

**5th European Regional Meeting  
on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention**

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4-8 December 2004, Yerevan, Armenia

Keynote

**The role of the Ramsar Convention in the modern world of  
multilateral environmental agreements**

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**International cooperation at global and regional levels**

International cooperation is one of the three pillars of the Ramsar Convention. International cooperation is a broad theme that can be performed at different levels and by different partners. There is an extensive cooperation between Ramsar and other environmental global and regional conventions, UN agencies, regional environmental organizations, NGOs and expert networks as well as other organisations from site level to international level. The Ramsar Convention achieves good global governance structure mainly by clarifying common areas of interest and overlap, simplifying and harmonizing approaches and providing guidance to Parties, enhancing collaboration on implementation at national and global levels as well as developing inter-convention synergies using Memoranda of Cooperation (MoC), Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), Joint Work Plans (JWP) and Programmes of Joint Work (PJW).

Ramsar has the leading role in the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) themes related to inland water biodiversity and substantially contributes to marine and coastal biodiversity and cross cutting issues. The third JWP has been endorsed for the period 2002-2006 providing for the close cooperation on common issues. Particular emphasis is on strengthening institutional cooperation in the areas of linkages, between the subsidiary scientific bodies (Ramsar's STRP, CBD's SBSITTA), the national focal points of both conventions, and in national reporting.

In October 2004, the Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) adopted the second Programme of Joint Work between Ramsar and MAB to further promote cooperation between Ramsar and UNESCO/MAB, particularly emphasising operational matters at national and site levels. The Joint Work Plan with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African – Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) concerning joint actions to safeguard migratory waterbirds and their habitats was signed in spring 2004. There are a number of MoCs and MoUs between the Ramsar secretariat and international agreements and initiatives as well as organisations at all levels.

Additionally, the Ramsar Convention has established its position with respect to the UNEP environmental conventions and has been included as an observer in the Joint Liaison Group between the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. It also plays an active role in the process of harmonisation of reporting between biodiversity related conventions.

### **The particular role of working with partners**

Of particular importance in our region are Ramsar's International Organisation Partners (IOP) and regional organisations/initiatives to facilitate the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. A good example is the MedWet Initiative that has brought together all Mediterranean countries of three Ramsar regions. Transboundary Ramsar Sites can promote cooperation between neighbouring countries, but more importantly, can provide coordinated implementation at site level. Good trilateral cooperation on the Wadden Sea between the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark led to the establishment of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat already in 1987. In 2000, the Prespa Park Co-ordination Committee was established between Greece, Albania and the FYR of Macedonia to encourage cooperation between the three countries in the Prespa basin, including the shared Ramsar site. (These experiences will be discussed in more detail during one of the workshops.)

### **Needs to complement international efforts at national level**

The efforts of the Convention at the international level need to be considered also at the national level where implementation really occurs. The Contracting Parties (CP) should work to bring together all their implementation mechanisms for multilateral environmental agreements (MEA) to ensure common implementation for the conservation and wise use of natural resources.

Increasingly the importance of the Ramsar Convention is being recognised in the global water agenda. Water issues are critical for human well being and sustainable utilization of ecosystems, especially wetlands. The results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment can assist CPs develop national plans for Ramsar and water related issues, as well as the wider environmental agenda. (More on this during the closing plenary session of this Meeting.) Moreover, the Convention must also be well reflected in key processes such as the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (April 2005) and the Fourth World Water Forum (March 2006).