Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism between 2000 and 2003

Site Name	Country	Date
41 Ichkeul*	Tunisia	2000
42 Djoudj, Diawling*	Senegal, Mauritania	2000
43 Ebro Delta	Spain	2000
44 Sumava Peat Bogs	Czech Republic	2001
45 Parc National de la Kéran	Togo	2001
46 Mühlenberger Loch	Germany	2001
47 Lake Srebarna*	Bulgaria	2001
48 Laguna de Llançanelo	Argentina	2001
49 Ouse Washes	United Kingdom	2001
50 Chilika Lake	India	2001
51 Doñana	Spain	2002
52 La Mare d'Oursi	Burkina Faso	2003
53 Kyliiske Mouth (Danube Delta)**	Ukraine	2003

* Joint mission with the World Heritage Convention & IUCN

** Joint mission with the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme

A complete list of Ramsar Advisory Missions is available on the Ramsar Web site (http://www.ramsar.org/index_ram.htm) and from the Secretariat. Copies of most of the individual RAM reports can also be obtained from the same Web address.

4.1.7 Article 3.2

Article 3.2 of the Convention requires the Parties "to arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay" to the Ramsar Secretariat. Moreover, when the Secretariat has been notified by a third party (e.g., a national or local NGO) of such a change or potential change, the staff treats such information as an Article 3.2 notification and contacts the Administrative Authority of the Party involved, seeking clarification of the situation and offering advice if needed. The Secretariat also reports back to the original informant, as appropriate, about the responses received from and actions taken by the Administrative Authority. (Further clarification on Article 3.2 was provided by the Parties in Resolution VIII.8, 2002.)

In addition, in accordance with **Article 8.2** of the Convention, the Ramsar Secretariat has the responsibility to inform the other Contracting Parties of "any alterations to the List or changes in character of wetlands included therein", and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties.



4.2 The wise use of wetlands

Under Article 3.1 of the Convention, Contracting Parties agree to “**formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory**”. Through this concept of “wise use”, which was pioneering when the Convention was drafted, the Convention continues to emphasize that human use on a sustainable basis is entirely compatible with Ramsar principles and wetland conservation in general. The Ramsar wise use concept applies to all wetlands and water resources in a Contracting Party’s territory, not only to those sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance. Its application is crucial to ensuring that wetlands can continue fully to deliver their vital role in supporting maintenance of biological diversity and human well-being.

As this term “wise use” gained currency within the Ramsar community and was used elsewhere for different purposes, the Conference of the Parties recognized the need for greater precision and adopted the following definition at its 3rd meeting in Regina, Canada, in 1987:

“The wise use of wetlands is their sustainable utilization for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem.”

At the same time, “sustainable utilization” of a wetland was defined as:

“Human use of a wetland so that it may yield the greatest continuous benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.”

“Natural properties of the ecosystem” were defined as:

“Those physical, chemical and biological components, such as soil, water, plants, animals and nutrients, and the interactions between them.”

To assist the Parties in implementing the wise use concept, the Wise Use Working Group, established at Regina, developed ***Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept***, which were adopted by the 4th COP in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1990.

Also at the 4th meeting, the Wise Use Project was instituted, funded by the Government of the Netherlands, and an international panel of experts began work which culminated in the ***Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept***, adopted by the 5th Meeting of the Parties in 1993, as well as the book of principles and case studies entitled *Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands*, edited by T.J. Davis (Ramsar, 1993).

The ‘Wise Use Guidelines’ call upon Contracting Parties to:

- ❑ **adopt national wetland policies**, involving a review of their existing legislation and institutional arrangements to deal with wetland matters (either as separate policy instruments or as part of national environmental action plans, national biodiversity strategies, or other national strategic planning);
- ❑ **develop programmes** of wetland inventory, monitoring, research, training, education and public awareness; and
- ❑ **take action at wetland sites**, involving the development of integrated management plans covering every aspect of the wetlands and their relationships with their catchments.

The Wise Use Guidelines emphasize the benefits and values of wetlands for sediment and erosion control; flood control; maintenance of water quality and abatement of pollution; maintenance of surface and underground water supply; support for fisheries, grazing and agriculture; outdoor recreation and education for human society; and climatic stability.

The Ramsar Secretariat assists the Contracting Parties in implementing the Guidelines and Additional Guidance on the wise use of wetlands by:

- ❑ providing expertise, either through Ramsar technical personnel and its network or through external consultants;
- ❑ making available the further guidelines adopted by the Conference of the Parties on many aspects of wetland conservation and wise use;



- funding projects through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, Wetlands for the Future, and Swiss Grant for Africa; and
- seeking third-party funding for wise use projects.

The Wise Use Guidelines and Additional Guidance are available on the Ramsar Web site and in hard copy from the Secretariat and have been reprinted as volume one of the 'Ramsar Toolkit', the **Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands. Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands** (Ramsar, 1993) is available from the IUCN Publication Services Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK (fax +44 1223 277175, e-mail info@books.iucn.org) and has also been reprinted on the Ramsar Web site.

The continuing work of the STRP in elaborating and refining the concept of wise use can be found in many of the substantial guidance documents that have been adopted by the COP (see Appendix 3, References).

Note: The "wise use" principle inscribed in Article 3.1 of the Convention in 1971, and its definition and application by the Conference of the Contracting Parties, have been established and have evolved completely independently from the so-called "wise use movement" that has emerged in recent years in North America. The use of the same term does not necessarily indicate that there is a commonality of understanding and/or purpose.

4.2.1 Establishment of national wetland policies

(a) Institutional and organizational arrangements

Since the 1st Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (Cagliari, 1980), and repeatedly thereafter, the Parties to the Ramsar Convention have recognized that National Wetland Policies are a key feature in the implementation of the wise use concept.

To help the Contracting Parties in developing their National Wetland Policies, the Conference of the Parties has adopted **Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies** (Resolution VII.6, 1999), which are available on the Ramsar Web site and in Ramsar Handbook 2.

The Guidelines strongly urge Parties that have not yet done so to develop National Wetland Policies or Strategies, or identifiable parts devoted to wetlands in national environmental or biodiversity strategies, and they outline a broad-based multisectoral consultative process of policy development to resolve conflicting interests and share ownership in the Policy amongst all stakeholders.

In addition, wetland policy planning at the national and regional scales is assisted by two other guidance documents agreed by the COP, the *Guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management* (Resolution VIII. 18, 1999) and the *Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)* (Resolution VIII. 4, 2002).

(b) Legislation

Since Recommendation 4.4 in 1987, the Conference of the Contracting Parties has urged that Parties review their legal mechanisms to ensure that the country's national, provincial, and local laws and institutions impacting upon the conservation and wise use of wetlands and wetland products do not conflict with one another or leave gaps or areas of inclarity.

At COP7 in 1999, in the Technical Session devoted to national planning for wetland conservation and wise use, the Parties benefited from a substantial background paper prepared by a leading environmental legal expert, and they adopted Guidelines on conducting such a review of laws and institutions that had been drafted by experts from IUCN's Environmental Law Centre and refined through workshops hosted by the Ramsar Secretariat.

The **Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands** provide a step-by-step blueprint for the establishment of a review team and its progress through the various stages required to assess the effectiveness of existing wetland-related legal and institutional measures for promoting wetland conservation and wise use, including identifying sectoral legal and institutional measures which directly or indirectly affect wetlands.

Clare Shine, who developed the background paper for COP7, is also co-author with the late Cyrille de Klemm of *Wetlands, Water and the Law: using the law to advance wetland conservation and wise use* (IUCN Environmental Law Centre, 1999),



332 pages, available from the IUCN Publication Services Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, United Kingdom (fax +44 1223 277175, e-mail info@books.iucn.org).

4.2.2 Knowledge of wetlands and their values

To manage wetlands effectively it is necessary to have adequate knowledge of their functioning. Inventory, assessment, monitoring, research, and training activities help in this respect. Important sources of information are the wise use case studies published by the Ramsar Secretariat (*Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands, 1993*).

(a) Inventory

In Resolution VII.20 (1999), the Contracting Parties recognized the importance of comprehensive national inventory as the vital basis for many activities necessary for achieving the wise use of wetlands, including policy development, identification and designation of Ramsar Sites, documentation of wetland losses, and identification of wetlands with potential for restoration. In Resolution VII.20 the COP also encouraged the collection of information for the management of shared wetlands, including those within river basins and/or coastal zones as appropriate – they urged Contracting Parties which had yet to complete national inventories of their wetland resources to give the highest priority to the compilation of comprehensive wetland inventories, and requested the STRP to review and further develop existing models for wetland inventory and data management, including the use of remote sensing and low-cost and user-friendly geographic information systems.

Accordingly, the STRP developed the *Framework for Wetland Inventory*, which was adopted by the COP in Resolution VIII.6 (2002) and published in Handbook 10. The Framework provides guidance for designing wetland inventory at multiple scales from site-based to provincial, national and regional and explains the inventory process in 13 steps leading from defining objectives to choosing a methodology to planning a pilot study.

(b) Monitoring

Monitoring is the process of measuring change in ecological character in any wetland over a period of time. It can be carried out at different levels of intensity, depending on available funding and/or technology.

Monitoring methods include simple field observations, remote sensing, quantitative sampling techniques such as the gathering of wetland plant material, and, where changes in social values and uses are concerned, participatory observation. Resolution VI.1 of the Conference of the Parties (Brisbane, Australia, 1996) adopted a “Framework for designing a wetland monitoring programme” to assist the Parties.

Resolution VI.1 also adopted a working definition of “ecological character” and brief guidelines for describing and maintaining the ecological character of Ramsar Sites, and in the triennium 2003–2005 the STRP is working on the preparation of consolidated guidance on the overall process of detecting, reporting, and responding to change in ecological character, as part of an “Integrated Ramsar Framework for inventory, assessment, and monitoring”.

4.2.3 Action at particular wetland sites

(a) Ecological aspects

Maintenance of the ecological functioning of a wetland requires an integrated, catchment approach to management, incorporating the different uses and activities that are compatible with sustainability.

Such management must take an interdisciplinary approach drawing upon the principles of biology, economics, policy, and social sciences. Global concerns must also be considered, namely, for example, shared wetland systems, shared species, and the issue of global climate change.

(b) Human activities

To achieve the wise use of a wetland so that present and future generations may enjoy its benefits, a balance must be attained that ensures maintenance of the wetland type. Activities may vary between:



- ❑ strict protection with no resource exploitation;
- ❑ a small amount of resource exploitation;
- ❑ large-scale sustainable resource exploitation; or
- ❑ active intervention in the wetland, including restoration.

Management can be adapted to suit local conditions, sensitive to local cultures and respectful of traditional uses.

(c) Integrated management planning

In addition to the other guidance documents described in this Manual, the Contracting Parties have adopted an evolving suite of further guidelines and principles on an array of management issues faced by the Parties in their planning for the conservation and wise use of wetland resources and their implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands

Recognizing that for the conservation of wetlands and the wise use of their resources, an overall agreement is essential between the various managers, owners, occupiers and other stakeholders, and that the management planning process provides the mechanism to achieve this agreement, the Contracting Parties adopted a first set of *Guidelines on management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands* at COP5 in 1993 (Resolution 5.7). These have been successful in their rational and flexible application at wetland sites of many types and sizes, but over time it became evident that a rethinking was needed.

During the triennium 1999-2002, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) drafted New Guidelines, which focused upon the management plans themselves as part of a dynamic and continuing management planning process and provided additional guidance on environmental, social and economic impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis, zonation and multiple use, design and maintenance of buffer zones, and the application of the precautionary approach. These were adopted by the Parties in Resolution VIII.14 (2002).

Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous peoples' participation in the management of wetlands

In Recommendation 6.3 (1996), the Contracting Parties acknowledged that local and indigenous people have a particular interest in ensuring that the wetlands within their region are managed wisely and, in particular, that indigenous people may have distinct knowledge, experience and aspirations in relation to wetland management. They also noted that the wise use of wetlands will benefit the quality of life of local and indigenous people and that these people, in addition to their involvement in site management, should derive the benefits that result from conservation and wise and sustainable use of wetlands.

The Recommendation called upon the Parties to make specific efforts to encourage active and informed participation of local and indigenous people, at Ramsar listed sites and other wetlands and their catchments, as well as their direct involvement, through appropriate mechanisms, in wetland management, and to recognize the value of the knowledge and skills of local and indigenous people in relation to wetland management, making special efforts to encourage and facilitate their participation in the development and implementation of wetland policies and programmes.

In addition, COP6 instructed the Ramsar Secretariat, in consultation with the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), the Kushiro International Wetlands Centre, the Caddo Lake Institute, IUCN – The World Conservation Union, and other NGOs with relevant regional and local experience, to produce criteria and guidance for involving local and indigenous people in the management of wetlands for consideration at the next meeting of the COP. After three years of drafting sessions and workshops, led by the IUCN Social Policy Group and the other organizations mentioned above, supported financially by the Governments of Australia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, the delegates at COP7 were able to consider a substantial background paper in a Technical Session and review 23 case studies from around the world and then to adopt the Guidelines (Resolution VII.8) in order to provide the Parties with substantial assistance in implementing this part of the wise use principle.

Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration

Recommendation 4.1 (1990) notes that “the maintenance and conservation of existing wetlands is always preferable and more economical than their subsequent restoration” and “restoration schemes must not weaken efforts to conserve existing natural systems”. Experience clearly shows that currently available restoration techniques almost never lead to conditions that match



those of pristine natural ecosystems. As a corollary to this, trading high-quality habitat or ecosystems for promises of restoration should be avoided except in the case of overriding national interests. However, restoration of individual sites can contribute to ongoing management of existing high quality wetlands by, for example, improving overall catchment condition and contributing to improved water allocation management.

Recognizing the importance of past experience in wetland restoration and the increasing interest in restoration among Contracting Parties, Recommendation 6.15 (1996) urged “the Scientific and Technical Review Panel [STRP], in collaboration with the Secretariat and concerned Contracting Parties and partners, to define guidelines on principles for wetland restoration”. The STRP was tasked with further developing these tools and guidelines by Resolution VII.17 concerning *Restoration as an element of national planning for wetland conservation and wise use*.

During the triennium 1999-2002, the experts of the STRP and their collaborators developed the *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration*, which were adopted by Resolution VIII.16 (2002), and established a mini-Web site that provides further guidance on tools and methods, including case studies, for wetland restoration (http://ramsar.org/strp_rest_index.htm). The guidelines provide a step-by-step process through the identification, development and implementation of a restoration project.

Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands

In 2002 the Conference of the Contracting Parties, recognizing “the vital contribution made by wetlands on many occasions to ensure the allocation of water required for human well-being, including food and water security, and in flood control and poverty alleviation”, but at the same time “aware of the increasing demands being placed upon freshwater resources in many parts of the world and the threat this poses for maintaining wetland ecosystem functions and their biodiversity”, adopted a set of guidelines on water allocation and urged the Parties to make use of them, adapting them as necessary to suit national conditions. The Guidelines begin with a set of seven basic principles always to be borne in mind and then proceeds to discuss six areas of water allocation and management with clear general steps for practitioners to follow. The Guidelines are supported by a background paper, “Allocation and management of water for maintaining wetland ecosystem functions: processes, strategies and tools”, that was also drafted by the STRP and presented to COP8 for the delegates’ information.

Guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management

River basins or catchments (the land area between the source and the mouth of a river including all of the lands that drain into the river), and coastal and marine systems influenced by catchment discharges, are important geographical units for considering the management of wetlands and water resources. In 1999 the COP adopted guidance for the Parties, both the sectors of government concerned immediately with wetlands and those other sectors concerned with other, perhaps broader planning issues, on how to integrate the principles of wetland conservation and wise use into management planning for the whole catchments of which the wetlands are a part.

The Guidelines consider such topics as strengthening policy and legislation, involving stakeholders and the public, minimizing the impacts of land use and water development projects on wetlands, maintaining natural water regimes, and cooperating internationally on shared river basins.

Following the adoption of these Guidelines by Ramsar COP6 and the adoption of Decision V/2 by the CBD in 2000, the **River Basin Initiative** (RBI) was created under the auspices of those two conventions and is presently maintained by the Global Environment Centre. The RBI’s Web site can be found at <http://www.riverbasin.org>.

Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)

Parties to the Ramsar Convention have recognized the importance of securing the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the coastal zone through full engagement with ICZM processes. Recommendation 6.8 called on Contracting Parties to adopt and apply strategic planning and integrated coastal zone management principles to assist sound decision-making on the conservation and wise use of coastal wetlands, and in Resolution VII.21 the Contracting Parties resolved to review and modify existing policies that adversely affect intertidal wetlands and to seek to introduce measures for the long-term conservation of these areas.

The *Principles and guidelines* adopted by Resolution VIII.4 (2002) were developed by the STRP in order to help to ensure that coastal wetland conservation and wise use are better understood as essential to the sustainable development of the coastal



zone, rather than being regarded, as is often the case, as solely a sectoral nature conservation and protected areas issue.

Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GAP)

The Guidelines, drafted by the STRP with particular assistance by experts from the International Mire Conservation Group and the International Peat Society, form the basis for the development of a global action plan for peatlands by Ramsar Contracting Parties, the Convention's bodies, and International Organization Partners and other organizations working to address peatland issues. They were adopted by Resolution VIII.17 (2002). As called for in that Resolution, a Coordinating Committee, composed of representatives of interested governments and peatland expert organizations, has been established in late 2003 to prepare an implementation plan for global action on peatlands.

4.2.4 The Wise Use Project

Following the adoption of expanded guidelines for the implementation of the wise use of wetlands by the 1990 Conference of the Contracting Parties, the Government of the Netherlands provided funding for a three-year project designed to draw lessons from a number of experiments in the wise use of wetlands. The project aimed to provide examples of site-specific wise use from regions throughout the world, provide practical examples of the interrelation between human activities and wetlands, and provide information about the process of developing national wetland inventories and policies.

The Wise Use Project was coordinated by the Secretariat, with technical support from the Wise Use Working Group (established by the Conference of Contracting Parties in 1987), the IUCN Wetlands Programme, and the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. Seventeen case studies were selected, in developed and developing countries, providing the widest possible geographical representation in different socio-economic contexts. In each case, the studies examined (a) the **problems** encountered, (b) the **methods** employed to counteract the problems, (c) the **results and achievements** obtained, and (d) the **lessons learned**. A report on the project, entitled *Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands*, was published by Ramsar in 1993 and has established a baseline for the Convention's thinking on the practical aspects of wise use since then, as can be seen in the many subsequent guidance documents produced by the STRP and adopted by the COP which elaborate and refine the concept in many ways.

4.3 Reserves and training

4.3.1 Reserves

Article 4.1 of the Convention provides that "each Contracting Party shall promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves on wetlands, whether they are included in the List or not, and provide adequately for their wardening".

Recommendation 4.4, recognizing the value of establishing nature reserves at wetlands of diverse types and sizes, and the value of reserves in promoting conservation education and public awareness of the importance of wetland conservation and the goals of the Convention, urges Contracting Parties to:

- establish national networks of nature reserves covering both listed and non-listed wetlands;
- establish an adequate legal framework, or review existing legal mechanisms, for the definition, establishment and effective protection of wetland nature reserves;
- develop conservation education programmes linked to wetland reserve networks;
- include wetland reserves in national inventories detailing their location and values; and
- develop and implement integrated management plans for wetland reserves.

4.3.2 Training

Article 4.5 of the Convention states that "Contracting Parties shall promote the training of personnel competent in the fields of wetland research, management and wardening". Trained personnel, particularly in the fields of management, education and administration, are essential for the effective conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

In establishing training programmes, attention should be given to:



- ❑ the definition of training needs;
- ❑ “training needs analysis” to determine the differing needs between regions, countries and sites;
- ❑ the target audience (from awareness programmes for the general public and policy makers to professional training for those directly involved in administering and practicing wetland management);
- ❑ the subject (furnishing wetland managers and administrators with the professional knowledge needed for establishing, defending and implementing the concept of the wise use of wetlands).

The types of training of particular relevance for professionals involved in wise use practices are:

- ❑ courses on integrated management (bringing together specialists from different fields to generate a common understanding and approach);
- ❑ courses on wetland management (including information on the most up-to-date techniques);
- ❑ courses for field staff, e.g. wardens and rangers (covering a basic understanding of the wise use concept, enforcement of legislation, and public awareness).

Training activities should be catalytic, involving governmental and non-governmental organizations, transferring knowledge gained, for example, from the regional level to potential trainers at the local level. Training manuals and other resource materials should be developed and updated as an ongoing process.

The Ramsar Secretariat places a high priority on assisting the Parties in wetland training and capacity building. In Africa alone, for example, in just the past few years, the Secretariat has organized or contributed to wetland wise use training workshops and seminars, at the regional level, held in Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia, and at the national level, in Angola, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania. In addition, a number of other such workshops have been funded through the Ramsar Small Grants Fund, and, in the Neotropics region, the Convention’s Wetlands for the Future programme is focused entirely upon assisting in wetland training and capacity building.

In addition, the Ramsar Secretary General chairs the boards of directors of the International Courses on Wetland Management and Wetland Restoration, which have been offered over the past ten years by the Wetlands Advisory and Training Centre (WATC) in Lelystad, The Netherlands, and the East African Wetland Management Course (EAWMC), a regional training initiative for wetland managers organized by the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute (KWSTI) in conjunction with the WATC. A recent agreement between the Government of Panama and the Convention on Wetlands has led to the establishment of a “Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere” in Panama City, and the Conference of the Parties has endorsed the creation of a similar “Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in Western and Central Asia” to be based in the city of Ramsar in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Ramsar partner organization Wetlands International is presently seeking the resources to establish a Ramsar Training Service to assist wetland officials and managers around the world.

4.4 International cooperation

In the context of international cooperation, the Ramsar Convention has a central role to play, providing the single most important framework for intergovernmental cooperation on wetland issues. Article 5 of the Convention on Wetlands establishes that “the Contracting Parties shall consult with each other about implementing obligations arising from the Convention especially in the case of a wetland extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where a water system is shared by Contracting Parties. They shall at the same time endeavour to coordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.”

In order to assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of this obligation of the Convention, the 7th Conference of the Parties (May 1999) adopted the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19). The Guidelines cover the following areas:

- ❑ Managing shared wetlands and river basins
- ❑ Managing shared wetland-related species
- ❑ Ramsar working in partnership with international/regional environment conventions and agencies
- ❑ Sharing of experience and information
- ❑ International assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands



- ❑ Sustainable harvesting and international trade in wetland-derived plant and animal products
- ❑ Regulation of foreign investment to ensure wetland conservation and wise use.

In adopting the Guidelines, the Conference called upon Contracting Parties to give special attention to identifying shared wetlands, river basins, and wetland-dependent species and to cooperate with other Parties in their management; to harmonize the implementation of the Ramsar Convention with that of other treaties; to increase the number of site twinning arrangements; and to raise the level and effectiveness of international development assistance programmes directed at the long-term conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

In relation to this last point, the Conference authorized the Secretariat to establish a new full-time post of Senior Trade and Development Advisor, devoted to working with the development assistance community in order to increase the flow of resources for wetland conservation and sustainable use in developing countries and countries in transition. This officer took up his post in the Ramsar Secretariat in August 2000.

4.4.1 Cooperation with and between Contracting Parties

By setting international standards for wetland conservation and providing an international forum for discussion of global wetland issues, the Ramsar Convention facilitates a continuous flow of information on wetland matters between Contracting Parties.

The Secretariat functions as the focal point for contacts between and among Contracting Parties by:

- ❑ promoting and organizing activities under Article 5 of the Convention, which concerns shared wetlands and water systems (Appendix 1);
- ❑ organizing and co-organizing regional meetings and technical workshops, as well as meetings of the COP;
- ❑ facilitating multilateral conservation initiatives, such as the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet).

4.4.2 Transboundary wetland conservation

Article 5 of the Convention calls upon Contracting Parties to consult with one another in the case of shared wetlands or water systems. Individual action by States may be insufficient for the conservation and management of wetlands because:

- ❑ many wetlands and watercourses cross national boundaries;
- ❑ many wetland species are migratory;
- ❑ management of wetlands often requires exchange of experiences between countries; and
- ❑ development assistance is often required for wetland conservation actions in developing countries.

To assist Contracting Parties to fulfill their obligations in this area, the Secretariat:

- ❑ gathers information on wetlands and water systems that are shared between two or more Contracting Parties where such wetlands or water systems contain at least one wetland included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance;
- ❑ reviews, in consultation with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and other appropriate secretariats, relevant information with a view to identifying shared migratory animal populations which may require conservation measures agreed upon by two or more Contracting Parties;
- ❑ promotes, in consultation with Contracting Parties, bilateral or multilateral arrangements in respect of wetlands situated along migratory flyways which cross the territories of two or more Contracting Parties;
- ❑ reports on the results of these activities to each meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Recent examples of international cooperation over shared wetlands and water systems in relation to Ramsar Sites and the Ramsar Convention include:

- ❑ The continuing success of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, begun in 1987 to jointly manage this extensive area of shallow waters, sandbanks, mudflats, and coastal marshes extending over a distance of some 500 kilometres along the coast of the North Sea, shared by Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands.



- ❑ The creation of the Prespa Lakes Transboundary Park by Albania, Greece, and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, inaugurated on World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2000.
- ❑ The momentum towards collaboration in the management of the Polesie wetlands shared by Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine, begun in May 2002.
- ❑ The efforts of the member States of both the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger Basin Authority, with assistance from the WWF Living Waters Programme and financial support from the Global Environment Facility, to designate each of their parts of these large catchments as Wetlands of International Importance and work toward their collaborative management, especially in the framework of memoranda of cooperation signed between the Ramsar Secretariat and both the LCBC and the NBA in November 2002.
- ❑ The “Trilateral Ramsar Platform” for the Morava-Dyje Floodplains, signed by Austria and the Czech and Slovak Republics in August 2001 – for their assistance in this project, the NGOs **Daphne** in the Slovak Republic, **Distelverein** in Austria, and **Veronica** in the Czech Republic jointly received the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award in 2002.

4.4.3 Transboundary species conservation

Article 5 of the Convention states that “Contracting Parties shall endeavour to coordinate present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna”. Many species of migratory birds follow flyways (migratory routes) along which are situated wetlands which they use as resting and feeding areas. To achieve the effective conservation of such species requires cooperation between States sharing wetland systems or situated along a flyway. The Secretariat works to facilitate such cooperation.

Recommendation 4.12 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties recognizes the flyway concept for the conservation of wetland bird species, and encourages Contracting Parties to:

- ❑ participate in internationally coordinated waterfowl surveys, and undertake special surveys within their territories to identify wetlands of international importance for waterfowl at any time in the annual cycles of these species;
- ❑ enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements for the conservation of migratory waterfowl;
- ❑ cooperate with other Contracting Parties situated along the same fly-way with regard to financial assistance and the sharing of expertise.

Several cooperative flyway programmes have been developed for the management of shared wetland species or the conservation of individual species. Leading examples are:

- ❑ the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (1986) between Canada, the United States and Mexico;
- ❑ the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network established along the east and west coasts of North and South America in 1985;
- ❑ the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (1996), established under the aegis of the Convention on Migratory Species;
- ❑ Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (1996); and
- ❑ the East Atlantic Flyway initiative launched by Friends of the Earth–Spain (1997).

The Secretariats of the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with a view to enhancing synergy between the two treaties. A three-way joint work plan between Ramsar, CMS, and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) was signed in April 2004.

4.4.4 The twinning of Ramsar Sites

Resolution 4.4 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties calls upon the Secretariat to encourage bilateral and multilateral agreements for the twinning of wetland sites, within the framework of the Ramsar Convention. The agreement signed in 1992 between the Governments of France and Romania, concerning the twinning of the Camargue and the Danube Delta, was one of the first of its kind involving sites on the Ramsar List.

The text of such an agreement leading to improved conservation of twinned wetland ecosystems and wise use of their resources might include the following:



- ❑ study and monitoring of the biological diversity of the sites, including an exchange of expertise in the areas of data management and inventory and monitoring techniques;
- ❑ the use of cartography and modern technology such as remote sensing;
- ❑ study of the legal aspects concerning the wetlands;
- ❑ exchange of information on restoration techniques;
- ❑ development of management plans;
- ❑ development of educational facilities and public awareness programmes.

The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008 calls for “twinning and/or networks of transboundary wetlands and wetlands sharing common features, as an important mechanism for sharing knowledge and providing training opportunities,” with a global implementation target for 2003-2005 of “at least 75 twinning arrangements to be in place and reported to the Bureau [Secretariat] for Web publicity on the Ramsar Web site.”

4.4.5 Regional cooperation under Ramsar: The Medwet Initiative

Resolution VIII.30 (2002) provides *Guidance for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands*, based upon the successful example of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, or MedWet. MedWet is a coordination mechanism for wetland activities in the Mediterranean Basin, designed to involve all major stakeholders – its goal is “to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of Mediterranean wetlands, as a contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and to sustainable development in the region.”

MedWet owes its origins to an international conference organized by the International Waterfowl & Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) [now Wetlands International] in Grado, Italy, in February 1991. The MedWet1 project (1992-1996), funded by the European Union and involving the five EU member states in the Mediterranean (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), began building the collaborative MedWet network and developed regional methods and tools. As part of MedWet1, the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy was developed by the eleven participating partners after wide consultation in the region. MedWet1 culminated in a major Conference on Mediterranean wetlands (Venice, Italy, June 1996), at which the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy, based on the first global Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention, was endorsed.

In the same year (1996), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, under whose guidance the MedWet Initiative had been developed, established the **Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com)**. MedWet/Com meets annually and guides the strategic direction and implementation of the Initiative; it includes representatives of 25 Mediterranean governments, the Palestinian Authority, the European Commission, intergovernmental conventions and UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the wetland centres Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre (EKBY), Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat in France, Sede para el Estudio de los Humedales Mediterraneos (SEHUMED) in Spain, and the Centro de Zonas Húmidas, Instituto de Conservação da Natureza (ICN) in Portugal.

In 1999 MedWet became a formal inter-regional structure for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution VII.20 of Ramsar’s COP7) and serves as a model for regional wetland cooperative structures elsewhere. A **MedWet Coordination Unit** has been established under the Ramsar Secretariat – it comprises the MedWet Coordinator (who reports to the Secretary General) and four colleagues, all outposted Ramsar Secretariat staff based in Athens, Greece, with the financial support of the Government of Greece, and it is assisted by the MedWet Technical Network of four well-known research and conservation institutes (EKBY, SEHUMED, Tour du Valat, and ICN).

4.4.6 Small projects assistance programmes

Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use

The Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) was established by the 1990 Conference of the Contracting Parties (at that time under the name “Wetland Conservation Fund”). The SGF provides financial assistance in the form of small grants (maximum Swiss francs 40,000 per project) for projects in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. At present, funding is provided for activities related to the implementation of the Convention’s Strategic Plan 2003-2008, including requests for emergency assistance.

So far, some 166 projects have been funded in about 80 countries, for a total amount of about Swiss francs 5,475,000.

The Fund relies entirely upon voluntary contributions for its operations. In recent years, voluntary financial contributions have been made to the SGF by the governments of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan,



Monaco, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the USA, as well as from WWF International. In addition, in some cases projects submitted to the Ramsar Small Grants Fund have been taken over for direct funding support by such organizations as Wetlands International, as part of its agreement with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), and the World Wide Fund for Nature's Living Waters Programme.

Normally, completed applications in English, French or Spanish must be received by the Ramsar Secretariat by 31 March of each year, but Secretariat staff can advise on project proposal submissions prior to that date. Emergency assistance may be requested at any time, however. Applications have to be endorsed by the Administrative Authority of the Convention in each country. After an evaluation carried out by the technical staff of the Ramsar Secretariat, and with advice from members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, partner organizations, and individual experts as required, recommendations for approval are submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee at its annual meeting. Only very infrequently are two project proposals from the same country awarded grants in the same annual cycle.

The Small Grants Fund Operational Guidelines and application form can be obtained in English, French, or Spanish from the Ramsar Secretariat or on the Ramsar Web site (http://ramsar.org/key_sgf_index.htm).

List of projects funded by the Ramsar SGF in 2002

- Armenia: "Regional seminar 'Current issues of conservation and wise use of wetlands and wetland biodiversity in the European New Independent States'"
- Bulgaria: "Establishing the Bulgarian GIS Database of Ramsar Sites as first step towards the National Wetland Database"
- Chile: "Dissemination and promotion of conservation and wise use of Salar del Huasco"
- Congo: "Lac Télé Community Reserve Project: Integration of local communities in the development of a management plan"
- Croatia: "Development of the Croatian Wetland Inventory"
- Cuba: "Preparation for participative management of coastal wetlands in northeast Cuba"
- Fiji: "Institutional capacity building and review of training needs for implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Fiji"
- Kenya: "Training and technical assistance on aquasilviculture and apiculture to a mangrove-based community in Kwale, Kenya"
- Mauritius: "Wetlands community awareness programme for Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary (RTREBS) and Bassin Sarcelle"
- Mexico: "Delimitation of the core area of the Dzilam State Reserve, Yucatan"
- Palau: "Support for training and management actions at Palau's first Ramsar Site, Lake Ngardok Nature Reserve"
- Sierra Leone: "National wetland inventory for Sierra Leone"
- Sri Lanka: "Facilitating the conservation and wise use of the Anaiwilundawa Wetland Sanctuary through the identification of appropriate management interventions and local community and institutional capacity building"
- Thailand: "Development of a management plan by local participation and production and active dissemination of awareness materials of the Ramsar Convention"
- Uruguay: "Ecological impact of the artificial opening of a coastal lagoon proposed as a Ramsar Site in Uruguay: scientific foundation for management of Laguna de Rocha"

Wetlands for the Future

Since 1995, the Ramsar Secretariat, the United States State Department, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service have operated a special initiative, the Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF) training programme, to benefit Latin American and Caribbean institutions and individuals through capacity building and training in the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This initiative promotes the implementation of the concept of "wise use" of wetlands through strengthening the capacity of countries to manage their wetland resources in perpetuity and contributing to integrate wetland conservation and management with the development process. All proposed activities must be in line with the principles, recommendations and guidelines of the Ramsar Convention. Following proposal evaluation by Ramsar Secretariat staff, projects are chosen by the Secretariat and US Fish and Wildlife jointly and administered by the Secretariat.

The sponsors of Wetlands for the Future wish to establish partnerships with training institutions, catalyze wetland training activities currently underway or planned within the region, or complement existing training and education initiatives with wetland-related instruction. The maximum amount that can be awarded to each project is US\$ 20,000. Further information can be found at http://ramsar.org/key_wff_index.htm.



4.4.7 Project support and external support agencies

The Ramsar Secretariat has a mandate to initiate and maintain contacts with external support agencies, both in order to sensitize them to the need for wetland conservation and wise use as an integral part of their projects, and to solicit from them greater support for projects aimed at the environmentally sound management of wetlands.

For example, implementing the recommendations of a Ramsar Advisory Mission report may call for considerable investment, requiring external support in the case of developing countries or countries with economies in transition. It is desirable, therefore, that donor governments and organizations pay particular attention to these needs if the benefits gained by application of the Mission are to be secured.

The Secretariat places a high priority on working with donor agencies to assist in wetlands work in developing countries. As of September 2003, for example, in Africa alone, Ramsar staff is working with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on multinational wetland projects involving the Lake Chad Basin Commission's five member states, the Niger Basin Authority's nine states, and the range states of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). In addition, Ramsar is involved in wetland projects in Africa which are benefiting from bilateral assistance from agencies in Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the European Union. At the same time, Ramsar is also working with African projects receiving financial and in-kind assistance from the Convention's four International Organization Partners (BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International, and WWF, especially the Living Waters Programme), as well as from Oiseaux Migrateurs du Paléarctique Occidental (OMPO), the Macarthur Foundation, the MAVA Foundation, the Fondation internationale du Banc d'Arguin (FIBA), and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Significant private-sector financial assistance for Ramsar-related projects in Africa is also coming from the Danone Groupe, Banrock Station Wines, and Point Afrique, a French air transport company that donates low-cost transportation and accommodation to assist in African development.

4.5 Communicating the Ramsar message

Communicating the Ramsar message about the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their natural resources is achieved at an international level by the activities of the Secretariat and the partner organizations and at national and local level by the activities of the Contracting Parties and local NGOs.

An essential function of the Secretariat is to foster communication about wetland conservation in general and the promotion of the Convention in particular, through:

- ❑ frequent information and news releases made available to the public over the Internet and by other means;
- ❑ informational publications and other promotional materials bearing the Ramsar logo;
- ❑ the preparation and delivery of lectures and addresses at national and international meetings and articles in relevant publications;
- ❑ contributions to the literature of other organizations; and
- ❑ financial assistance for the relevant publications of other bodies, which will normally include the Ramsar logo on them.

Three hardcopy **information packs** are presently available free of charge from the Ramsar Secretariat: The basic introduction to the Convention; *The Values and Functions of Wetlands*; and *The Cultural Heritage of Wetlands*. All are also available on the Ramsar Web site. The small brochure, "**The Convention on Wetlands**", provides an attractive glance at the basic information about Ramsar, and the A4-size "**Emergency solutions seldom lead to sustainability**" provides an introduction to the concept of Wetlands of International Importance as a network of protected areas.

4.5.1 The Communication, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA) programme

At the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP7), Resolution VII.9 adopted the first programme of actions for promoting **communication, education and public awareness (CEPA)** under the Convention. Following on from a review of the achievements of that first CEPA programme, the Parties adopted an ambitious new one for the period 2003-2008 (in conjunction with the new Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008), and it incorporates many of the lessons learnt. The *vision* of the new Ramsar Convention's CEPA Programme is:



“People acting for the wise use of wetlands.”

The CEPA Programme specifies a large number of actions to be taken by the Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat, the STRP, the International Organization Partners, and other collaborators, grouped under three General Objectives and under each of these a number of Operational Objectives.

General Objective 1 To gain acceptance of the value and effectiveness of wetland-related communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) processes at all levels throughout the Convention.

General Objective 2 To provide support and tools for the effective national and local implementation of wetland-related communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities.

General Objective 3 To mainstream the wise use of wetlands within society and enable people to act.

The Contracting Parties have named government and non-governmental **National CEPA Focal Points** who are expected to form part of a global network of experts to share information, promote the dissemination of resource material, and support the development or expansion of programmes that can provide opportunities for individual, group and community participation in wetland and water resource management. To facilitate this work, a CEPA Web site has been set up as part of the Ramsar Web site, and a public e-mail discussion group has been inaugurated in order to provide for the exchange of news, views, announcements and advice on wetland-related CEPA issues.

The Conference of the Parties, in Resolution VII.28, also decided to establish a **Voluntary Fund for the Convention’s Outreach Programme**. The Standing Committee has adopted the Terms of Reference for the Fund and contributions are invited from Contracting Parties, NGOs, foundations, the private sector and other institutions.

The CEPA Programme 2003-2008 can be consulted on the Ramsar Web site and in the Ramsar Handbook series, second edition, as Handbook No. 6.

4.5.2 Ramsar and the Internet

The **Ramsar Web site**, first established in February 1996, includes over 6,400 files and 5,500 images by March 2004 and has been receiving a average of 3,020 users per day, with 13,000 Web pages viewed per day. The site is maintained by Secretariat staff and is intended to fulfill three purposes:

- ❑ **to provide information** about the Convention (frequently asked questions, lists of authorities and personnel, links to other relevant Web sites, a glossary of Ramsar terminology, etc.);
- ❑ **to provide an archive of all the documents** that are part of the Convention’s tool kit for accomplishing its mission, e.g., the Strategic Plan, texts of all Resolutions and Recommendations, all criteria and guidelines and meeting reports and memoranda of cooperation, speeches, lists of Contracting Parties and Ramsar Sites, etc.; and
- ❑ **to supply a continuous stream of news** about the activities of the Secretariat, the Contracting Parties, the International Organization Partners, and other relevant issues.

Electronic mailing lists. Since June 1997, the Secretariat has maintained a public e-mail mailing list, called the **Ramsar Forum**, in order to provide an e-mail mechanism for the exchange of news, announcements, and requests for information and advice on Ramsar-related issues. As of December 2003, there were about 700 Forum members around the world. To join the Ramsar Forum, interested persons may send a blank e-mail message to: ramsar-forum-join@indaba.iucn.org. A confirmation will be requested by the list moderator (to exclude spammers), and then a welcoming message with more information will be automatically sent by return mail.

The **Ramsar Exchange**, a non-public companion to the Forum, is a suite of three administrative lists that was created in 1997 to facilitate official communications among those who are formally involved in the Convention. The Exchange exists in separate language versions for English, Spanish, and French and includes as members all Administrative Authorities, permanent diplomatic missions of Contracting Parties, and National Ramsar Committees for which e-mail addresses are known, as well as permanent observers and partner NGOs. There are also separate, non-public e-mail discussion lists for the Ramsar **Standing Committee**, the **Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)**, and the **STRP National Focal Points**.



The **Ramsar CEPA List** is the Secretariat's public e-mail discussion group whose members include both the designated CEPA National Focal Points from the Parties and interested members of the public. The CEPA list exists in separate versions for English, French, and Spanish-speakers and, as of December 2003, has a total of about 500 members.

4.5.3 World Wetlands Day and WWD materials

The 2nd of February each year is World Wetlands Day, marking the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 (it was formally signed the next day). WWD was celebrated for the first time in 1997 and has grown remarkably since then. Each year, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. Every year since 1997, the Convention's Web site has posted reports from more than 80 countries of WWD activities of all sizes and shapes, from lectures and seminars, nature walks, children's art contests, sampan races, and community clean-up days, to radio and television interviews and letters to newspapers, to the launch of new wetland policies, new Ramsar Sites, and new programmes at the national level.

Each year the Ramsar Secretariat has produced an array of promotional items which are available free of charge to everyone who is planning World Wetlands Day activities for their communities. These have included decorative and instructional posters, stickers, brochures and leaflets, bookmarks, pocket calendars, screen savers, quotable background papers, and videos, and each year the Secretariat is able to offer, not only the new material, but whatever has been left over from preceding years as well. The latest WWD page on the Ramsar Web site shows a listing of what promotional materials are presently available at any time: http://ramsar.org/wwd2004_index.htm.

4.5.4 The Wetland Conservation Awards

The **Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award** was established in 1996 to recognize and honor, every three years, individuals, organizations, and government agencies that have made a significant contribution to wetland conservation and sustainable use in any part of the world. In the first two award cycles, in 1999 and 2002, the three Awards were each accompanied by an "Evian Special Prize" of US\$ 10,000, generously donated by the Danone Groupe.

1999: In ceremonies in San José, Costa Rica, at Ramsar COP7 in 1999, the prize for individuals was shared by Vitaly G. Krivenko (Russian Federation) and Victor Pulido (Peru); the prize for non-governmental organizations was shared by the Lake Naivasha Riparian Association (Kenya) and the Society for the Protection of Prespa (Greece); the prize in the government/non-government coalition category was won by the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program (Canada).

2002: In ceremonies in Valencia, Spain, at Ramsar COP8 in 2002, the Awards went to Banrock Station Wines (Australia), the Chilika Lake Development Authority (India), and The NGO Trinational Initiative for the Morava-Dyje Floodplain (Austria and the Czech and Slovak Republics), and additional Recognitions of Excellence were conferred upon Dr Monique Coulet of France and Dr Max Finlayson of Australia.

4.5.5 The Wise Use Resource Centre

The Wise Use Resource Centre is a permanent and evolving section of the Ramsar Web site (http://ramsar.org/wurc_index.htm) which, so far, includes five initiatives.

- ❑ The **Ramsar CEPA Programme** (for Communication, Education, and Public Awareness), first adopted for 1999-2002 and thoroughly revised for 2002-2005 by Resolution VIII.31 (2002), includes, amongst other things, an Internet-based clearinghouse of news, information, and materials to assist the Parties and others in developing and exchanging ideas about wetlands CEPA. This mini-Web site was launched in April 2001 and is updated almost daily – it also includes contact details of Ramsar governmental and non-governmental National Focal Points for CEPA activities in all of the Contracting Parties.
- ❑ The **Wise Use Resource Library** is a smorgasbord of reprinted technical publications and references to many others covering a range of subjects associated with the wise use of wetlands. It also serves as an index to such useful materials on the Ramsar Web site as examples of national wetland strategies/policies, Ramsar Site management plans, and Ramsar Information Sheets.
- ❑ The **Wetland Restoration mini-Web site** was developed by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), particularly by Dr Bill Streever representing the Society of Wetland Scientists, and posted on the Ramsar Web site in



2001 and 2002. The site includes an illustrated guide to approaches to restoration, a glossary and bibliography, and links to restoration projects and training opportunities, all of which provide an additional setting to the recently adopted *Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration* (2002).

- ❑ The **Ramsar Small Grants Fund final reports** is a collection of news reports of completed projects from the Ramsar SGF which provides interesting information about the projects themselves and frequently about the Ramsar Sites at which they were carried out. They also serve as useful examples for people contemplating writing SGF project proposals of their own.
- ❑ The **Ramsar Handbook series** on the wise use of wetlands is a collection of nine volumes and the Convention Work Plan 2000-2002, all in English, French, and Spanish. They include all of the Guidelines that have been adopted so far by the Conference of the Contracting Parties in order to assist Parties in their implementation of the Convention and its wise use principle. The Handbooks themselves are available in printed brochures and in PDF format on a CD-ROM published by the United Nations University, all of which is available from the Ramsar Secretariat. The Ramsar Web page http://ramsar.org/wurc_handbook_index.htm includes a description of the Handbook series as well as a collection of fuller case studies than were published in the Handbooks.

(Note: a new edition of the Handbooks series, including the results of COP8 in 2002, will be available on CD-ROM in April 2004. The Table of Contents is available as Appendix 4 at the end of this Manual.)

4.5.6 The Ramsar videos

A 22-minute video, entitled *Wetlands, water, and sustainability: The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, presents the major issues related to wetland conservation and sustainable use, as well as the work of the Convention to address them, by focusing upon five case studies and highlighting the need to involve all stakeholders. Copies of the video are available free of charge from the Ramsar Secretariat in English, French, and Spanish, in PAL, SECAM, and NTSC formats. In addition, the master is also available to qualified parties without text audio, so that they can insert spoken text in their own languages into the audio track. The video can also be downloaded in .MOV format, suitable for viewing on a personal computer with QuickTime and other media players – each file is 115MB and takes a while to download. English version, <http://indaba.iucn.org/ramsarfilms/ramsar-video-2002-e.mov>.

A second 17-minute video entitled *The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: its history, evolution and future* is available in English only, also in PAL, SECAM, and NTSC formats.

4.5.7 Publications

Ramsar publications can be requested directly from the Ramsar Secretariat or ordered from: The IUCN Publications Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, United Kingdom (Tel +44 1223 277894, Fax +44 1223 277175, e-mail: info@books.iucn.org).

- ❑ **Ramsar Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands (The Ramsar “Toolkit”)**, ed. A. J. Hails (2000), 9 A4 pamphlets. Available in hard copy or in PDF format on CD-ROM. (A second edition will be available on CD-ROM in April 2004.) English, French, and Spanish versions.
- ❑ **Wetlands, Biodiversity and the Ramsar Convention: the Role of the Convention on Wetlands in the Conservation and Wise Use of Biodiversity**, ed. by A. J. Hails (1996-97), 196 pages. An excellent collection with introductory chapters by Peter Bacon and Michael Smart and nearly 30 case studies from all the Ramsar regions. Maps and color photographs included. English only.
- ❑ **Economic Valuation of Wetlands: a Guide for Policy Makers and Planners**, by Edward B. Barbier, Mike Acreman and Duncan Knowler (1997), 127 pages. Outlines the benefits of economic valuation techniques as applied to wetlands and wetland development projects, and describes some of these techniques in detail. A number of case studies, a glossary, and a bibliography increase the importance of this book for theoreticians and practical managers alike. English, French, and Spanish versions.
- ❑ **The Legal Development of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance**, by Cyril de Klemm in collaboration with Isabelle Crétaux (1995), 224 pages. For students of legal aspects of environmental conventions,



this book contains the details of the development of the Convention up to Kushiro (1993). English, French, and Spanish versions in one volume.

- ❑ **Towards the Wise Use of Wetlands: Report of the Ramsar Convention Wise Use Project**, ed. by T. J. Davis (1993), 180 pages. This book details the Ramsar wise use movement and includes 17 case studies from different regions around the world. English only.
- ❑ **The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: its history and development**, by G. V. T. Matthews (1993), 130 pages. An excellent historical narrative and analysis through to 1993, written by one of the Convention's Founding Fathers. English only.
- ❑ **Proceedings of the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Valencia, Spain, 2002**. Two hardcover volumes containing the Resolutions and the Conference Report, available in English, French, or Spanish. The CD-ROM version contains a great deal of additional material in all three languages, and includes the texts of the National Reports.
- ❑ **Proceedings of the 7th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, San José, Costa Rica, 1999**. Three hardcover volumes containing the Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the COP, the Conference Report, and the List of Participants. English, French, and Spanish versions.
- ❑ **Proceedings of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Brisbane, Australia, 1996**; twelve separate A4 pamphlets bound in a ringbinder. English, French, and Spanish versions.
- ❑ **The Directory of Wetlands of International Importance**, published by Wetlands International on CD-ROM for each meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and kept up to date on WI's Web site, <http://www.wetlands.org/rsdb>.

4.5.8 Signs at Ramsar Sites

The Standing Committee, by Decision SC19.18 (1996), has invited Contracting Parties to identify Ramsar Sites with signs bearing the following standard text, translated into the local language(s):

THIS SITE, COVERING XXX HECTARES, HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT FOR INCLUSION IN THE **LIST OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE** ESTABLISHED UNDER THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS, THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY SIGNED IN RAMSAR (IRAN) IN 1971 TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WETLAND AREAS WORLDWIDE.

The protection and management of this site is under the responsibility of: (name and address, including telephone and fax numbers, of the appropriate agency)

Variation for states with a federal structure:

ON THE PROPOSAL OF (NAME OF THE STATE/PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT), THIS SITE, COVERING XXX HECTARES, HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT . . .



5. How States may join the Ramsar Convention

According to Article 9.2 of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), “Any member of the United Nations or of one of the Specialized Agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency or Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may become a Party to this Convention”. Unfortunately, supranational bodies, such as the European Commission, are thus not eligible to join the Convention, but may nevertheless develop bilateral working agreements with the Convention Secretariat.

5.1 The instrument of accession

In order for a country to accede to the Convention, signatures and the deposit of the instrument of ratification or accession (with an obligatory first Ramsar Site designation) are to be made through diplomatic channels to the Depositary for the Ramsar Convention, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 7, place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France, with a copy to the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs at the same address.

The instrument of ratification or accession must be signed by the Head of State or Government or by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. **(A copy of all communications to UNESCO should be sent to the Ramsar Secretariat.)** UNESCO will then notify the Ramsar Secretariat and all other Contracting Parties of the new Party's accession.

Example of document of accession to the Ramsar Convention:

<p style="text-align:center">I, [NAME], [TITLE] IN THE GOVERNMENT OF [NAME OF THE COUNTRY]</p> <p style="text-align:center">DO HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE STATE OF [NAME OF THE COUNTRY]</p> <p style="text-align:center">ACCEDES TO THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT OF 2 FEBRUARY 1971 AS AMENDED BY THE PROTOCOL OF 3.12.82, AND ACCEPTS THE AMENDMENTS TO ARTICLES 6 AND 7 OF THAT CONVENTION (1987).</p> <p style="text-align:center">IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I HAVE SIGNED AND SEALED THIS INSTRUMENT OF ACCESSION</p> <p style="text-align:center">DONE AT [NAME OF CAPITAL CITY], [DATE].</p> <p style="text-align:center">[TITLE AND SIGNATURE]</p>

5.2 Designating wetlands for the Ramsar List

The document of adhesion to the Convention sent by the Head of State or Foreign Office to UNESCO must be accompanied by the designation of **at least one wetland site** for the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Thereafter, each Party “shall designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in the List” (Article 2.1). The designation of the first and subsequent Ramsar Sites do not require ratification by parliaments, but are administrative decisions taken by the appropriate government agency according to existing procedures in each country. Such designation(s) should include:



- a) a completed **Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands** (RIS) for each site, which can be obtained from the Ramsar Web site at http://ramsar.org/key_ris_index.htm or requested from the Ramsar Secretariat; and
- b) a **map** showing the boundaries of each designated site.

Please note: All subsequent designations of wetlands for the Ramsar List should be sent directly to the Ramsar Secretariat, not to UNESCO. Subsequent designations do not require the signature of the Head of State or Ministry of Foreign Affairs but must be signed by the head of the government agency that has been officially named to represent the national government in implementing the Ramsar Convention.

It is important to be aware that sites designated for the Ramsar List do not have already to be established as legally protected areas before designation. Listing under the Ramsar Convention elevates the sites to a higher status (recognized as places of “international importance”), focuses more attention upon them, and should contribute to their long-term conservation and wise use – whether or not Ramsar status conveys additional legal protection in-country depends upon the national and local policy and legislation concerning Ramsar Sites, which varies from country to country. Human uses of wetlands are compatible with listing under Ramsar, provided that they are in line with the Ramsar concept of “wise use” (sustainable use) and do not lead to a negative change in ecological character. Member States do not surrender sovereignty over their Ramsar Sites in any way.

Wetlands should be added to the Convention’s List of Wetlands of International Importance if they meet any of eight Criteria for being considered internationally important. The listing has to be made by the national government, which is then implicitly making a commitment to ensure that the ecological character of the site will be maintained. Local officials and citizens’ groups wishing to nominate wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List should make contact with their country’s “Administrative Authority”, the agency (as mentioned just above) within the national government that has been charged by the head of state or foreign office with responsibility for implementing the Convention within the country. Different countries have evolved their own procedures for proceeding to a Ramsar designation and these vary greatly from country to country. A list of the Administrative Authorities is available at http://ramsar.org/about_admin_auth.htm and from the Ramsar Secretariat.

5.3 The cost of joining the Convention

At each ordinary meeting, the Conference of the Parties adopts a budget (in Swiss francs) for the next triennium. Contracting Parties contribute to this budget a percentage that is based upon the United Nations scale of assessments adopted for each year by the UN General Assembly, with the exception that the Conference of the Parties has established a **minimum** level of contributions at 1000 Swiss francs (ca. US\$ 780 or Euros 640 in March 2004) for all Parties to cover basic expenses of invoicing and administration.



Appendix 1

Text of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat

**Ramsar, 2.2.1971
as amended by the Protocol of 3.12.1982
and the Amendments of 28.5.1987**

The Contracting Parties,

RECOGNIZING the interdependence of Man and his environment;

CONSIDERING the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands as regulators of water regimes and as habitats supporting a characteristic flora and fauna, especially waterfowl;

BEING CONVINCED that wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable;

DESIRING to stem the progressive encroachment on and loss of wetlands now and in the future;

RECOGNIZING that waterfowl in their seasonal migrations may transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource;

BEING CONFIDENT that the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining far-sighted national policies with coordinated international action;

Have agreed as follows:

ARTICLE 1

1. For the purpose of this Convention wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.
2. For the purpose of this Convention waterfowl are birds ecologically dependent on wetlands.

ARTICLE 2

1. Each Contracting Party shall designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in a List of Wetlands of International Importance, hereinafter referred to as "the List" which is maintained by the bureau established under Article 8. The boundaries of each wetland shall be precisely described and also delimited on a map and they may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands, especially where these have importance as waterfowl habitat.
2. Wetlands should be selected for the List on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology. In the first instance wetlands of international importance to waterfowl at any season should be included.
3. The inclusion of a wetland in the List does not prejudice the exclusive sovereign rights of the Contracting Party in whose territory the wetland is situated.



4. Each Contracting Party shall designate at least one wetland to be included in the List when signing this Convention or when depositing its instrument of ratification or accession, as provided in Article 9.
5. Any Contracting Party shall have the right to add to the List further wetlands situated within its territory, to extend the boundaries of those wetlands already included by it in the List, or, because of its urgent national interests, to delete or restrict the boundaries of wetlands already included by it in the List and shall, at the earliest possible time, inform the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 of any such changes.
6. Each Contracting Party shall consider its international responsibilities for the conservation, management and wise use of migratory stocks of waterfowl, both when designating entries for the List and when exercising its right to change entries in the List relating to wetlands within its territory.

ARTICLE 3

1. The Contracting Parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory.
2. Each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8.

ARTICLE 4

1. Each Contracting Party shall promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves on wetlands, whether they are included in the List or not, and provide adequately for their wardening.
2. Where a Contracting Party in its urgent national interest, deletes or restricts the boundaries of a wetland included in the List, it should as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources, and in particular it should create additional nature reserves for waterfowl and for the protection, either in the same area or elsewhere, of an adequate portion of the original habitat.
3. The Contracting Parties shall encourage research and the exchange of data and publications regarding wetlands and their flora and fauna.
4. The Contracting Parties shall endeavour through management to increase waterfowl populations on appropriate wetlands.
5. The Contracting Parties shall promote the training of personnel competent in the fields of wetland research, management and wardening.

ARTICLE 5

The Contracting Parties shall consult with each other about implementing obligations arising from the Convention especially in the case of a wetland extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where a water system is shared by Contracting Parties. They shall at the same time endeavour to coordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.

ARTICLE 6

1. There shall be established a Conference of the Contracting Parties to review and promote the implementation of this Convention. The Bureau referred to in Article 8, paragraph 1, shall convene ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties at intervals of not more than three years, unless the Conference decides otherwise, and extraordinary meetings at the written requests of at least one third of the Contracting Parties. Each ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties shall determine the time and venue of the next ordinary meeting.
2. The Conference of the Contracting Parties shall be competent:
 - (a) to discuss the implementation of this Convention;



- (b) to discuss additions to and changes in the List;
 - (c) to consider information regarding changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 3;
 - (d) to make general or specific recommendations to the Contracting Parties regarding the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna;
 - (e) to request relevant international bodies to prepare reports and statistics on matters which are essentially international in character affecting wetlands;
 - (f) to adopt other recommendations, or resolutions, to promote the functioning of this Convention.
3. The Contracting Parties shall ensure that those responsible at all levels for wetlands management shall be informed of, and take into consideration, recommendations of such Conferences concerning the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna.
 4. The Conference of the Contracting Parties shall adopt rules of procedure for each of its meetings.
 5. The Conference of the Contracting Parties shall establish and keep under review the financial regulations of this Convention. At each of its ordinary meetings, it shall adopt the budget for the next financial period by a two-thirds majority of Contracting Parties present and voting.
 6. Each Contracting Party shall contribute to the budget according to a scale of contributions adopted by unanimity of the Contracting Parties present and voting at a meeting of the ordinary Conference of the Contracting Parties.

ARTICLE 7

1. The representatives of the Contracting Parties at such Conferences should include persons who are experts on wetlands or waterfowl by reason of knowledge and experience gained in scientific, administrative or other appropriate capacities.
2. Each of the Contracting Parties represented at a Conference shall have one vote, recommendations, resolutions and decisions being adopted by a simple majority of the Contracting Parties present and voting, unless otherwise provided for in this Convention.

ARTICLE 8

1. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources shall perform the continuing bureau duties under this Convention until such time as another organization or government is appointed by a majority of two-thirds of all Contracting Parties.
2. The continuing bureau duties shall be, *inter alia*:
 - (a) to assist in the convening and organizing of Conferences specified in Article 6;
 - (b) to maintain the List of Wetlands of International Importance and to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any additions, extensions, deletions or restrictions concerning wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 2;
 - (c) to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 3;
 - (d) to forward notification of any alterations to the List, or changes in character of wetlands included therein, to all Contracting Parties and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next Conference;
 - (e) to make known to the Contracting Party concerned, the recommendations of the Conferences in respect of such alterations to the List or of changes in the character of wetlands included therein.



ARTICLE 9

1. This Convention shall remain open for signature indefinitely.
2. Any member of the United Nations or of one of the Specialized Agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency or Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may become a Party to this Convention by:
 - (a) signature without reservation as to ratification;
 - (b) signature subject to ratification followed by ratification;
 - (c) accession.
3. Ratification or accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of ratification or accession with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereinafter referred to as “the Depository”).

ARTICLE 10

1. This Convention shall enter into force four months after seven States have become Parties to this Convention in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 9.
2. Thereafter this Convention shall enter into force for each Contracting Party four months after the day of its signature without reservation as to ratification, or its deposit of an instrument of ratification or accession.

ARTICLE 10 bis

1. This Convention may be amended at a meeting of the Contracting Parties convened for that purpose in accordance with this Article.
2. Proposals for Amendment may be made by any Contracting Party.
3. The text of any proposed amendment and the reasons for it shall be communicated to the organization or government performing the continuing bureau duties under the Convention (hereinafter referred to as “the Bureau”) and shall promptly be communicated by the Bureau to all Contracting Parties. Any comments on the text by the Contracting Parties shall be communicated to the Bureau within three months of the date on which the amendments were communicated to the Contracting Parties by the Bureau. The Bureau shall, immediately after the last day for submission of comments, communicate to the Contracting Parties all comments submitted by that day.
4. A meeting of Contracting Parties to consider an amendment communicated in accordance with paragraph 3 shall be convened by the Bureau upon the written request of one third of the Contracting Parties. The Bureau shall consult the Parties concerning the time and venue of the meeting.
5. Amendments shall be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the Contracting Parties present and voting.
6. An amendment adopted shall enter into force for the Contracting Parties which have accepted it on the first day of the fourth month following the date on which two thirds of the Contracting Parties have deposited an instrument of acceptance with the Depository. For each Contracting Party which deposits an instrument of acceptance after the date on which two thirds of the Contracting Parties have deposited an instrument of acceptance, the amendment shall enter into force on the first day of the fourth month, following the date of the deposit of its instrument of acceptance.

ARTICLE 11

1. This Convention shall continue in force for an indefinite period.
2. Any Contracting Party may denounce this Convention after a period of five years from the date on which it entered into force for that Party by giving written notice thereof to the Depository. Denunciation shall take effect four months after the day on which notice thereof is received by the Depository.



ARTICLE 12

1. The Depositary shall inform all States that have signed and acceded to this Convention as soon as possible of:
 - (a) signatures to the Convention;
 - (b) deposits of instruments of ratification of this Convention;
 - (c) deposits of instruments of accession to this Convention;
 - (d) the date of entry into force of this Convention;
 - (e) notification of denunciation of this Convention.
2. When this Convention has entered into force, the Depositary shall have it registered with the Secretariat of the United Nations in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, being duly authorized to that effect, have signed this Convention.

DONE at Ramsar this 2nd day of February 1971, in a single original in the English, French, German and Russian languages, all texts being equally authentic* which shall be deposited with the Depositary which shall send true copies thereof to all Contracting Parties.

* Pursuant to the Final Act of the Conference to conclude the Protocol, the Depositary provided the second Conference of the Contracting Parties with official versions of the Convention in the Arabic, Chinese and Spanish languages, prepared in consultation with interested Governments and with the assistance of the Bureau.



Appendix 2

Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention

1st Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Cagliari, Italy, November 1980)

- Recommendation 1.1 Recruitment of new Parties to the Convention
- Recommendation 1.2 Assisting developing countries to contribute to the Convention
- Recommendation 1.3 Increasing the number of sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Recommendation 1.4 Developing guidelines on selection of sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Recommendation 1.5 National inventories of wetlands
- Recommendation 1.6 Assessment of wetland values as part of the planning process
- Recommendation 1.7 Elaboration of a protocol to establish an amendment procedure for the Convention
- Recommendation 1.8 Elaboration of a protocol to amend the Convention with a view to extending its effectiveness
- Recommendation 1.9 Call for a Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties subsequent to the entry into force of the protocol proposed under Recommendation 1.7
- Recommendation 1.10 Establishment of a permanent secretariat for the Ramsar Convention
- Recommendation 1.11 Thanks to the Italian hosts

2nd Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Groningen, Netherlands, May 1984)

- Recommendation 2.1 Submission of national reports
- Recommendation 2.2 Amendment of the Convention
- Recommendation 2.3 Action points for priority attention
- Recommendation 2.4 Possibilities of financial or other support for the interim secretariat
- Recommendation 2.5 Designation of the Wadden Sea for the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Recommendation 2.6 Conservation and management of Sahel wetlands
- Recommendation 2.7 Conservation of Djoudj National Bird Park, Senegal
- Recommendation 2.8 Establishment of a protected area in the River Senegal Basin in Mauritania
- Recommendation 2.9 Conservation action and protection of wetlands not designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Recommendation 2.10 Thanks to the Government of the Netherlands

3rd Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Regina, Canada, May-June 1987)

- Resolution 3.1 Secretariat matters
- Resolution 3.2 Financial and budgetary matters
- Resolution 3.3 Establishment of a Standing Committee
- Resolution 3.4 Provisional implementation of the amendments to the Convention

- Recommendation 3.1 Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance and guidelines on their use
- Recommendation 3.2 Need for further studies of flyways
- Recommendation 3.3 Wise use of wetlands
- Recommendation 3.4 Responsibility of development agencies towards wetlands
- Recommendation 3.5 Tasks of the Bureau in respect to development agencies
- Recommendation 3.6 Further Contracting Parties in Africa
- Recommendation 3.7 Further Contracting Parties in Central America, the Caribbean and South America
- Recommendation 3.8 Conservation of Azraq Ramsar Site
- Recommendation 3.9 Change in ecological character of Ramsar Sites
- Recommendation 3.10 Further Contracting Parties in Asia and the Pacific
- Recommendation 3.11 Thanks to the Canadian hosts



4th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Montreux, Switzerland, June–July 1990)

Resolution 4.1	Interpretation of Article 10 bis paragraph 6 of the Convention
Resolution 4.2	Working languages of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
Resolution 4.3	Wetland Conservation Fund
Resolution 4.4	Implementation of Article 5 of the Convention
Resolution 4.5	Accession requirements

Four additional Resolutions were adopted by the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties:

Annex to Document C.4.12:	Resolution on the framework for the implementation of the Convention and priorities for attention 1991-1993
Annex to Document C.4.13:	Resolution on financial and budgetary matters
Annex to Document C.4.14:	Resolution on the Standing Committee
Annex to Document C.4.15:	Secretariat matters

Recommendation 4.1	Wetland restoration
Recommendation 4.2	Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance
Recommendation 4.3	National reports
Recommendation 4.4	Establishment of wetland reserves
Recommendation 4.5	Education and training
Recommendation 4.6	Establishment of national scientific inventories of potential Ramsar Sites
Recommendation 4.7	Mechanisms for improved application of the Ramsar Convention
Recommendation 4.8	Change in ecological character of Ramsar Sites
Recommendation 4.9	Ramsar Sites in the territories of specific Contracting Parties
Recommendation 4.9.1	Doñana National Park, Spain
Recommendation 4.9.2	Everglades, USA
Recommendation 4.9.3	Azraq Oasis, Jordan
Recommendation 4.9.4	Conservation of the Leybucht, Federal Republic of Germany
Recommendation 4.9.5	Greek Ramsar Sites
Recommendation 4.10	Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept
Recommendation 4.11	Cooperation with international organizations
Recommendation 4.12	Cooperation between Contracting Parties for the management of migratory species
Recommendation 4.13	Responsibility of multilateral development banks (MDBs) towards wetlands
Recommendation 4.14	Thanks to the Swiss hosts

5th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Kushiro, Japan, June 1993)

Resolution 5.1	The Kushiro Statement and the framework for the implementation of the Convention
Resolution 5.2	Financial and budgetary matters
Resolution 5.3	Procedure for initial designation of sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance
Resolution 5.4	Record of Ramsar Sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur (the Montreux Record)
Resolution 5.5	Establishment of a Scientific and Technical Review Panel
Resolution 5.6	Wise use of wetlands
Resolution 5.7	Management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands
Resolution 5.8	Future funding and operation of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Fund
Resolution 5.9	Application of the Ramsar criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance
Recommendation 5.1	Ramsar Sites in the territories of specific Contracting Parties
Recommendation 5.2	Guidelines for interpretation of Article 3 (“ecological character” and “change in ecological character”)
Recommendation 5.3	Essential character of wetlands and the need for zonation related to wetland reserves
Recommendation 5.4	Relationship between the Ramsar Convention, the Global Environment Facility, and the Convention on Biological Diversity
Recommendation 5.5	Inclusion of conservation and wise use of wetlands in multilateral and bilateral development cooperation programmes



- Recommendation 5.6 The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Ramsar Convention
- Recommendation 5.7 National Committees
- Recommendation 5.8 Measures to promote public awareness of wetland values in wetland reserves
- Recommendation 5.9 Establishment of Ramsar guidelines on wetlands of international importance as fish habitat
- Recommendation 5.10 25th anniversary wetland campaign for 1996
- Recommendation 5.11 New Bureau headquarters in Switzerland
- Recommendation 5.12 Thanks to the Japanese hosts
- Recommendation 5.13 Promotion and strengthening of the Ramsar Neotropical Region
- Recommendation 5.14 Collaboration for Mediterranean wetlands
- Recommendation 5.15 Working languages of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Brisbane, Australia, March 1996)

- Resolution VI.1 Working definitions of ecological character, guidelines for describing and maintaining the ecological character of listed sites and operation of the Montreux Record
- Resolution VI.2 Adoption of specific criteria based on fish for identifying wetlands of international importance
- Resolution VI.3 Review of the Ramsar criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance and the accompanying guidelines
- Resolution VI.4 Adoption of population estimates for operation of the specific criteria based on waterfowl
- Resolution VI.5 Inclusion of subterranean karst wetlands as a wetland type under the Ramsar classification system
- Resolution VI.6 The Wetland Conservation Fund [now renamed the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF)]
- Resolution VI.7 The Scientific and Technical Review Panel [STRP]
- Resolution VI.8 Secretary General matters
- Resolution VI.9 Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity
- Resolution VI.10 Cooperation with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its implementing agencies: the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP
- Resolution VI.11 Consolidation of recommendations and resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
- Resolution VI.12 National Wetland Inventories and candidate sites for listing
- Resolution VI.13 Submission of information on sites designated for the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Resolution VI.14 The Ramsar 25th Anniversary Statement, the Strategic Plan 1997-2002, and the Bureau Work Programme 1997-1999
- Resolution VI.15 Amendment of the Rules of Procedure as of the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
- Resolution VI.16 Accession procedures
- Resolution VI.17 Financial and budgetary matters
- Resolution VI.18 Establishment of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award
- Resolution VI.19 Education and public awareness
- Resolution VI.20 Thanks to the people and governments of Australia
- Resolution VI.21 Assessment and reporting on the status of wetlands
- Resolution VI.22 Consideration of overall cost reduction and in particular of possible relocation of the Ramsar Bureau and its operations
- Resolution VI.23 Ramsar and water

- Recommendation 6.1 Conservation of peatlands
- Recommendation 6.2 Environmental impact assessment
- Recommendation 6.3 Involving local and indigenous people in the management of Ramsar wetlands
- Recommendation 6.4 The “Brisbane Initiative” on the establishment of a network of listed sites along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway
- Recommendation 6.5 Establishment of further wetland manager training programmes
- Recommendation 6.6 Establishment of regionally based Ramsar Liaison Officers
- Recommendation 6.7 Conservation and wise use of coral reefs and associated ecosystems
- Recommendation 6.8 Strategic planning in coastal zones
- Recommendation 6.9 Framework for National Wetland Policy development and implementation
- Recommendation 6.10 Promotion of cooperation on the economic valuation of wetlands
- Recommendation 6.11 Continuing collaboration for Mediterranean wetlands



- Recommendation 6.12 Conservation and wise use in private and public funded activities
- Recommendation 6.13 Guidelines on management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands
- Recommendation 6.14 Toxic chemicals
- Recommendation 6.15 Restoration of wetlands
- Recommendation 6.16 Conservation and wise use of wetlands in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation programmes
- Recommendation 6.17 Ramsar Sites in the territories of specific Contracting Parties, also including:
 - Recommendation 6.17.1 Greek Ramsar Sites
 - Recommendation 6.17.2 National Reserve of Paracas and the national strategy for the conservation of wetlands in Peru
 - Recommendation 6.17.3 Azraq Oasis, Jordan
 - Recommendation 6.17.4 Australian Ramsar Sites
 - Recommendation 6.17.5 The Lower Danube Basin
- Recommendation 6.18 Conservation and wise use of wetlands in the Pacific Islands region

7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (San José, Costa Rica, May 1999)

- Resolution VII.1 Regional categorization of countries under the Convention, and composition, roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, including tasks of Standing Committee members
- Resolution VII.2 Composition and *modus operandi* of the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)
- Resolution VII.3 Partnerships with international organizations
- Resolution VII.4 Partnerships and cooperation with other Conventions, including harmonized information management infrastructures
- Resolution VII.5 Critical evaluation of the Convention's Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) and its future operations
- Resolution VII.6 Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies
- Resolution VII.7 Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands
- Resolution VII.8 Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands
- Resolution VII.9 The Convention's Outreach Programme, 1999-2002
- Resolution VII.10 Wetland Risk Assessment Framework
- Resolution VII.11 Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- Resolution VII.12 The sites in the Ramsar List: official descriptions, conservation status and management planning, including the situation of particular sites in the territory of specific Contracting Parties
- Resolution VII.13 Guidelines for identifying and designating karst and other subterranean hydrological systems as Wetlands of International Importance
- Resolution VII.14 Invasive species and wetlands
- Resolution VII.15 Incentive measures to encourage the application of the Wise Use Principles
- Resolution VII.16 The Ramsar Convention and impact assessment: strategic, environmental and social
- Resolution VII.17 Restoration as an element of national planning for wetland conservation and wise use
- Resolution VII.18 Guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management
- Resolution VII.19 Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention
- Resolution VII.20 Priorities for wetland inventory
- Resolution VII.21 Enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands
- Resolution VII.22 Collaborative structure for Mediterranean wetlands
- Resolution VII.23 Defining Ramsar Site boundaries
- Resolution VII.24 Compensation for lost wetland habitats and other functions
- Resolution VII.25 Measuring environmental quality in wetlands
- Resolution VII.26 Creation of a Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere
- Resolution VII.27 Work Plan
- Resolution VII.28 Financial and Budgetary Matters
- Resolution VII.29 Thanks to the host
- Resolution VII.30 Status of Yugoslavia in the Ramsar Convention
- Recommendation 7.1 A global action plan for the wise use and management of peatlands
- Recommendation 7.2 Small Island Developing States, island wetland ecosystems, and the Ramsar Convention



- Recommendation 7.3 Multilateral cooperation on the conservation of migratory waterbirds in the Asia-Pacific region
Recommendation 7.4 The Wetlands for the Future Initiative

8th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Valencia, Spain, November 2002)

- Resolution VIII.1 Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands
Resolution VIII.2 The Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention
Resolution VIII.3 Climate change and wetlands: impacts, adaptation, and mitigation
Resolution VIII.4 Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)
Resolution VIII.5 Partnerships and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions
Resolution VIII.6 A Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory
Resolution VIII.7 Gaps in and harmonization of Ramsar guidance on wetland ecological character, inventory, assessment, and monitoring
Resolution VIII.8 Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention
Resolution VIII.9 'Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into environmental impact assessment legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment' adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and their relevance to the Ramsar Convention
Resolution VIII.10 Improving implementation of the Strategic Framework and Vision for the List of Wetlands of International Importance
Resolution VIII.11 Additional guidance for identifying and designating under-represented wetland types as Wetlands of International Importance
Resolution VIII.12 Enhancing the wise use and conservation of mountain wetlands
Resolution VIII.13 Enhancing the information on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites)
Resolution VIII.14 New Guidelines for management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands
Resolution VIII.15 The 'San José Record' for the promotion of wetland management
Resolution VIII.16 Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration
Resolution VIII.17 Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands
Resolution VIII.18 Invasive species and wetlands
Resolution VIII.19 Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites
Resolution VIII.20 General guidance for interpreting "urgent national interests" under Article 2.5 of the Convention and considering compensation under Article 4.2
Resolution VIII.21 Defining Ramsar Site boundaries more accurately in Ramsar Information Sheets
Resolution VIII.22 Issues concerning Ramsar Sites that cease to fulfil or never fulfilled the Criteria for designation as Wetlands of International Importance
Resolution VIII.23 Incentive measures as tools for achieving the wise use of wetlands
Resolution VIII.24 UNEP's Guidelines for enhancing compliance with multilateral environmental agreements, and Guidelines for national enforcement, and international cooperation in combating violations, of laws implementing multilateral environmental agreements
Resolution VIII.25 The Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008
Resolution VIII.26 The implementation of the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 during the triennium 2003-2005 and National Reports for Ramsar COP9
Resolution VIII.27 Financial and budgetary matters
Resolution VIII.28 *Modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)
Resolution VIII.29 Evaluation of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) and establishment of a Ramsar Endowment Fund
Resolution VIII.30 Regional initiatives for the further implementation of the Convention
Resolution VIII.31 The Convention's Programme on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) 2003-2008
Resolution VIII.32 Conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources
Resolution VIII.33 Guidance for identifying, sustainably managing, and designating temporary pools as Wetlands of International Importance
Resolution VIII.34 Agriculture, wetlands and water resource management



- Resolution VIII.35 The impact of natural disasters, particularly drought, on wetland ecosystems
- Resolution VIII.36 Participatory Environmental Management (PEM) as a tool for management and wise use of wetlands
- Resolution VIII.37 International cooperation on conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Asia-Pacific region
- Resolution VIII.38 Waterbird population estimates and the identification and designation of Wetlands of International Importance
- Resolution VIII.39 High Andean wetlands as strategic ecosystems
- Resolution VIII.40 Guidelines for rendering the use of groundwater compatible with the conservation of wetlands
- Resolution VIII.41 Establishment of a Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in Western and Central Asia
- Resolution VIII.42 Small Island Developing States in the Oceania Region
- Resolution VIII.43 A subregional strategy of the Ramsar Convention for South America
- Resolution VIII.44 New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Africa
- Resolution VIII.45 Operation of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the effectiveness of Ramsar Convention Resolutions and Recommendations
- Resolution VIII.46 Thanks to the people and governments of Spain



Appendix 3

References

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Information Packs

The basic Ramsar Info Pack: http://ramsar.org/index_about_ramsar.htm#info.

“Wetland values and functions”: http://ramsar.org/values_intro_e.htm.

“The cultural heritage of wetlands”: http://ramsar.org/wwd2002_infopack_pdfmenu.htm.



Appendix 4

The Ramsar Convention 'toolkit' for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, 2nd edition

including Guidelines adopted by the 7th and 8th Conferences of the Parties

- HANDBOOK 1** WISE USE OF WETLANDS
- HANDBOOK 2** NATIONAL WETLAND POLICIES
Developing and implementing National Wetland Policies
- HANDBOOK 3** LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS
Reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands
- HANDBOOK 4** RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT
Integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management
- HANDBOOK 5** PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT
Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands
- HANDBOOK 6** WETLAND CEPA
The Convention's Programme on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) 2003-2008
- HANDBOOK 7** DESIGNATING RAMSAR SITES
Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance
- HANDBOOK 8** MANAGING WETLANDS
Frameworks for managing Wetlands of International Importance and other wetlands
- HANDBOOK 9** INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- HANDBOOK 10** WETLAND INVENTORY
A Ramsar framework for wetland inventory
- HANDBOOK 11** IMPACT ASSESSMENT
Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into environmental impact assessment legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment
- HANDBOOK 12** WATER ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT
Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands
- HANDBOOK 13** COASTAL MANAGEMENT
Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management
- HANDBOOK 14** PEATLANDS
Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands



Appendix 5

Glossary of Ramsar Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Terminology

ACRONYMS

AAs	Administrative Authorities, Ramsar implementing agencies
AEWA	African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEC	IUCN Commission on Education and Communications
CEM	IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management
CEPA	Communications, education, and public awareness
CIESIN	Center for International Earth Science Information Network
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COP	Conference of the Contracting Parties
COP8	8 th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
CP	Contracting Party, or member state, of the Convention
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DSG	Deputy Secretary General
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
EKBY	The Greek Wetland / Biotope Centre
EPA	Education and Public Awareness; Environmental Protection Agency
EWS	Early warning system
GAPP	Global Action Plan for Peatlands
GBF	Global Biodiversity Forum
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GISP	Global Invasive Species Programme
GWEN	Global Wetlands Economics Network
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
ICN	Instituto de Conservação da Natureza, Portugal
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
ICZM	Integrated coastal zone management
IMCG	International Mire Conservation Group
IOPs	International Organization Partners of the Convention
IPCC	UN/WMO Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPS	International Peat Society
IUCN	IUCN - The World Conservation Union
IWRB	International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (now Wetlands International)
KIWC	Kushiro International Wetlands Centre
MA	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
MAB	UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme
MEA	Multilateral environment agreement
MR	Montreux Record
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NFPs	National Focal Points (for CEPA and STRP)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRs	National Reports prepared by Contracting Parties in advance of each Ramsar COP
NRC	National Ramsar Committee / National Wetland Committee
NWPs	National Wetland Policies (or Strategies or Plans, etc.)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PTG	Policy and Technical Group within the Ramsar Secretariat
RAM	Ramsar Advisory Mission
RBI	River Basin Initiative



RIS	Information Sheet for Ramsar Wetlands
SBSTA	UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice
SBSTTA	CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
SC	Ramsar Standing Committee
SC30	30 th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
SG	Secretary General
SGF	Ramsar Small Grants Fund
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SSC	IUCN Species Survival Commission
STRP	Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel
STRP6	6 th meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel
SWS	Society of Wetland Scientists
TOR	Terms of reference
TSs	Technical Sessions of the Ramsar COPs
UNCCD	Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WCMC	UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCPA	IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas
WFF	Wetlands for the Future initiative
WLI	Wetland Link International
WRI	World Resources Institute
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002
WWD	World Wetlands Day (2 February)
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
WWT	Waterfowl and Wetlands Trust

GLOSSARY

Administrative Authority:	the agency within each Contracting Party charged by the national government with implementation of the Ramsar Convention within its territory
Attributes of wetlands:	attributes of a wetland include biological diversity and unique cultural and heritage features. These attributes may lead to certain uses or the derivation of particular products, but they may also have intrinsic, unquantifiable importance (adopted by Resolution VI.1, Appendix 10)
Brisbane Initiative:	recommendation of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (1996) calling for the establishment of a network of Ramsar-listed and other wetlands of international importance for migratory shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway
Change in ecological character:	the impairment or imbalance in any of those processes and functions which maintain the wetland and its products, attributes and values (annex to Resolution VI.1, Appendix 10)
Compensation:	meaning not yet precisely fixed; cited in Article 4.2 of the Convention as required in the event of a Contracting Party's deleting a Ramsar Site or restricting its boundaries
Contact letters:	method by which the Ramsar Secretariat seeks information from the Contracting Parties when informed by any means of impending threat to Ramsar Sites
Contracting Parties:	countries that are Member States to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 138 as of



December 2003. Membership in the Convention is open to all states that are members of the United Nations, one of the UN specialized agencies, or the International Atomic Energy Agency, or is a Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat :	the official name of the Convention; the abbreviated name “Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)” is more commonly used
Ecological character:	the structure and inter-relationships between the biological, chemical, and physical components of the wetland. These derive from the interactions of individual processes, functions, attributes and values of the ecosystem(s) (adopted by Resolution VI.1, Appendix 10)
Evian Project:	a suite of communications and capacity building activities managed by the Ramsar Secretariat with funding from the private sector Danone Groupe
Functions of wetlands:	activities or actions which occur naturally in wetlands as a product of interactions between the ecosystem structure and processes. Functions include flood water control; nutrient, sediment and contaminant retention; food web support; shoreline stabilization and erosion controls; storm protection; and stabilization of local climatic conditions, particularly rainfall and temperature (adopted by Resolution VI.1, Appendix 10)
International Organization Partners :	the four officially recognized non-governmental organizations which assist in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention: BirdLife International, IUCN–The World Conservation Union, Wetlands International, and the World Wide Fund for Nature International
List of Wetlands of International Importance :	(“Ramsar List”) = the list of wetlands which have been designated by the Contracting Parties in which they reside as internationally important according to one or more of the criteria that have been adopted by the Conference of the Parties
Mediterranean Wetlands Committee:	committee of governments and NGOs established by the Ramsar Standing Committee’s 19th meeting which, under the aegis of the Ramsar Secretariat, provides guidance to all interested parties, and in particular to the Ramsar Secretariat and the MedWet Coordinator, on practical measures and actions for implementation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy
Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy:	plan of objectives and actions, endorsed by the Venice Declaration (Mediterranean Wetlands Conference, Venice, June 1996), aimed at achieving the goal of: <i>“to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of Mediterranean wetlands as a contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and to sustainable development in the region”</i>
MedWet:	the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, administered by the MedWet Coordination Unit (an outposted part of the Ramsar Secretariat based in Athens, Greece)
Montreux Record:	the list of Ramsar Sites where change in ecological character has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur as a result of technological development, pollution, or other human interference (established by Resolution 5.4, Appendix 9). Montreux Record sites require priority national and international conservation attention and receive preference for application of the Ramsar Advisory Mission.
National Ramsar Committee:	the body established in many Contracting Parties to assist the official Administrative Authority in implementation of the Convention within the country, usually including scientific and technical experts and representatives of NGOs and stakeholders as well as government personnel. Sometimes called “National Wetland Committees”.
National Wetland Policies:	one of the most important tools under the Convention for ensuring the wise use and integrated management of Ramsar and other wetlands within each Contracting Party (may also be called Strategies, Plans, etc.)
1% threshold:	Criterion 6 of the Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance for the Ramsar List: <i>“where data on populations are available, [the site] regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterfowl”</i> .
Paris Protocol:	an amendment to the text of the Ramsar Convention providing an amendment



Products of wetlands:	procedure (Article 10 bis) and additional language versions of the Convention, adopted by an Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Paris in 1982 products generated by wetlands include wildlife resources; fisheries; forest resources; forage resources; agricultural resources; and water supply. These products are generated by the interactions between the biological, chemical and physical components of wetlands (adopted by Resolution VI.1, Appendix 10)
Ramsar:	city in Iran, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, where the Convention on Wetlands was agreed on 2 February 1971; thus the Convention's informal nickname, "Ramsar Convention on Wetlands"
Ramsar Advisory Mission:	the method by which, at the invitation of Contracting Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat, with consultant experts as appropriate, can assess the situation at a threatened Ramsar Site, frequently a Montreux Record site, and make recommendations for improvement.
Ramsar Criteria:	Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance, used by Contracting Parties and advisory bodies to identify wetlands as qualifying for the Ramsar List on the basis of representativeness or uniqueness or of biodiversity values
Ramsar List:	the List of Wetlands of International Importance
Ramsar regions:	Africa, Asia, Europe, Neotropics, North America, and Oceania
Ramsar Sites:	wetlands designated by the Contracting Parties for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance because they meet one or more of the Ramsar Criteria
Ramsar Sites Database:	repository of ecological, biological, socio-economic, and political data and maps with boundaries on all Ramsar Sites, maintained by Wetlands International in Wageningen, the Netherlands, under contract to the Convention
Regina Amendments:	series of amendments to Articles 6 and 7 of the Ramsar Convention, approved by the 4th Meeting of the COP held in Regina, Canada, May 1987; entered into force in May 1994
Scientific and Technical Review Panel :	the Convention's subsidiary scientific advisory body consisting of 15 individual STRP members elected by the SC and delegates from the four International Organization Partners, in addition to invited observers from 18 other instruments and organizations; advises the Secretariat and the Standing Committee on a range of scientific and technical issues
Small Grants Fund:	a fund maintained from the Convention's core budget and voluntary contributions for the support of projects from developing countries and countries with economies in transition which have as their objectives the implementation of the Strategic Plan, preparation for joining the Convention, or emergency assistance to threatened Ramsar Sites
Standing Committee:	a committee of Ramsar Contracting Parties that guides the work of the Convention and the Secretariat in the periods between triennial meetings of the COP. The members are chosen by the COP on a proportional basis among the Ramsar regions and also include the Parties that are current hosts of the most recent and the next meetings of the COP. Switzerland (host of the Secretariat) and The Netherlands (host of Wetlands International), as well as the four International Organization Partners, are Permanent Observers on the SC.
Sustainable utilization of a wetland:	Human use of a wetland so that it may yield the greatest continuous benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspiration of future generations (Recommendation 3.3)
Tour du Valat:	the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, located in the Camargue, in southern France, one of the world's foremost wetlands research institutions
Urgent national interests:	meaning not yet precisely fixed; cited in Article 2.5 of the Convention as the only circumstance under which any already-designated site should be deleted from the Ramsar List or its boundaries restricted. Resolution VIII.20 offers some guidance to Parties in interpreting the term.
Values of wetlands:	the perceived benefits to society, either direct or indirect, that result from wetland functions. These values include human welfare, environmental quality, and wildlife support (adopted by Resolution VI.1).
Wetland Conservation Award:	Ramsar Awards established in 1996 to recognize and honor, every three years,



individuals, organizations, and government agencies that have made a significant contribution to wetland conservation and sustainable use in any part of the world, conferred at each triennial meeting of the COP

**Wetlands for the
Future Initiative:**

a funding programme operated by the US State Department, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Ramsar Secretariat to provide matching funds for training and capacity-building projects in the Neotropical region

Wetlands International:

the leading global non-profit wetland conservation organization, partner with the Convention in many activities and contractual provider of Ramsar Sites Database services and the STRP Support Service

Wise Use Guidelines:

Guidelines on the Implementation of the Wise Use Concept (adopted as an annex to Recommendation 4.10, Appendix 12), since elaborated many times by specialized guidance on various aspects of the concept

Wise use of wetlands:

Sustainable utilization of wetlands for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem (Recommendation 3.3)

World Wetlands Day:

the 2nd of February each year (i.e., the anniversary of the signing of the Convention in 1971), established by the Standing Committee in 1996 as the official occasion for activities and celebrations within each Contracting Party aimed at alerting the public to the values and benefits of wetlands and the role of the Convention in maintaining them