

Agenda item 5

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to receive the Secretary General's report and advise as appropriate.

Introduction

1. This report covers the period since the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC39), in November 2008, following the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10) in Changwon, Republic of Korea. The analysis of some global issues is beyond this time frame, taking into account the Resolutions of COP10 and ongoing global debate and actions that affect wetlands. At present the Convention has 159 Contracting Parties, with 1834 wetland sites, totaling 170.4 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Therefore, the level of activity demanded of the Secretariat continues to increase, as the number of Contracting Parties increases and new challenges are emerging from global debate.

COP10 results and implementing key outcomes

2. The most significant achievements stem from the efforts made to expand and better characterize the role of the Convention with regard to: Water and wetlands; Climate change and wetlands; People's livelihoods and wetlands; People's health and wetlands; Land use change, biodiversity and wetlands.
3. COP10 was also a success in opening up the Conference of the Parties and its related meetings to the general public and the local people in and around Changwon city. The hosts for future COPs should endeavour to match those efforts or even do better to raise the profile of wetlands in local, national and international planning and decision-making regarding land use options, environmental governance and finance and economics.
4. In line with the decisions of COP10, the Secretariat has finalized the text of the Strategic Plan 2009-2015 to take into account the Resolutions adopted by the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties; it is now available to Contracting Parties and all others concerned with its implementation.
5. Likewise, the Changwon Declaration has been finalized and the Secretariat is using it as a key guidance for future work and establishment of priorities; the Secretariat is also seeking opportunities to actively promote the Declaration at national and international levels. In this regard, the following actions have been taken or are underway to convey the key messages of the Declaration and encourage its implementation:

- Conducting field visits and discussions with Contracting Parties at all levels, including higher-ranking government officials, Parliamentarians, technical and scientific agencies, NGOs, land users and the media.
 - Intensifying our working relationships with the United Nations agencies and ongoing processes, including UNEP, EMG and UN-Water, UN-Habitat, World Meteorological Organization, GEF, and World Bank. However, integrating wetland issues into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) remains challenging. The Convention will be understood and wetlands recognized as key assets for sustainable development only if the Contracting Parties emphasize their importance during global debates such as UN General Assemblies, CSD Sessions, Climate Change deliberations and other priority areas for decisions and actions. In this regard, the Secretariat continues to seize any opportunity to explain the importance of wetlands and to convey the key messages of the Changwon Declaration to five major sectors, covering:
 - Water and wetlands
 - Climate change and wetlands
 - People's livelihoods and wetlands
 - People's health and wetlands
 - Land use change, biodiversity and wetlands
6. The Secretariat is also encouraging actions for wetland conservation and wise use through two types of cross-cutting mechanism at national and international levels:
- Planning, decision-making, finance and economics
 - Sharing knowledge and experience
7. Therefore, understanding and recognizing the multifaceted interactions between wetlands and land use options is a prerequisite for making decisions on meaningful actions to allow wetlands to perform their functions and provide goods and services to sustain human life.
8. The Secretariat is looking for ways to discuss with the Contracting Parties and adopt with them the most appropriate approaches to raising the profile of wetlands in national and regional planning, policy definition and implementation, and stakeholder's concrete and joint actions.
9. The overall key challenge is about the need to ensure a continued financial support through the payment of regular contributions to the core budget and to obtain voluntary funding to enhance the work of the Convention. In this regard, the implementation of Resolution X.7 on *Optimizing the Ramsar Small Grants Fund during the period 2009-2012* is a real challenge, in the context of the ongoing economic crisis.

Goal 1: Wise use of wetlands

Progress on achievements since COP10, especially with regard to COP Resolutions

10. Particular attention is given to the approach we use to stimulate the implementation of COP decisions. In this regard, the Secretariat is taking actions to enhance the motivation and encourage the participation of key stakeholders, including new partners. The focus on key elements for this period is on:
- Resolution X.3 adopting the Changwon Declaration on human well-being and wetlands;
 - Resolution X.1 adopting the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015, especially its contribution to, *inter alia*, achievement of Millennium Development Goals; the program of the 5th World Water Forum in Turkey 2009; achievement of the 2010 Biodiversity targets; achievement of the 2012 target for Marine Protected Areas; providing responses to the key issues of climate change; and implementation of decisions from the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD13) policies on water and sanitation;
 - Resolution X.19 on Wetlands and river basin management: consolidated scientific and technical guidance;
 - Resolution X.23 on Wetlands and human health and well-being
 - Resolution X.24 on Climate change and wetlands
 - Resolution X.27 on Wetlands and urbanization
 - Resolution X.26 on Wetlands and extractive industries
 - Resolution X.28 on Wetlands and poverty eradication
 - Resolution X.12 about the Principles for partnerships between the Ramsar Convention and the business sector

UN-Habitat

11. Exchanges of ideas on course of actions are underway with UN-HABITAT, and the first steps to establish a partnership with the UN-Habitat have been promising. Following our first contact, UN-Habitat has issued a concept note on “*Cities and Wetlands Management Initiative*”. In this note UN-Habitat recognizes that “Purposeful attention of wetland ecosystems is essential, particularly in the urban fringes where wetlands are being lost due to severe settlement pressure.” The paper provides a summary of root causes of wetland degradation due to human settlements, including inappropriate waste-water treatments from industries and municipalities. Several examples of successful strategies and actions are summarized as well as ongoing actions by UN-Habitat and its partners that find themselves at the center of this great challenge.
12. It is timely for the Ramsar Convention to join these partners to help implement the above Resolutions, especially Resolution X.23 on Wetlands and human health and well-being; Resolution X.27 on Wetlands and urbanization; Resolution X.26 on Wetlands and extractive industries; Resolution X.19 on Wetlands and river basin management. In this regard four areas of possible cooperation have been identified:
- a) Identification of 5-10 cities and provision of support to develop integrated plans for wetland management;
 - b) Collection, documentation and dissemination of innovations and best practices on cities and wetland management;
 - c) Review of planning legislation and by-laws;

- d) Awareness raising.
13. The way forward is to develop a concept note further to a project proposal and jointly mobilize resources for implementation, and invite other development partners and UN agencies to collaborate in promoting wetland conservation and wise use.
14. The Secretariat is urging the Administrative Authorities to join efforts with the UN-Habitat in ongoing actions that are already in line with the principles of the Ramsar Convention. These actions are promoting conservation and wise use of wetlands in an equitable way while at the same time providing great benefits for cities. For instance, the Lake Victoria Region Water and Sanitation Initiative is a joint project involving UN-HABITAT and the governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, helping towns around the Lake attain the water and sanitation target of the Millennium Development Goals. The L Initiative is working with two ongoing programmes coordinated by the East African Community Secretariat, the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Program and the Nile Basin Initiative. It has also established collaborative linkages with the NEPAD Water Agenda for the region facilitated by the African Development Bank, and other regional initiatives. Other relevant initiatives include cities in Sri Lanka, India and the Mekong Basin.

UN World Tourism Organization

15. The Secretariat is liaising with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to develop a joint approach on wetlands management and development of the tourism industry in some Contracting Parties in line with COP10 Resolutions 10, 11 and 30, especially in small islands countries.

Ongoing regional actions to enhance wise use of wetlands

In Africa

16. Four months after COP10, the region and the Secretariat engaged in a series of activities related to the wise use of wetlands through initial steps to implement some COP10 Resolutions in the continent.
17. These actions include among others:
- i) preparation of a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) to Mozambique to advise the government on measures to be taken to alleviate the environmental impacts of an oil/gas project on a Ramsar site and implement Resolution X.26 on wetlands and extractive industries,
 - ii) elaboration of a project document to prepare an institutional and legal framework on biofuels production and their impacts on wetlands in Côte d'Ivoire, in accordance with Resolution X.25;
 - iii) liaising with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to develop a joint approach on wetlands management and development of the tourism industry, starting with Seychelles, in line with Resolutions X.10, 11, and 30;
 - iv) helping the government of Niger to complete its National Wetland Policy and Action Plan;

- v) suggesting the establishment of working relationships with UN-HABITAT for implementing Resolution X27 on wetlands and urbanization, starting with Lake Victoria in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.
18. With the assistance of the WWF International Freshwater Programme, an exchange of experience on National Wetland Policy development and implementation has been made between Niger and Algeria.

In the Americas

19. Ramsar Contracting Parties continue making progress in the preparation and implementation of precise wetland policies or water policies and water programmes that integrate wetland issues. In this regard, the National Water Programme 2007-2012 of Mexico is worth noting. Although this programme does not seem to have the same definition of wetlands as the Ramsar Convention does, it is a comprehensive document that integrates key Ramsar principles in its policies, strategies and objectives. This programme is a relevant tool to implement Ramsar Resolutions related to River Basin Management, wetlands and human health and well-being, climate change and wetlands, wetlands and urbanization, and wetlands and extractive industries.
20. In Brazil, the rehabilitation of Aranuama Lagoon is a good example of successful partnership between city halls, state agencies, private companies, and NGOs to address problems related to wetlands and urbanization. This initiative is a practical demonstration of social mobilization to work on integrated solutions to improve water quality and ecological character of wetlands. It shows a practical way to implement Resolution X.27 on Wetlands and urbanization.
21. In the USA, it is timely to take a look at the progress made regarding the new goal set in 2004 to move beyond the “No Net Loss” of wetlands to one of achieving an overall gain by creating, improving, and protecting three million acres of wetlands by Earth Day 2009 (22 April). According to the fourth annual progress report on the President’s Wetlands Initiative, the goal has been achieved and exceeded, with more than 3.6 million acres of wetlands restored, protected or improved. By 22 April 2009, the report anticipates that nearly 4.5 million acres of wetlands will likely be restored, protected or improved, exceeding the President’s goal by 50%. The most promising achievement is the fact that cooperative conservation continues to be the corner stone of ongoing success. The Secretariat is pleased to notice that under the Cooperative Conservation Executive Order 13352, the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and Defense, and the Environmental Protection Agency, work in partnership with each other and with state, local and tribal governments; private institutions; and other non-governmental entities and individuals to meet conservation goals. The Secretariat hopes that these conservation efforts will continue with the same sense of purpose. Future progress will depend on close attention to the types and quality of wetlands.

In Asia and Oceania

22. The Republic of Korea is taking actions to implement the Changwon Declaration at national level. In addition, during Session 3.33 convened by the Ramsar Secretariat in Istanbul (5th World Water Forum), the Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of

Korea and the Ramsar Secretariat introduced the Changwon Declaration, and its key messages on water, climate change and wetlands formed part of the session's discussions.

23. The Republic of Korea has also published the vision and policy goals on water resources to be led by the Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs. This policy paper is in line with Ramsar principles and Ramsar COP decisions, since it promotes consistent water management for people and for nature. It has four objectives: 1) Clean and sufficient water supply to people and nature; 2) Strengthening of the society against floods; 3) River restoration for the co-existence of people and nature; 4) Informatization and technological development on water resources. The Ramsar Secretariat is hopeful and encourages the implementation of the Changwon Declaration along with the policy on water to fully implement Ramsar principles and COP decisions in the Republic of Korea.
24. In China, the measures adopted to better manage the Yangtze River and the Yellow River are promising examples of restoration schemes that help implement Ramsar Resolutions related to River Basin Management, wetlands and human health and well-being, climate change and wetlands, wetlands and urbanization, and wetlands and extractive industries.
25. Japan's policy paper "*Achieving Water Security Worldwide and in Japan*" is an encouraging engagement of Japan in water-related activities, focusing on water and sanitation MDGs, climate change adaptation, and integrated water resources management. The Secretariat hopes that this commitment will help address water and wetland challenges not only in Japan, but also in other countries. In addition, during the World Water Forum in Turkey, it was encouraging to note promising approaches supported by the Ministry of Environment of Japan, such as the World Lake Vision (WLV) and the Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM). These approaches are in harmony with Resolution X.19 on wetlands and river basin management. A practical example of the combination of the two approaches is underway through the Lake Biwa Comprehensive Conservation Plan (Mother Lake 21 Plan) in Japan. This is a practical way of implementing Resolution X.19, focusing on three areas of actions: 1) maintaining water quality; 2) improving the recharge capacity of soils; and 3) preserving the natural environment and landscapes. It sets a long-term goal of 50 years with a 10 years' interim target.
26. In Central Asia, discussions are underway to address the most prominent problems in the irrigation sector. For Central Asia, the Secretariat recommends improving the irrigation scheme along with water management through the implementation of Resolution X.19 on Wetlands and river basin management; an efficient use of the consolidated scientific and technical guidance from this Resolution will help reduce conflicts between regions within countries, and between upstream and downstream water users. It will also reduce the problems due to rising groundwater tables, floods and increased salinity of arable lands. In Central Asia, it is also advisable to reach a regional agreement about water-energy issues to safeguard water-related security and human well-being.

In Europe

27. Following COP10, the joint support of Switzerland and the Netherlands to the Ramsar Secretariat has been instrumental in conveying the message of the Changwon Declaration, especially through the 5th World Water Forum held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 16 to 22 March 2009.

28. France is reorganizing and reviving the national platform that facilitates the implementation of the Convention in the country (the National Ramsar/Wetland Committee). This is a hopeful process led by the Minister of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Landscape Management. The Secretariat strongly supports this process, chiefly through the participation of the Secretary General in the launch of the process on 6 April 2009 and subsequent inputs from the Senior Advisor for Europe. This initiative is bringing together relevant ministries and governmental organizations, including agencies in charge of water and coastal areas, local authorities, NGOs and representatives of users of wetlands, land, water, and biodiversity. It is implementing Resolution X.29, *Clarifying the functions of agencies and related bodies implementing the Convention at the national level*. The establishment of this national platform enables the Ramsar Administrative Authority to liaise with other competent government agencies with responsibilities relevant to wetlands, water, land, biodiversity and other natural resource issues, with a view to strengthening the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.
29. The Secretariat believes that the EU Water Framework Directive can enhance the implementation of Ramsar principles, and it encourages the Administrative Authorities to make the best use of this directive. This directive focuses heavily on water quality and ecology and it includes many of the Ramsar principles, such as holistic management of water at river basin scale, transboundary water management, including flood, droughts and aquifer management.
30. The Secretariat also encourages relevant Contracting Parties to involve the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in the European Union-China River Basin Management Program that is underway. Ramsar Administrative Authorities are encouraged to take an active part in the EU-China Dialog Platform, where discussions are underway between Chinese and European policy makers, researchers, and practitioners.

Key challenges to address following COP10

31. The 5th World Water Forum was a good opportunity for the Ramsar Secretariat to discuss with Ministers of Waters the key challenges that require a strong partnership at national and international level. One of these challenges calls for joint strategies and actions to implement Resolution X.27 on Wetlands and urbanization. The dialog with the Ministers of Water in Istanbul has shown that we all agree that human beings have developed a tight relationship with wetlands, including rivers, lakes, deltas, estuaries and other coastal wetlands, building towns and cities and using the freshwater and marine resources along rivers, lakes and the coast. In this regard, the 15 largest cities in the world are either on river or lake banks or on coastal wetlands. Some large cities such as Mexico City are even built on lakes that have been drained. Today, human populations are moving to the coast at alarming rates, increasing the pressure on coastal resources and ecosystems. If this trend continues without careful planning and appropriate land use patterns, it will bring many communities to a turning point for their economic and social development.
32. The Ramsar Convention has a vital role to play because coastal environments are fragile and they depend on the health of two major types of wetlands: inland waters and coastal wetlands. The consequences of irresponsible use of freshwater and marine resource are well known, but the decision-makers do not seem to understand the Convention's message. Therefore, the major challenge for the future is to find the right channels to communicate with decision-makers at all levels and to translate key findings in a language

that motivates and stimulates their decisions. Finding and collaborating with the right partners will enhance the influence of the Ramsar Convention.

The Secretariat's approach to responding to these challenges

33. The proposed priorities for 2009 could be better addressed through increasing partnership with relevant UN organizations and Ramsar IOPs – the Secretariat encourages Ramsar Administrative Authorities to work closely with regional and national offices of the IOPs in their countries or regions. New joint activities are under discussion with the UN-HABITAT and the United Nations World Tourism Organization.
34. Taking into account the fact that the year 2010 has been declared by the UN as the Year of Biodiversity, the Secretariat is also encouraging the Administrative Authorities to work closely with relevant stakeholders to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of wetland biodiversity by promoting actions at the local, regional and national levels. The Secretariat is working closely with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through the implementation of the Joint Work Plan and participation in the ongoing dialog on '2010 Biodiversity Target and beyond' led by the Environment Management Group (EMG). The Secretariat is also participating in the work of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG).

GOAL 2. Wetlands of International Importance

Ramsar site designation and management

35. Since COP10, the following Ramsar site designations have been recorded: Africa: 4 sites, in Gabon (3 sites = 1, 054,700 ha) and Mauritania (1 site = 9,500 ha). Asia & Oceania: 8 sites in China (6 sites = 230,729 ha), Kazakhstan (1 site = 111,500 ha), Turkmenistan, 159th Party, with 1 new site (267,124 ha).
36. It is also worth pointing out that, in October 2008, just before COP10, and after the publication of the Secretary General's Report to COP10, the following designations were made:
 - Africa : Chad (1 site); The Gambia (1 site).
 - Americas: Mexico (15 sites); Peru (1 site).
 - Asia & Oceania: Japan (4 sites); Malaysia (1 site); Nepal (1 site); Uzbekistan (1 site); Australia (1 site).
 - Europe: France (2 sites); Germany (1 site); Italy (1 site).
37. Thus since COP10, 12 sites have been designated covering 1,873,553 hectares bringing the present total at 159 Contracting Parties, 1834 Ramsar sites, covering 170,427,084 hectares as of 30 March 2009.
38. In addition, a considerable number of new Ramsar site designations have been submitted to the Secretariat and are presently in the process of review and discussion with the Parties about the form and standard of the data presented. These are 59 designations from the Africa region, 26 from the Americas region, 32 from the Asia and Oceania regions, and 8 from Europe.

39. Some Contracting Parties, especially in Asia and Oceania, have raised two considerations regarding whether they would list a particular wetland as a Ramsar site. The first is that they want to gain the support of the local community before they list the site, quite rightly, and the second issue is that there should ideally be some kind of funding mechanisms in place for the future management of the site before it is listed. For the latter, there are some interesting examples of how Administrative Authorities have managed to work with the local communities to find ways of raising funds for the management of the site. It would be useful to put these case studies together as a reference for our Contracting Parties.
40. In countries where there is no systematic wetland inventory, the process for Ramsar site designation remains practically the only way to assess wetland values and to involve additional stakeholders in the work of the Convention.
41. To make the designation of Ramsar sites more consequential, it is essential to put more effort on management of sites as well as monitoring and evaluation of existing management plans. In fact, the Convention calls for appropriate management and wise use of all wetlands. Particular attention has also to be given to those internationally important wetlands that are not yet formally designated as Ramsar sites but have been identified as qualifying through domestic application of the Strategic Framework or an equivalent process.
42. To enhance wetland management, the Secretariat recommends to the Contracting Parties to include in their Regional Initiatives a strong component on management of sites.

Threats to Ramsar sites and the Montreux Record

43. Document SC40-15 provides a detailed update on the status of Ramsar sites and the Montreux Record through the period following COP10.

Goal 3: International cooperation

44. Since COP10 a number of steps have been taken to raise the profile of wetlands in global processes and promote their conservation and wise use.
45. Concerning increased cooperation with the Global Environment Facility, the Secretariat participated in the 34th Session of GEF Council in November 2008. This was an opportunity to meet with the members of the GEF Council, the GEF Secretariat, and the GEF implementing agencies, as well as representatives of other conventions and NGOs working on transboundary issues. Since the GEF is facilitating international cooperation, the Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to strengthen collaboration with this international structure dealing with global environment, in which it is helping countries to collaborate with their neighbors to modify human activities that place stress on transboundary water systems and interfere with downstream uses of those resources.
46. In December 2008, a further collaborative action was made with the GEF through the involvement of the Ramsar Secretariat and the Chairperson of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in a scientific and technical workshop to examine the use of globally representative datasets and derived indicators that might be utilized to express

potential global benefits for GEF investment actions in International Waters. This was an opportunity for Ramsar to provide input in the review of the situation for transboundary surface water basins, transboundary groundwater systems, and Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs).

47. Working with the GEF International Waters Focal Area can open further opportunities to expand the work of the Convention, since the GEF Focal Area on International Waters targets transboundary water systems, such as river basins with water flowing from one country to another, groundwater resources shared by several countries, or marine ecosystems bounded by more than one nation. Some of the issues that the Convention can address through the GEF are:
- transboundary water pollution;
 - over-extraction of groundwater resources;
 - unsustainable exploitation of fisheries;
 - protection of fisheries habitats;
 - invasive species; and
 - balancing competing uses of water resources.

GOAL 4. Institutional capacity and effectiveness.

48. The Secretariat encourages Contracting Parties to take up specific issues and agree to take the lead on improving their implementation. This can happen through different means: establishing and leading an ad hoc working group, organizing seminars or other working meetings to further the main issues (such as those specifically addressed in Resolutions X.23-28), e.g. for members of the ad hoc working group, for national focal points, or for focal points of Ramsar plus other MEAs, etc. The countries taking the lead in this would also have to provide the necessary funds. Several of our Parties already do this for other MEAs, and we are hopeful that they will be willing to do the same for the Ramsar Convention.
49. Practical examples could include:
- the Ramsar Advisory Board on Capacity Building set up and sponsored by the Netherlands. This Advisory Board is preparing a Framework on Capacity Building that will be made available to all Contracting Parties.
 - through the support of the Swiss government, a training session is being organized in Côte d'Ivoire for French-speaking magistrates, in order to build their capacity in dealing with not only the Ramsar Conventions, but also other environmental conventions as well. The Ramsar Secretariat is leading this initiative, together with UNEP and the “ Institut de l’Energie et de l’Environnement de la Francophonie (IEPF)”.
 - The Ad Hoc Working Group on the legal status of the Secretariat set up by COP10 and co-chaired by Australia and Chile.
50. The development and reactivation of National Wetlands Committees is also a strong means to improve the national capacity to implement the Convention. Similarly, the development of strategic partnerships is always an option for improving the capacity of the Secretariat.

The Convention's financial capacity

51. The Secretariat is seeking voluntary contributions or a secondment of a suitable expert to assist in the preparation and implementation of a strategy to mobilize new and additional resources for implementation of the Convention.
52. Another approach is to enhance cross-sectoral recognition of wetland services to increase recognition of and attention in decision-making to the significance of wetlands for reasons of biodiversity conservation, water supply, coastal protection, integrated coastal zone management, flood defense, climate change mitigation and/or adaptation, food security, poverty eradication, tourism, cultural heritage, and scientific research. In this regard it is helpful to continue expanding our involvement in cross-sectoral groups, meetings, seminars with the UN agencies and programmes, as well as with the civil society such as Planet Workshops.

CEPA activities

53. World Wetlands Day 2009 materials were mailed to over 4,000 key contacts at the end of October 2008. The results so far suggest that the theme and slogan have been popular, and we have already received a large number of reports, some of which are now available on the WWD reports page of our Web site. Equally, the Secretariat has received a satisfying number of translations and personalisations of the poster and leaflet from the design files the Secretariat supplies, and more are expected. These will be on display during the Standing Committee meeting and a special WWD Web page created to collate these, as has been done in previous years.
54. A World Wetlands Day Assessment has been completed during 2008 by a consultant. The full report will be made available online and a summary report is presented to Standing Committee in document SC40-20. The Secretariat has suggested in this summary that a popular report of the key findings and suggestions emanating from the consultant's work should be prepared and distributed, human resources permitting.

Revision of the Ramsar Web site

55. The Secretariat is presently engaged in a revision of the Ramsar Web site in a project funded by the Danone Group. In summer 2008 the RGIS company of Geneva, developers of the Sezame content management system, was contracted to develop a new design for the Web site and manage the content migration of all of the existing Ramsar site (23,850 files) into a new Java-based database technology. Despite some delays caused by Ramsar COP10, by mid-January 2009 the subcontracted design firm, 21Torr of Germany, had completed HTML mock-ups of all of the template pages, and RGIS began building the Sezame framework for the new site.
56. As of mid-March, the Ramsar webmaster has finished a complete inventory of the existing Web site, identifying groups of similar files that can be migrated automatically to the new framework and assigning them their new locations – with that in hand, RGIS developers have begun writing scripts that will help to migrate and index automatically as much of the present site as possible. It is estimated that the migration itself into the new technology will take place in early to mid-April; at that time, the Secretariat staff will be left with the task

of manually completing the migration/indexing and beginning the testing before the new Web site will be ready for the public. Until the migration has been carried out, it is impossible to estimate the amount of Ramsar staff time that will be needed to complete the transition to the new site launch.

The Capacity Building Framework

57. During Standing Committee 37, the Committee noted the progress of the Advisory Board on Capacity Building for the Ramsar Convention in finalizing the Capacity Building Framework, a key product of the work of the Board targeted specifically but not exclusively at the Ramsar Administrative Authorities. The Framework was further elaborated during a side event at COP10 and its finalization was subsequently discussed during the Advisory Board's meeting on 17 March. It was agreed at that meeting that the Framework should be finished before the end of this year; that the lead consultants will assess the funding necessary to do this, and that the Board will work to secure this funding.
58. **MEA e-learning initiative:** Ramsar will be collaborating with this UNITAR-led initiative to explore the possibility of enhancing awareness about the Convention objectives and principles. UNITAR is willing to use their training tools and relevant materials from Ramsar to undertake a learning exercise through electronic communication.

Membership in the Convention

59. With the accession of Turkmenistan on 3 March 2009, the Convention has 159 Contracting Parties.

Working with the International Organization Partners

60. Senior Secretariat staff members are requested to be proactive and maintain close contact with relevant staff members from the IOPs who are dealing with global, regional and national issues, working with them based on concrete projects in the regions.

Partnership with private sector

61. The Secretariat is taking the first steps to follow up on Resolution X.12, using each opportunity when a company approaches us or with the help of intermediary third parties. Details on these matters will be provided as further information becomes available.