

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**29th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 26-28 February 2003**

DOC. SC29-2

Agenda item 4

**Report of the Secretary General
(and a reflection on the future of the Convention)**

1. One of the main concerns of the Bureau after COP8 has been to finalize the 46 Resolutions, ensuring careful editing in relation to content and full consistency in the three languages versions. These are now finalized in English and Spanish and the French versions will be ready soon.
2. In addition to posting the Resolutions in the Ramsar Web site, as is already being done, the Bureau plans to produce an in-house photocopied volume with all the Resolutions (as was done for COP7) as the official record to be transmitted to Parties. The volume will be available to others upon request. The Bureau will also produce a CD-ROM with the Resolutions in HTML, Word, and PDF formats in the three languages.
3. Concerning the series of Ramsar Manuals, the Bureau is planning to republish it, provided that sufficient resources can be found. This will require discarding some of the existing manuals that have become outdated, producing inserts for some of them (when COP8 has adopted additional guidance on the subject), and preparing some new volumes in the series. The new series could be ready in six months.
4. The Bureau has also dedicated most of the month of January to preparing the materials for the Standing Committee, in particular the Bureau Work Plan for 2003, the draft National Planning Tool/National Report Format, the draft *Modus operandi* for the Ramsar Endowment Fund, the revised SGF Operational Guidelines, and the proposal on priorities for the STRP Work Plan 2003-2005.
5. Progress has also been made with the preparation of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Greek Government concerning the MedWet Coordination Unit, as requested by Resolution VIII.30. The MOU should include as annexes:
 - The Terms of Reference of the MedWet Coordination Unit.
 - The full budget of the MedWet Coordination Unit, as it appears in Resolution VIII.30
 - The practical arrangements for the provision of working space and support to the Medwet Coordination Unit in Villa Kazouli, Athens.
 - The consolidated budget of the contribution of Greece for the triennium, as per the letter of the Minister.
 - The letter of the Minister.

6. In addition, MedWet has achieved substantial advancement in the field of projects:
 - The Principality of Monaco has agreed to support MedWet financially for carrying on work in the region of Neretva River / Hutovo Blato, with the sum of 30,000 EUR in total for 2003 and 2004. This will be a follow up of the SGF project, currently in completion.
 - A PDF B funding proposal, of total budget of approx 700,000 EUR leading to a Full Proposal to the GEF, has been submitted to and approved by UNDP, and its operation is expected to commence soon.
 - The proposal submitted to the EU INTERREG/MEDOC programme for the MedWet/Regions network, with a total budget of 2,340,000 EUR, has been approved. The project brings together the regional authorities from 11 European regions (Spain, Portugal, France, Italy) and one from Morocco and is intended to carry out activities for inventory and management of wetlands.
7. Plans are being made for the 5th Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com5), which should be held in Turkey in the first half of May 2003.
8. The Bureau has also been working on the Convention's presence at the 3rd World Water Forum (Kyoto, Japan, 16-23 March 2003). The Bureau will be represented by the Secretary General and the Regional Coordinator for Asia, who will participate in a series of events during the Forum, including the launching of a CD-ROM showing the location of Ramsar sites in the watersheds of the world, jointly produced by the World Resources Institute, IUCN, and Ramsar. The CD will show that the basins with the greatest number of Ramsar sites include the Danube, with 65 sites; the Rhine-Maas basin, with 22; the Niger, with 15; the Amur, Murray-Darling, Elbe and the Paraguay sub-basin, with 11 Ramsar sites each; and the Po River basin, with 9. It will also highlight the fact that there are 36 basins and sub-basins that only have one designated Ramsar site, and 65 basins and sub-basins that so far have no Ramsar sites.
9. In relation to the Ministerial Conference to be held during the last two days of the Forum, COP8 Resolution VIII.1 requested "the Ramsar Bureau to work with the secretariat of the Third World Water Forum (Japan, 2003) to ensure that the critical importance of the goods and services provided by wetlands for water management, and the *Guidelines for allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands*, are fully recognized and debated during the Third World Water Forum. The Bureau has transmitted the *Guidelines* using the diplomatic channel of the Government of Japan. The Government of Japan has kindly provided useful advice on how to insert the Convention's concerns into the process.
10. Following the Valencia Meeting on the preparation of a Wetland Strategy and Action Plan for New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a task force has been established to advance the NEPAD Wetlands Strategy and Action Plan. This task force includes five regional government representatives from Africa, five representatives from partner organizations, including: UNEP, Ramsar, IUCN, WWF, Wetland International; and five from other areas of expertise. The task force will meet in Nairobi on 10-11 February to refine the strategy and prepare a set of projects that will be submitted to the

African leaders to initiate the implementation of the NEPAD Wetland Strategy and Action Plan.

11. The Ramsar Bureau has been nominated by the task force to undertake a review of all relevant documents, to make an introductory presentation of the Wetland Strategy and Action Plan, and to propose project ideas that could be further selected and developed by the task force at the 10-11 February meeting.
12. The Bureau has also actively taken part in the preparation of the Strategy and Action Plan of NEPAD on Invasive Species. A set of projects has also been proposed to implement the Strategy, taking into account Ramsar Resolutions VII.14 and VIII.18 adopted by COP7 and COP8.
13. The Ramsar Web site continues to be very popular. It had 2350 users per day during November, a peak because of the COP, but only slightly so, because there have been more than 2200 per day since last April. (December 2002 was low because of Christmas.) During November, users viewed an average of 9601 documents per day, more than 288,000 for the month.

A reflection on the future of the Convention

Last year, and in preparation for COP8, the Secretary General invited the policy and technical staff at the Ramsar Bureau to have a one-day retreat to reflect on the future of the Convention. The retreat was held on Saturday, 24 August 2002.

The notes of the meeting were transmitted to all members of the Standing Committee before COP8, in order to share with them the views and sentiments of the staff about some important questions in relation to the future of the Convention.

Since most of the points are still valid, those notes are attached, for the benefit of the new members of the Standing Committee.

Meeting Notes

Bureau discussion on the future of the Ramsar Convention

Saturday, 24 August 2002

Present: Nick Davidson (chairing), Ibrahim Shaame, Najam Khurshid, Alain Lambert, Julio Montes de Oca, Sergey Dereliev, Sandra Hails, Margarita Astrálaga, Anada Tiéga, Spyros Kouvelis, Tobias Salathé

Introduction

The Secretary General invited the policy and technical staff at the Ramsar Bureau to a one-day discussion on the future of Ramsar on Saturday, 24 August 2002. Other staff members were invited to attend if they so wished, for the whole day or part of it. The issues for discussion proposed by the SG appear in the Annex (page 12). Unfortunately, due to an unexpected short hospitalization on the eve of the meeting, the Secretary General was unable to be present, so the meeting went ahead under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary General.

The aim of the discussion was to seek a common understanding among the Ramsar Bureau staff on the future of the Convention, so as to convey these views, where appropriate, to the Contracting Parties as a contribution from the secretariat, through the Report of the Secretary General to COP8, the regional reports, and in discussions during the COP. The Secretary General and all Bureau staff are fully aware that decisions on the future of the Convention are the sole responsibility of Contracting Parties, through the COP, but since we are the only group of people in the world devoted full-time to work for the Convention, we feel that it is our obligation to convey our views and proposals.

Summary notes

We had a lively and positive set of discussions, with valuable and significant contributions from all present, and found a clear consensus view on the future direction and issues for the Convention. Many thanks to all who participated and gave up their Saturday to do so – and particularly to Spyros for joining the meeting from Athens.

Tobias Salathé (morning) and Alain Lambert (afternoon) acted as ‘rapporteurs’ – particular thanks to them. These key points are consolidated from their notes.

For our discussions we broadly followed Delmar’s suggested organization of the three Convention pillars and then some cross-cutting issues, but in practice covered a number of issues generic to all parts of the Convention in our “1st pillar” debate, and these are summarized first below. Some of the issues picked up in the comments under 1st pillar may also have generic relevance to the other pillars.

We also recognized the great value to all of us in having the debate, and felt that there would be considerable value in some follow-up discussions on some of the specific topics, notably on the implications for Ramsar positioning and work on the WSSD outcomes (once we have had a chance to review them), and options for future institutional arrangements for the Bureau (for which we felt we needed to have some clearer background information on costs and benefits).

We also noted the value of a series of Bureau staff briefings on different technical topics, for example on Alain’s sustainable trade-related work, etc., and some of the key COP8 issues such as water allocations.

As a context for our discussions we recognized the significant progress made by the Convention in many of its areas of activity (which will be reported to COP8 through the Secretary General’s global implementation report and the regional implementation reports). Our purpose in the meeting was to look forwards at the future directions for the Convention, and to identify where we considered there were impediments or constraints to further progress which would, if not properly addressed, limit the future effectiveness of the Convention in achieving its Vision and objectives of conservation and wise use of wetlands. Thus, the shortcomings identified in the following notes of the meeting should be read as the recognition of current constraints which, from their identification, can and should be turned into opportunities to further improve the performance of the Convention and to enhance its global relevance. Our discussions, as reported below, identified a number of potential ways and means of developing these opportunities.

Nick Davidson
Deputy Secretary General

General and cross-cutting issues

1. **Convention’s evolution and future positioning.** The Ramsar Convention has evolved over time from a ‘wetlands for waterbirds’ oriented treaty to an all-embracing instrument for wetland ecosystem conservation and wise use, linking to wetlands for people and for biodiversity. This is a key message that is, sadly, still not understood by all countries, including both non-Parties and Contracting Parties (or at least our Administrative Authorities (AAs)), which often are in too narrowly focused protected areas or nature conservation parts of government). The core message of the Convention now, that the route to wetland biodiversity conservation is through people and securing the continuing goods and services provided for them by wetlands, needs continual stressing and restating and educating our AAs (and/or seeking to persuade governments to change their AAs to more relevant parts of their governance).

2. The evolution of the Convention is one of its major successes and strengths. To remain policy-relevant in a changing world, it is essential that the Convention should continue to adopt and evolve its approach according to actual needs and today's realities, remaining clearly market-oriented while, however, not losing its core goal of wetland conservation and wise use. The Convention needs to position itself to respond to key and emerging issues for the world that affect the capacity of wetlands to deliver goods and services, and/or which benefit from these goods and services – currently (and in light of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)) poverty eradication, trade globalization, and water allocation and management – but also to ensure that it can respond flexibly to these and emerging issues without distracting Ramsar from its core business and message.
3. **A “Guide to the Convention”.** Since the Convention has evolved substantially over time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get a clear overview and understanding of all its specific issues, resolutions, recommendations, projects, guidelines, etc.. This is an increasing problem even for Bureau staff, let alone Administrative Authorities, etc. It is therefore timely to prepare a “Guide to the Ramsar Convention” analogous to those done for CBD and CITES.
4. Of course the ‘toolkit’ already provides part of this, but we have already recognized that what is missing from this is updated guidance on the Convention processes, bodies, etc. (as in the out-of-date Ramsar Manual). Also needed is a ‘route map’ through the increasingly large body of detailed guidelines, to help users find what they need to use. Also a guide to which COP decisions relate to which objectives in the new Strategic Plan (we have a start on this in the Annex to the draft Strategic Plan 2003-2008), and perhaps a review of all such decisions to identify which have been superseded and could be recommended for ‘retirement’.
5. Developing a “Ramsar Guide” could make identification of critical gaps easier, i.e. wetland conservation issues not yet sufficiently addressed by Ramsar and its guidance. [NB The Annex to the draft new Strategic Plan has already shown up the lack of any COP decisions on some Strategic Plan themes.]
6. **Bureau capacity.** The Bureau is under-resourced to deal with all key wetland conservation issues of today's world, and to secure a strong future position for the Convention through engaging in the key issues affecting its business. Recognizing the likely continuing constraints of the core budget, we should review priority needs/lack of capacity and develop a suite of project-type ‘modules’ for issues and work not necessarily to be covered by the core budget. Such projects could then be more easily submitted to donors for specific contributions (example: the 1990-93 Wise Use project), as part of a logical set of activities, and consider encouraging individual countries to support ‘modules’ through, for example, secondment of Junior Professional Officers, etc.
7. **Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA).** Throughout our debate we repeatedly came back to the urgent need to increase the Convention's CEPA activities, so as to get a stronger message about the role of the Convention, the values and functions of wetlands, particularly in water management and conservation of water resources, food security, income generation and/or poverty alleviation, etc., out to both the direct Ramsar constituency and importantly to those other sectors which affect Ramsar's business. We considered this as crucial to Ramsar's future success, but the Bureau is woefully under-resourced and under-staffed to do this. Key future CEPA elements should include getting

Ramsar materials and products into as many local languages as possible (and donors sought to cover the (relatively) modest costs of such activities), and broadening the portfolio of materials, including suitable audio-visual tools for a wider range of different target audiences. We think that a well-presented and wider range of case studies on a number of topics would greatly help getting across the message.

8. **Bureau regionalization.** The Convention should definitely more actively promote regionalization, but regionalization should be a step-by-step process, driven by the regions, not from the Bureau. Regionally (or perhaps better, subregionally with time) based coordinators who have had previous experience within the Bureau could be a good approach to develop. To initiate the process the best approach could be to have a group of permanent assistant coordinators based in Gland, while they are trained and they develop the projects that will enable the regions to develop clear workplans and secure the funding needed to open a regional office, which will need a minimum of two staff members, as the office cannot be left unattended for extended periods of time. The clear commitment of the Parties themselves in providing direct funding for the running of this office should be a requirement before such an office is established, to make sure that we do not repeat the examples of other bodies, which kept their regional offices open only until the “seed money” had run out. Such a situation only raises expectations before resulting in damage to the perception of the Convention.
9. With such an approach, (sub)regional development of international cooperation initiatives (see also comments for 3rd pillar) on priority common issues could be effectively developed by groupings equivalent to MedWet/Com. Working through engaging Ramsar support from existing regional organizations might be a good way to start. It is important to note that this involvement of regional organizations and effective joint work will require additional workloads for the regional coordinators, as the capacity of these organizations is larger than the Bureau’s but to implement their own agendas.
10. Development of ‘regionalization’ might also be based upon biogeographic characteristics or thematic programmes (mangrove countries, coastal zone countries, high mountain countries, semi-closed seas countries, etc.).
11. **Synergies with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).** We did not address this topic in detail – however, the following points are relevant. To help countries deliver their conservation and sustainable use commitments to multiple MEAs more coherently (and avoiding duplication of effort) implies that better established synergies between the MEAs should be an essential process. However, Bureau experience is that getting the process going is time-consuming and difficult, creating more work when capacity is no larger – and to date most synergetic actions are at the global level through secretariats and subsidiary body collaboration. However, these first steps can establish mechanisms for better cooperation at national level – but the critical next step if synergies are to be of value is to get them working at national level, through better linkage between the different focal parts of governments responsible to each MEA.
12. **Future Bureau institutional arrangements.** We did not explore this in detail, as we felt we needed first to see if any direction or requirement for change in International Environmental Governance of MEAs, or need for change in positioning of the Convention, has come from the WSSD. We also felt we needed a separate discussion specifically on the options for this topic, with some background on costs/benefits as the

starting point (and to look at the previous reviews of some of these options). The options to discuss which we identified were:

- a. Becoming a UNEP-administered Convention
- b. Being administered directly by UN HQ (cf. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC))
- c. Being administered by another UN organization, e.g. UNESCO
- d. Becoming a Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) protocol
- e. Seeking recognition as an International Organization in Switzerland
- f. Remaining independent convention (as now) but with the Bureau located elsewhere than hosted by IUCN

1st Pillar: the wise use of wetlands

13. **“Wise Use Concept and guidelines”.** These now need a major review and updating to align the approach and guidance with developments in the outside world, and the relationship between wise use and other now more commonly used terms (e.g. sustainable use, sustainable development, integrated water management, ecosystem approach, precautionary approach, etc.) needs to be clarified. The wise use concept is interpreted differently from country to country, and the Convention must acknowledge this and modify its approach according to regional, national and local needs – and seek to better explain the concept in simple-to-understand terms. The best illustrations for wise use can and should be found at local level, ideally using Ramsar sites as demonstration sites.
14. The most promising approach to make the wise use concept more widely known and applied is to provide and disseminate lessons learnt through case studies (as originally done through the Dutch-funded Wise Use project 1990-93) in a renewed attempt.
15. An immense gap needs to be bridged between existing case studies and the rather general Handbook 1, that is, specific guidelines are needed on how to turn the lessons learnt at local level into effective national wetlands policies. The issue of Strategic Environmental Assessment (and Impact Assessment) and wetland valuation techniques are also crucial topics to develop more.
16. The Convention is not currently sufficiently equipped to deal with all the widening range of key technical/policy issues related to the wise use of wetlands. Given the staff constraints of the Bureau, missing expertise should be brought in by developing our cooperation with organizations such as the Global Water Partnership (GWP) and others outside the environmental field (e.g. in the field of development cooperation and stability/peace maintenance), and possible topic-based secondments to enhance Bureau capacity. The potential linkages between the Convention’s approach and human rights treaties, particularly where they refer to human access to clean water, might be valuably explored and developed.
17. **Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and wise use.** The current functioning of the STRP has major constraints in terms of efficiency and effectiveness to translate and transfer scientific and technical knowledge into policy-relevant guidance. Such limitations have been particularly caused by the STRP members often having a good academic background but not adequate experience of wetland conservation and wise use on the ground, and also lacking the ability to transfer their scientific knowledge to policy-relevant

guidance for Parties. The requirement to have its membership with regional representation is another constraint. The new *modus operandi* (in which the members of the Panel revert to more of a ‘review’ role for materials prepared by global experts) and its “Support Service” (if both are approved by COP8) will go some way towards improving STRP functioning and its capacity to access external expertise.

18. However, we consider that even with the anticipated new *modus operandi* the STRP will not necessarily have access to the full range of expertise on wise use issues. We consider that hiring expert consultants to draft the policy-relevant guidelines etc. for STRP papers is the most efficient way forward. It must be stressed that the current COP8 STRP-related proposals and budget lines do not include funding for any such work, and fully resourcing such short-term assignments will be a vital issue to resolve if the STRP is to deliver its anticipated substantial amount of wise use-related work in the next triennium.
19. **Experts Database.** Earlier projects to set up, maintain and update such databases have shown that this is an extremely time-consuming and costly exercise and were therefore not pursued any longer (e.g. MedWet1). It is therefore considered of low priority for attention: identifying and accessing experts will form key part of STRP Support Service, if adopted by COP8, but the issue will need revisiting post-COP8 if not adopted.
20. **AA capacity and understanding (including Small Grant Fund (SGF) and other project funding).** A major constraint for the effective implementation of the Convention is the Administrative Authorities’ narrow ability to make and implement decisions on conservation matters and water management issues, the (very) limited capacities of many national AAs, and their sometimes narrow and limited conservation viewpoint of the Convention. Efforts have therefore to continue to convince our focal points to team up with relevant national partners (in other administrative departments and ministries) so as to fully engage all sectors in wetland wise use. Means of providing operational training to AAs should be considered further. The training programme under preparation by the Conservation Finance Alliance (chaired by the Ramsar Senior Advisor /environment and development cooperation) on conservation finance mechanisms for protected areas should be promoted and supported by the Bureau.
21. Ramsar sites undoubtedly provide great ‘flagship value’ to the Convention (see 2nd pillar comments below), but some countries seem to have an unhealthy focus in their Convention implementation only on site designation, and rather than engaging fully in seeking wise use of all wetlands, which may be a harder challenge to deliver since it has to involve engaging other sectors of government, private sector, local communities etc. to achieve its goals. The critical importance of wise use needs raising up the agenda.
22. The Wetlands for the Future (WFF) programme (Americas) and the Swiss Grant for Africa have proved immensely valuable for capacity building and training for AAs and others supporting Ramsar work. Having seed moneys at the Bureau for specific small-scale projects (SGF, WFF, Swiss Grant for Africa, etc.) is an essential tool for the Bureau’s convincing power to market the value of the Convention to developing countries. These low-cost targeted schemes should also be more promoted to donor countries as highly effective in capacity building for poverty eradication. WFF-style programmes should therefore be promoted by the Bureau for other regions as well, and donors should be actively sought.

23. Targeted training to build and increase specific capacities, where specific gaps have been identified, is considered an effective means of improving the implementation of the Convention. [NB The proposed Ramsar Wetland Training Service under development for the Convention by Wetlands International can help here (confirmation of major funding is hoped for very soon).]
24. **CEPA for wise use.** As highlighted in the General Issues, we consider CEPA as crucial to Ramsar's success but currently heavily constrained by lack of resources. To get the wise use message out to a wider audience, existing wise use materials should be translated into more languages and more audio-visual tools and donors sought to cover the (relatively) modest costs of such activities.
25. In reality, while we have already an overwhelming amount of written technical guidelines and guidance documents (toolkit, etc.), there exists an expressed need for easy-to-understand materials, mainly in visual form (posters, films, etc.) and user-friendly (especially in regions where there is no tradition of written communication, i.e. where people do not read text-only documents).
26. An increased CEPA programme has to progressively shift its efforts from preaching to the converted (hopefully our AAs) to increasingly addressing other sectors of administration and the civil society. We have to diversify our target audience.
27. The most convincing method for CEPA activities is to focus on case studies, real-life examples and lessons to be learnt. In this context, wetland valuation is a powerful tool that is still too little known and used, and its outcomes are not enough disseminated.
28. **Bureau capacity and skills.** Getting increasingly limited in relation to the scope and topics of the work, especially on the broadening issue of wise use. See also CEPA comments above. The Bureau socio-economic programme (sustainable trade, incentives, economic valuation, conservation finance, etc.) started by the Senior Advisor/ environment development cooperation is promising but has reached its limits in terms of staffing. Urgent support will be needed if we are to keep up the necessary pace of work. Technical staff background expertise does not necessarily cover all such topics. A review of Regional Coordinators' (RCs) job descriptions could be valuable to ensure that their responsibilities adequately cover work on wise use, and the approach of using RCs' knowledge to cover some topics (e.g., as Margarita Astralaga does on marine/coastal, Tobias Salathé on peatlands) can help – but currently their capacity to do such work, given their very heavy and increasing regional work loads, is limited. Also trying to create time allocation in RCs (and other technical staff) work plans to prepare policy-related discussion papers could be valuable (at least in non-COP years!). This, however, cannot be done without increasing the Bureau capacities for dealing with the day-to-day issues, e.g. through more experienced Assistant Regional Coordinators. Bringing in seconded supporting expertise from CPs on other topics should be explored as another option.
29. The Bureau and the Ramsar AAs are still not very good in a two-way communication about Ramsar tools and their outputs when applied on site. SGF projects' reporting can still be improved. Reporting and publicising the effective use of Montreux Record, Ramsar Advisory Missions and their results and outcomes is still weak. Urgently, the resources to improve our capacity and performance in this field have to be sought, so as to get maximum recognition of the role of the Convention and its mechanisms.

30. There would be merit, if the small projects programmes do expand, whether regional or global (SGF) or both, to look at establishing a small projects support assistant post to deal with project reviews and evaluations and guidance to Parties, etc. – to take some of the load of the regional teams.
31. **WSSD implications.** In the period between WSSD and COP8 an analysis of the WSSD outcomes should be made by the Bureau and their relevance to Ramsar be assessed. There are at least three categories of WSSD implications that need to be looked at. One is the broader positioning and opportunities for Ramsar in the WSSD outcomes (both type I (Overall Implementation Plan) and type II (partnership initiatives)), and the extent to which Ramsar’s relevance to sustainable development has been recognized. Another is any implications for change in Ramsar governance, e.g., as a UN Convention. The third is any implications for the COP8 Resolutions and guidelines, for example whether references to precautionary approach, ecosystem approach, invasive species, etc., are likely to cause challenges in light of governments’ stances at WSSD. This should be reflected in the COP document COP8 DOC. 7 “Report of the Secretary General on the results of the World Summit on Sustainable Development of relevance to the Convention on Wetlands”, based on such analysis and prior in-house discussion at the Bureau.
32. **New strategic alliances.** The capacity of the current International Organization Partners (IOPs) to provide the much-needed support to the Convention on its broadening sustainable use scope is a concern – some remain rather too focused only on biodiversity conservation. Partners outside of the environmental field (development assistance, equity and stability enforcing groups, etc.) should be invited to contribute their programmes to work with Ramsar and eventually become IOPs. The signing of MoUs on agreed support to Ramsar and work programmes seems to be a useful way forward to develop such cooperation.
33. At country level, AAs strongly need urging to forge better alliances with other sectors, e.g., water, agriculture, trade, etc., and to get such involvement through National Ramsar/Wetland Committees.
34. At regional level, additional strategic alliances can be useful for political purposes, and also for accessing funding for wetland wise use, e.g., from regional economic commissions, development banks, river/lake basin organizations, major NGOs such as Conservation International, etc. The Convention should be using the regional Standing Committee representatives to engage in this work (but they will need training and advice). The problem is that the Standing Committee regional representatives have little communication regionally even with their AA counterparts in adjacent countries – they should have much stronger responsibilities in a Terms of Reference for leading regional promotion of the Convention (but would probably need a complete overhaul of the selection process for this to be possible).
35. We must be clear on the need for alliances for different purposes: lobbying, funding sources, raising awareness, ‘political purposes’ – and formalized agreements (Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs), etc.) can help to get the ‘foot in the door’. Global alliances (agreements) can help liberate regional implementation support. Opportunities need to be sought for reinforcing partnership with some institutions such as the GEF Council and to join existing alliances, cf. the Conservation Finance Alliance.

36. It was agreed that each alliance with the Bureau should be based on a continuing cost/benefits analysis, to make sure that such engagements provide sufficient return on investment of our already extremely stressed human resources.
37. **Sustainable wetland trade.** The Ramsar sites network could be well used to demonstrate how sustainable trade in wetland products is consistent with the Convention and wise use. However, this is clearly not a panacea for all sites. Different approaches in different regions are needed. We also identified that the nervousness about the Bureau/Convention engaging in such matters as ‘trade’ may be more a problem of terminology than policy. We need to be careful using the word ‘trade’ in this context, since we are actually focusing on demonstrating sustainable use and marketing of wetland products to support local communities (a link here with poverty eradication), i.e. wholly consistent with the wise use concept. [NB. Bureau briefing session on Alain’s ‘trade-related’ initiatives, UNCTAD MoU etc. pre-COP8 would be very helpful.]

2nd Pillar: the Ramsar List

38. **Ramsar Site guidance/STRP, etc.** With the COP8 guidelines and other materials on inventory, assessment, management, monitoring, etc., there is now a pretty good suite of materials available – it will be even more comprehensive with the proposed STRP ‘gap-filling and harmonisation’ work next triennium. STRP and its expert networks are likely to be better equipped to address these matters than the broader wise use topics, on evidence of capacity this triennium. Further guidance on rapid assessment methods, including economic valuation could help Parties (NB: this, for inland waters, is a current joint activity under CBD/Ramsar JWP, with a planned workshop reviewing guidance later this year, for CBD’s SBSTTA8). The RIS should become the first key statement of ecological character, including water resources, but it is currently not well structured for this purpose (cf. the guidance in new management planning guidelines on establishing ecological character).
39. **CP capacity to apply the guidance.** Here’s the weakness. The Strategic Framework is just not being applied – certainly very few if any countries have baseline information or have developed a strategic approach to designating a coherent national site network as called for in Res. VII.11 – most don’t even know what wetlands they have, or which qualify, and designations are generally opportunistic.
40. Many RISs even in the current format are very poorly filled in (particularly by developed countries!), and maps are still a problem. Lack of management plans for many sites is another problem, as is absence of monitoring and reporting change of ecological character through Article 3.2.
41. Even when someone knows what is happening at site level, reporting to national level, capacity and political will by AA in handling such reporting is weak and not generally happening. The focus of attention on Ramsar sites remains too biological and hydrological and not enough human, cultural and socio-economic – there is a need to better promote their values and functions.
42. How to improve this situation? Partly through education and training – on the importance of these mechanisms to use the ‘jewels in the Ramsar crown’ to maintain and demonstrate sustainable use, and value of reporting to assess wetland status and trends; partly a

significant resource issue (management and monitoring can be costly) – and this will remain an issue (but making Ramsar sites (RSs) a focus of, e.g., the SGF, and urging Parties to use RS status to get donor funding e.g. through GEF for globally significant biodiversity sites). Again CEPA has a key role here.

43. Montreux Record – still not being used well and still seemingly regarded by some as a blacklist (Article 3.2 reporting of problems may be viewed in same way). Its value in securing assistance and resourcing for management needs further stressing – COP8 Resolution VIII.8 may help here. If MR and also San José Record gain priority and are used more by Parties, there will be a resourcing issue for their operations by the Bureau.
44. There tends still to be a focus on site designation, and less on management planning (proportion of Ramsar sites with management plans still low). The focus on RSs and their designation raised by WWF Living Waters Programme is admirable in raising public awareness about their values and functions, but we now need to encourage WWF and the other Ramsar partners to focus more on their management planning target. We also need to find ways of supporting Contracting Parties with training and resourcing to prepare management plans. We also need to focus on sustainable and creative financing for Ramsar sites: conservation finance at site level should be more promoted (the Conservation Finance Alliance can help here).
45. We have to talk more about Article 5 of the Convention, and remind Contracting Parties of their obligations here on Ramsar sites, especially during regional meetings, etc. (also relevant to 3rd pillar).
46. **Site-specific CEPA issues.** Three angles need further promotion to increase awareness of the value of the RS network: the values of RS designation for delivering sustainable use, the value of designation for getting more funding, and the value of Montreux Record (with good case study examples of benefits of designation). New RS leaflet a good start, but really also need good promotional material showing RS values and functions, and goods and services (especially food and water roles) contribute to well-being of local communities and poverty alleviation. The RS network of over 103 million ha needs stressing as a hugely valuable tool for this purpose – and countries' contribution to sustainable development (the 'bio-trade' initiatives could be a powerful tool here).
47. **Ramsar Sites Database.** Has been slow to develop to meet evolving Bureau and Convention needs, but under the new Wetlands International structure and management is undergoing a major redevelopment and becoming more Web-based. Will soon be Web-searchable, and have scanned full Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs) etc. accessible, and improved GIS map-handling. However, role and functioning should be kept under review, including whether outsourcing this task remains the most effective option, or are we just dealing here with a legacy from the past?
48. **Space agencies/Earth Observation.** The prospect of collaboration with the European Space Agency (ESA) (TESEO project) should not be over-optimistic and a careful cost/benefit analysis needs to be done before investing more time and money in it. Has great potential (and potentially major resources available), but more discussions are needed with ESA to overcome current limitations of its focus only on technical research and development, perhaps through development of partnership funding approaches so as to secure transfer of new technologies and methods to country-level application.

49. **Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)/World Heritage Convention (WHC) etc.** Joint work with WHC and MAB hampered by lack of Bureau capacity, but MAB activities beginning now to develop – joint sites could and should be an important tool and we should try to improve the working relationship, involving RCs and actions at regional level. With CBD now getting into protected areas issues (at COP7) need to ensure that Ramsar Site network well-positioned and promoted as mechanism in this debate (CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan has the pegs for this).

3rd Pillar: international cooperation

50. Article 5 commitments and the COP7 guidelines on international cooperation are pretty clear – capacity at AA level to implement may be the main limitation to fuller recognition of the importance of cooperation and the role of the Convention here – with many AAs struggling to deal with the first two pillars of the Convention. Several approaches could, however, be used to increase understanding of the importance of international cooperation and its application, again strengthening our CEPA capacity with additional materials highlighting the value and case study successes of such cooperation. These should include:
51. Promoting more strongly the basin-scale management approach to transboundary rivers and wetlands, driven off the COP7 river basin guidelines, and using examples e.g. of Lake Chad and Niger River of how to move forwards in collaboration with river basin authorities – getting the River Basin Initiative moving into implementation would be an effective route here, using the existing Web RBI portal as the starting point. Making better use of existing basin agreements, especially for large rivers (e.g. Danube, Rhine, Elbe, etc. conventions and commissions) or regional seas (e.g. MedWet-MAP, HELCOM, Cartagena, etc.).
52. Promoting the value and need to cooperate on the designation of coherent Ramsar site networks (wetland types in biogeographic regions, migratory species flyway networks etc.) as essential for 2nd pillar delivery.
53. Trying to put key people in key positions in existing international cooperation networks and initiatives might be a good way to strengthen cooperation: GWP technical Committee, Nile River Basin organization, Mekong River Basin organization, Conservation Finance Alliance, etc. Having “honorary Ramsar representatives” in institutions or regions could be a good way forward.
54. The Bureau and the Parties should also promote the exchange of research protocols, research results, management plans, information on threats and solutions to them, and site managers between Ramsar sites or by theme staff (mangroves, coral reefs, etc.) as a way of capacity building through international cooperation.
55. The successes of the subregional approach to COP8 preparatory meetings in getting countries to recognize common issues for their subregion suggests that developing international cooperation at the subregional level may be an effective approach. Standing Committee representatives for each subregion should be playing a key leadership role in this, but currently do not seem to have the capacity, will or understanding to do so. However, difficulties remain on how best to define subregions, without creating unnecessary overlap or multiplication, especially in Europe.

56. Our overall view is that the Convention should not yet start a new programme specifically aimed at strengthening or promoting cooperation. We should use existing mechanisms, repeatedly encouraging CPs to do better on this issue, and eventually promote new one on a case by case basis.

ANNEX

The future of Ramsar

Proposed issues for discussion

I propose that we organize our discussion on Saturday on the basis of the three pillars of the Convention, looking in each case to a) the technical aspects; b) the policy implications; c) the institutional arrangements; and d) the financial aspects.

In addition, there are some cross-cutting issues, such as the regionalization of the Convention, synergies, etc., which should also be dealt with.

1. The 1st pillar: the wise use of wetlands

1.1 Technical aspects

- 1.1.1 Is the “wise use” concept clearly defined and understood? If not, what should be done?
- 1.1.2 Is the Convention sufficiently equipped to deal with key technical issues related to the wise use of wetlands:
- management planning at the site and basin/coastal levels
 - water management
 - economic valuation
 - productive systems, including commercialization
 - others
- 1.1.3 Would the STRP be sufficiently equipped to deal with the key wise use issues in the next triennium? If not, what should be done about this?
- 1.1.4 Which sort of technical publications are still needed? Which sort of promotional materials? How to use CEPA in relation to wise use?

1.2 Policy implications

- 1.2.1 Should the Convention develop more clearly as a “poverty eradication” tool? If so, how to do this? What will be the reaction of developed countries, where poverty eradication is not their main problem? What would be offered to them?
- 1.2.2 Should we pursue a “wise use approach” which is not strongly related to poverty eradication, and thus with a more universal meaning? If so, how to do this?

- 1.2.3 How should the Convention respond to the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development? The options could be: fully embrace them, just note them, ignore them completely.

1.3 Institutional arrangements

- 1.3.1 What are the implications of the above for the institutional arrangements in relation to the Convention at the country level?
- 1.3.2 Is the Ramsar Bureau equipped, mentally and technically, to deal with these matters? If not, should we change?
- 1.3.3 Which are the strategic alliances that should be pursued at the country level (both in developed countries and in developing countries/countries in transition)?
- 1.3.4 Which are the strategic alliances that should be pursued at the international level? UNDP? The World Bank? The EC? Others? Which NGOs? Should we actively seek to have additional International Organization Partners recognized at COP9?
- 1.3.5 Should we try to embark the other Conventions in a common approach to wise use/poverty eradication?
- 1.3.6 Should we pay more attention to the Experts Data Base?

1.4 Financial aspects

- 1.4.1 What to do with the SGF?
- 1.4.2 Should WFF continue as it is? Should we encourage WFF initiatives for other regions?
- 1.4.5 Which strategy to follow vis-à-vis the GEF? Should we fight for a) becoming a “GEF Convention”? or b) having our own “Ramsar Fund”? Could the proposed Endowment Fund become a true “Ramsar Fund”?
- 1.4.5 Do we need additional resources in the Ramsar Bureau to deal more effectively with the wise use of wetlands?

2. **The 2nd pillar: the Ramsar List**

2.1 Technical aspects

- 2.1.1 Is COP8 covering most of the technical aspects still missing in the Ramsar toolkit for the application of the Strategic Framework (either through the materials to be adopted at this COP or through the instructions to be given to the STRP to prepare for COP9)?
- 2.1.2 Would the STRP be sufficiently equipped to deal with the key issues related to the above? If not, what to do about this?

- 2.1.3 Are the arrangements regarding the Ramsar Sites Database effective?
- 2.1.4 Are the prospects of collaboration with space agencies going in the right direction?
- 2.1.5 Are CPs technically equipped to monitor and maintain the ecological character of Ramsar sites? Which are the main gaps? What should the Convention do about this?
- 2.1.6 Which sort of technical publications are still needed in relation to the List and the Strategic Framework? Which sort of promotional materials are still needed? How to use CEPA in relation to the List?

2.2 Policy implications

- 2.2.1 How to promote the use of the Strategic Framework at the country level as the fundamental tool for this pillar of the Convention? What is the role of the Bureau on this?
- 2.2.2 How to elevate the status of the Ramsar List at the national and international levels?
- 2.2.3 How to establish a clear connection between the List and the wise use approach (including poverty eradication)?

2.3 Institutional arrangements

- 2.3.1 Are the institutional arrangements with other Conventions (in particular World Heritage and CBD) working well in relation to the Ramsar List?
- 2.3.2 Other issues regarding institutional arrangements and the List?

2.4 Financial aspects

The issues are practically the same as for the first pillar, but some additional questions could be considered:

- 2.4.1 Which are the particularities, if any, of the second pillar, regarding finances?
- 2.4.2 Which are the prospects of generating funding for the List as different from wise use?

3. *The 3rd pillar: international cooperation*

3.1 Technical aspects

- 3.1.1 Are the guidelines adopted at COP7 sufficient to provide the basis for this pillar, or are there aspects that would require further elaboration?

3.1.2 Which sort of technical publications are still needed (e.g., shared water systems and Ramsar)? Which sort of promotional materials? How to use CEPA in relation to this pillar?

3.2 Policy implications

3.2.1 So far, the Convention has not been perceived and used as an useful tool for international cooperation. Why? What could be done to change this state of affairs? How to promote the Convention as a tool for effective management of shared water systems?

3.2.2 Which are the other specific issues that should be promoted under this pillar? Capacity building? Technical cooperation? Twinnings?

3.2.3 Should the Convention launch a specific programme of international cooperation?

3.3 Institutional arrangements

Should the Convention establish some sort of institutional arrangements at regional and/or international level to promote cooperation?

3.4 Financial aspects

Is there a possibility to use more this “obligation” under the Convention (Article 5) to pressure for more financial cooperation?

4. Cross cutting issues

4.1 Ramsar regionalization. Is the MedWet model the way forward? What could be the implications of the proposed resolution on regional initiatives?

4.2 Synergies. Should the Convention pursue its proactive approach to this matter? Pros and cons.

4.3 Institutional arrangements for the Ramsar Bureau. Would the Convention benefit from becoming a UN-administered Convention? There has been some talk about Ramsar being absorbed by CBD. Would this be a positive development?