

Agenda item 4

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to note the report of the Secretary General and offer any comments and advice that may be appropriate.

1. This report generally covers the period from the end of the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, November 2005, but some regional issues go further back to give the context. The level of activity demanded of the Secretariat continues to increase, commensurate with the number of new Contracting Parties, as well increasing activity in existing Contracting Parties. Activities are arranged under each of the five Goals in the strategic framework and can be linked to the draft Convention Work Plan in this way.
2. The agenda from COP9 will give much to do for the next triennium by Parties, International Organization Partners (IOPs), and the Secretariat to achieve the programme. Yet it is achievable, and the Secretariat looks forward to working with all concerned to advance the aims, objectives and programme of the Convention – truly now a Convention for the 21st century.

Goal 1: Wise use of wetlands

3. The Secretariat supported Contracting Parties for the implementation of the wise use concept through providing advice and technical assistance in the drafting of wetland policies and strategies and establishment of National Wetland Committees. Close and regular contacts were maintained with the Contracting Parties as well as with their missions in Geneva.
4. On basis of 50% of Asian CPs reported having conducted national wetland inventory, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Jordan and Vietnam made especial progress in the field. Since COP9, China has made progress in expanding its Ramsar Convention Implementation Office and is now in progress to establish a National Ramsar Committee.
5. The Ramsar Secretariat and several national Ramsar focal points from Europe participated actively in two seminars, held in the UN Office at Geneva, on the role of ecosystems as water suppliers and on environmental services and financing for the protection and sustainable use of water-related ecosystems, organized by the UN Water Convention secretariat. Currently, the Ramsar Secretariat is participating in a drafting group preparing a code of conduct on the payment of water-related ecosystem services. This document will significantly complement Ramsar's wise use concept, as spelled out in Resolution IX.1 and particularly in its Annex C.
6. The European regional meeting at COP9 in Kampala reiterated the need of more formal working relationships with the European Commission. Ramsar and EU instruments

complement each other with their respective strengths. Focusing wetland conservation exclusively on the objectives of the “Natura 2000” network (or the “Emerald” network in non-EU countries) would be a trap. Ramsar’s focus is wider than only natural habitats and species and relates, for example, to the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive. EU instruments have jurisdictional strength in which Ramsar is lacking. This should be applied to Ramsar sites, whenever possible. Three of the European Standing Committee members are EU Member States and could, together with the Ramsar Secretariat, usefully develop this cooperation further.

7. The Secretariat has been able to assist Benin, Ghana, Namibia and Mali in developing their National Wetlands Policies (NWP). In addition, financial resources were secured for the development of the NWPs of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tunisia and turning the Ghana NWP into an action plan.
8. The Secretariat is collaborating with IUCN to work on the preparation of the NWPs of some West Africa countries where a wetlands inventory has been completed.
9. Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Congo Brazzaville have established their NWCs. However, some of these committees cannot operate without technical and financial assistance from the Secretariat as they cannot raise funds at the national level.
10. While encouraging the African Parties to develop their NWPs, the Secretariat puts a special emphasis on the need to link the principle of wise use to the tools and mechanisms that are available to fight against poverty and implement Resolution IX.14.
11. Parties continue to be encouraged to establish and operate their National Ramsar Committees. We can say we were particularly successful in Central America with progress having been made in El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama.
12. The National Wetland Strategy for Chile was approved by Decree last December.
13. Bahamas is in the process of implementing a Small Grants Fund project for the drafting of a National Wetlands Policy. Guatemala finalized its SGF project on the development of a National Wetlands Policy which was recently published.
14. The Regional team for the Americas participated actively in multiple events to promote and provide training and information on Ramsar’s role in the application of the wise use concept.
15. Some progress has been made in the development of the National Wetland Policies and Inventories at this point in the Oceania region. Australia and New Zealand have already completed such exercises, while current Pacific Island Country (PIC) Contracting Parties are slowly embarking on these due to capacity constraints.
16. Marshall Islands, Palau and Samoa have completed their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). The NBSAPs include provisions for the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs and mangroves, the critical wetland ecosystems of the Pacific Islands. One major consideration (and a potential challenge) is to ensure that these strategies are implemented and reviewed periodically and linked to Ramsar implementation.

17. The Secretariat actively engaged and provided input into various initiatives related to the wise use of wetlands in the Oceania region, such as:
- The joint Wetlands International-SPREP Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Wetlands Wise Use (September 2005);
 - SOPAC Coastal & Marine Habitat Mapping Planning Meeting (January 2006);
 - The FSPI Regional Workshop on Community-Based Coastal Resource Management (February 2006) focusing on sustainable use and conservation of coral reefs and mangroves by community practitioners; and coordination of WWD 2006 celebrations for the region;
 - SPREP, UNEP Regional Seas, WPRFMC survey (2005) to assess PIC technical capacity to assess and manage mangrove responses to Sea level rise;
 - Samoa Coastal Ecosystem Recovery Project Committee (CERP) for 2005-2006 on behalf of SPREP.

Goal 2: Wetlands of International Importance

18. Considerable assistance was provided for the designation of 30 + 1 pending sites in Asia since the regional meeting in May 2005: India 6 sites, Japan 20 sites (with 1 update), Korea 1 site, Kyrgyzstan 1 site, Malaysia 1 site, Vietnam 1 site. One site (Wasur National Park) designated by Indonesia is under review. China, Iran and New Zealand are updating the Ramsar Information Sheets and maps. So far, updated information have been received from China (1) and Iran (21).
19. Some pre-accession countries made good progress in preparing RISs for the sites to be accompanied by the accession instruments. The Secretariat assisted Iraq in preparing an excellent RIS for the Iraqi Marshes, and UNDP Kazakhstan and Birdlife are making good progress in preparing RISs for a few new sites in Kazakhstan. IUCN/UNDP/Mekong River Commission is helping Lao PDR prepare the site to be designated, and UNEP has contracted experts to prepare Afghanistan sites.
20. Good quality Ramsar site information (updated RISs and maps) exists for all Ramsar Sites in only five European countries. Compiling up-to-date Ramsar site information is a basic requirement to implement Resolution IX.1 Annex B. This information is also likely to provide baseline indicators to monitor ecological change. The Secretariat is therefore actively pursuing this need for regular update with all Contracting Parties concerned. Currently, a number of RIS updates from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and the United Kingdom are being processed.
21. Twenty-seven European Ramsar sites are currently included in the Montreux Record. Most of them could probably be removed as part of the RIS update process as the reasons for listing no longer exist (Croatia and Italy promised to request this at COP9). For a minority of the sites, the Secretariat invites Parties concerned to identify specific actions to address the problems that led to their inclusion in the Montreux Record (e.g. through a Ramsar Advisory Mission). Such Ramsar missions were recently undertaken to Kyliiske Mouth (Ukraine), Wetlands of Central Kolkheti (Georgia), Kopacki Rit (Croatia) and Skadarsko Jezero (Serbia and Montenegro). In 2005, the Czech Republic placed the Floodplain of the lower Dyje River and Poodri on the Montreux Record, due to the continuing threat posed by the planned Danube-Odra-Elbe navigation waterway affecting also the Austrian part

(Donau-March-Auen, already listed in 1990) of the Trilateral Ramsar Site Floodplains of the Moravia-Dyje-Danube Confluence.

22. Since the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee (June 2005), 55 new European Ramsar sites were included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, based on the receipt at the Secretariat of complete RISs and maps from Albania (1), Austria (2), Finland (38), France (1), Republic of Moldova (1), Poland (5), Romania (2), Slovenia (1), and United Kingdom (4). New designations from Portugal (5), Turkey (3) and Spain (14) are currently being processed. These fulfill the announcements made at COP9 by Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, while forthcoming designations announced at COP9 by Albania, Armenia and Italy are still to be substantiated.
23. Thirty-six new sites were designated as Wetlands of International Importance in 2005 in the following African countries: Chad (2), Cote d'Ivoire (5), Guinea (2), Kenya (1), Madagascar (2), Morocco (20), Niger (5) and Zambia (1). Although Algeria designated 16 new sites in 2004, and processing of these sites took place in 2005.
24. In addition, Cape Verde designated three sites to accede the Convention, while the Central African Republic, Rwanda, and Sudan each designated its first site to accede to the Convention.
25. In addition, approximately 80 site designations are currently in the pipeline for Africa. For the new site designations, the challenge remains to develop and implement a management plan for each of these.
26. Several NGOs and similar organizations have approached the Africa team in 2005 to inform us about problems regarding the following sites:
 - Botswana: Makgadikgadi National Park (not a Ramsar site) – fencing.
 - Chad: Partie tchadienne du lac Tchad – oil exploration
 - Kenya: Lake Naivasha – agricultural activities
 - Mauritania: Banc d'Arguin – oil exploration
 - Morocco: Embouchure de la Moulouya – tourism development
 - South Africa: Wilderness Lakes – tourism development; Verloren Valei Nature Reserve – mining prospecting
27. The Secretariat has approached these countries to collect additional information and offer its assistance to maintain the ecological character of these sites according to article 3.2 of the Convention.
28. Considerable assistance has been provided for the designation of 20 sites in the Americas in 2005: Argentina (1), Belize (1), Canada (1), El Salvador (2), Honduras (1), Jamaica (1), Mexico (7), Trinidad & Tobago (2), United States (3). Antigua & Barbuda designated Codrington Lagoon as their first site to accede to the Convention.
29. In 2005 the complaints regarding threats to Ramsar sites in the Americas received by the Secretariat included:
 - infrastructure projects (ports, oleoducts) (Paracas - Perú, Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta - Colombia, Río Pilcomayo - Paraguay)

- drainage, desiccation (La Mancha El Llano - México)
 - tourism (Jeanette Kawas - Honduras)
 - water contamination (Río Cruces – Chile)
 - climate change: drought, fires (Lagunas de Mejía – Perú), damage by hurricanes (Mexico).
30. The process of designating additional Ramsar sites in PIC parties is still in its infancy. Hence, the initial focus has been primarily on increasing membership to the Convention. Only one new site was designated in 2005, that being from New Zealand (Manawatu Estuary).
31. Two site designations are in the pipeline with the Marshall Islands and Samoa indicating their plans to designate their second national Ramsar sites respectively. Both PICs have requested assistance for consultations and preparation of documentation for these designations. Fiji has also indicated that their National Wetlands Taskforce has compiled a database of 20 potential sites for additional designation once they become a Party, which should occur very soon.

Goal 3: International cooperation

32. The development of the Himalayan Initiative Framework Agreement has been making progress since the Asia regional meeting. After an informal meeting on the initiative during COP9, a revised framework agreement has been sent to all the countries involved for their endorsement.
33. The East Asia Australasia Flyway Partnership made good progress in developing an agreed text and technical cooperation following Asia Pacific Conservation strategies that have been implemented during the last 10 years.
34. The Ramsar Center Japan is working with Japan's Administrative Authority and partners for the implementation of the Ramsar COP9 Resolution IX. 19, for the preparation of the next Asian Wetland Symposium.
35. The Province of Venice (Italy) organized in November 2005, together with the UNESCO Office in Venice and the Ramsar Secretariat, an international workshop on practical implications of international conventions on wetland management. This workshop discussed the usefulness of site-related tools of international conventions, such as Ramsar sites, Biosphere Reserves, and World Heritage Sites, and provided the opportunity to underline the usefulness of more regular coordination between the secretariats. The conclusions of the workshop are published at www.ramsar.org/mtg/mtg_venice_2005a.htm.
36. The Ramsar Secretariat is an active partner in the coalition of international organizations supporting the process of trilateral cooperation in the Danube Delta, a wetland of global importance shared by Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The authorities, experts and NGOs in these three countries held national workshops to prepare for the international conference on the conservation and sustainable development of the Danube Delta which took place in Odessa (Ukraine) in February 2006, under the auspices of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNESCO, and the Danube Commission (ICPDR). Besides national delegations, experts from the Council of Europe (Berne Convention

Secretariat), the European Commission (DG ENV), UNEP, WWF and Wetlands International participated in the conference.

37. Hydrological catchments often transcend political and administrative boundaries. Thus, transboundary cooperation is an essential prerequisite and an urgent necessity for many shared wetland sites and water catchments throughout Europe. This was addressed at several international meetings, notably at the international conference on lake Skadar international designations for territorial development in Vranjina (Serbia and Montenegro) and Shkoder (Albania) in October 2005 cf. www.ramsar.org/wn/w.n.skadar_mtg_2005.htm, at the above-mentioned workshop in Venice on practical implications of international conventions on wetland management, and at the 4th Biodiversity in Europe conference in Plitvicke Lakes National Park (Croatia) in February 2006.
38. The UNEP pilot project on Issue Based Modules for the Coherent Implementation of Biodiversity-related MEAs organized a regional workshop for Europe in Croatia in February 2006. This provided the opportunity for the Ramsar Secretariat to discuss with other stakeholders, notably directly concerned national administrative authorities, four modules on issues of common concern (inland waters, biodiversity and climate change, invasive alien species, sustainable use) among the Ramsar, CBD, CMS, World Heritage, UNCCD and UNFCCC conventions. The modules provide a structured overview of how specific topics are treated across several conventions. They identify and group implementation requirements under the conventions and address synergies and complementarities between the MEAs. These four pilot modules will be officially launched in March 2006, during the CBD COP8 in Brazil (cf. www.svs-unespibmdb.net).
39. Only 21 of the European Ramsar Parties have designated a technical expert as national STRP focal point and a governmental and a non-governmental focal point for CEPA programmes. Seven Parties have not designated any focal point at all. The absence of national focal points is likely to prevent these countries from participating in information exchange and profiting from coordinated approaches through the network of national focal points.
40. The 2003 cycle SGF project in the Republic of Moldova was completed with the publication of an environmental review and priority action plan for the Lower Prut Lakes Ramsar sites in English and Romanian in early 2006. Slovenia is implementing a 2004 cycle SGF project for young people action for wise use of karst wetlands (cf. www.ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_rpts_slovenia01.htm) and during the 2005 cycle, a SGF grant was awarded to Bosnia and Herzegovina for the restoration of wetlands in the Bardacha region.
41. For Africa, the Secretariat collaborated with UNEP-DEC (former DEPI) to prepare two workshops on MEAs for parliamentarians of Lesotho and Gabon. The Lesotho workshop has already taken place and the Gabon one is scheduled to take place in the course of the year.
42. We are cooperating with the Niger Basin Authority and Lake Chad Basin Commission on their wetland-related activities in Central and West Africa.
43. We have managed to have the Council of Ministers of the Congo Basin Commission (CICOS) accept to include wetlands in their mandate, which only included navigation issues,

during their Council of Ministers meeting last November in Brazzaville. An MoC between the Secretariat and CICOS will be signed at the Fourth World Water Forum.

44. We assisted the African Development Bank in the preparation of the ToR and the identification of a consultant for the preparation of a handbook on Wetlands Assessment Planning Management and Monitoring in Africa. This study includes field work in five Ramsar Parties: Algeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea and South Africa.
45. In 2006, the Secretariat will elaborate its own strategy for the implementation of the wetlands component of the NEPAD Environment Action Plan as the Ramsar-NEPAD project with the government of Kenya did not yield the expected results.
46. The Secretariat will also assist in the implementation of the newly approved COP9 regional initiative for Coastal West Africa (WaCoWet) for which the Secretariat is providing a proportion of the funding.
47. The development of the High Andean Strategy as per Resolution VIII.39 was a key priority for 2005, and a lot of progress was made reaching consensus and advancing with the draft strategy, which was adopted at the COP. We managed to work very closely with the Administrative Authorities of all pertinent governments, IUCN and WWF, and the two networks of high-Andean scientists in the region. Funding and involvement of the private sector assisted in carrying out activities related to this Strategy.
48. The Secretariat participated actively in and continued to contribute to the development of the Western Hemisphere Strategy for Migratory Species (WHMSI), as well as to the White Water to Blue Water Initiative Partnership, as member of both Steering Committees.
49. Regarding the promotion of implementation of MOUs, successful exchanges with the Cartagena Convention ended in the signature of the second MOU in June last year. The Secretariat also contributed to their expert meeting on site designation criteria for the SPAW protocol.
50. Contact has been maintained with the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in the four Pacific Island Country (PIC) parties (Papua New Guinea, Palau, Marshall Islands and Samoa). Also contact has been maintained with potential administrative authorities in the other SPREP member Island States working closely and liaising with the Ramsar Partner Organizations active in the region, particularly, Wetlands International Oceania and WWF-SPP. It is envisaged that once the IUCN regional office for Oceania is fully operational, the Secretariat will be able to collaborate more closely with them.
51. The Secretariat has been cooperating with the University of Tasmania, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, and UNEP Regional Seas Programme to facilitate a survey to assess the technical capacity of PICs to assess and manage mangrove responses to sea level rise.
52. Several international meetings took place in late 2005 and early 2006, and between the posting of this report and the Standing Committee meeting the Fourth World Water Forum will meet in Mexico City and the Eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will be held. Detailed reports of these events will be provided to Standing Committee when it meets.

53. In December 2005 the UNFCCC met as COP7MOP with parties to the Kyoto protocol, and the Convention on Biological Diversity held its eleventh SBSTTA meeting at Montreal, Canada, simultaneously. The Deputy Secretary General and the former Chair of Standing Committee gave the CBD SBSTTA a report of the key outcomes of Ramsar COP9.
54. The Secretary General made a brief statement to the UNFCCC SBSTA, drawing attention the important role of climate change on wetlands, and the way in which wisely, or badly, managed wetlands can influence climate change both positively and negatively. Wetlands, in fact, contain a greater proportion of stored carbon than other ecosystems, underscoring the need for integrated management of all ecosystems to mitigate against, and adapt to, the effects of climatic and other global changes. He also drew attention to the decisions of COP9, requesting the development of strengthened cooperation with the UNFCCC, and drew attention to the resolution on *The role of the Ramsar Convention in the prevention and mitigation of impacts associated with natural phenomena, including those induced or exacerbated by human activities*, which COP9 had seen as a clear a link with UNFCCC, among others.
55. The simultaneous gathering of the two conventions allowed a short joint sitting between CBD SBSTTA and UNFCCC SBSTA. The Secretary General was invited to address the joint sitting and drew attention to the fact that “wetlands are consistently under-emphasised in the discussions on carbon sequestration; they are prime sinks as well potentially considerable sources for carbon. And while Forests appear to remain the main focus of discussion linking Biodiversity and Climate change, we should emphasize not only the key role of wetlands, but also emphasize the complex nature of our global land and seascape matrix. For it is in the wise management of this matrix that we can gain in our efforts to mitigate against, and adapt to, climate change, and the changes it in turn brings in other areas of the natural world, as well as human well-being.
56. “The Ramsar Convention’s responsibility and mandate deals with wetland ecosystems and associated water resources. The Convention realizes that wetlands are not isolated two-dimensional islands in the landscape, but are connected by flows of water, energy and species. This means that actions in wetlands can have far-reaching effects outside, and that actions in other ecosystems can affect wetlands. And this includes feedback processes on both biodiversity and climate change.
57. “We already enjoy an excellent working relationship with the CBD in delivering elements of that Convention’s programme on inland waters, as well as marine and coastal and other ecosystems. This relationship works at the COP level, but perhaps most of all through the SBSTTA framework.
58. “Our COP9 just concluded reinforced this cooperative approach and urged me to extend it to UNFCCC and UNCCD, in part though our observer status on the Joint liaison Group, as well as with other MEAs in the biodiversity cluster. To paraphrase the poet, no convention is an island, and we must strive to redouble our efforts at synergy, from global to national levels.”
59. The Global Oceans Forum at UNESCO in Paris 24/25 January was attended by the Secretary General briefly, and by Margarita Astráraga for the whole period of the Forum as a member of the steering committee. This was the third such conference, following the establishment of the idea at the WSSD in 2002. The aim of the forum is to accelerate

progress in the attainment of international targets, promote synergy and mobilize active partnerships for implantation programmes, and to develop tangible next steps and progress markers towards attainment of international ocean targets.

60. The Secretary General took part in two ministerial informal round tables and made a presentation in the session on linking freshwater and oceans – something the Convention has clearly on its agenda. During the discussions the subject of a memorandum of cooperation with the Global plan of Action on land based sources of marine pollution was raised, and it was agreed this should be accelerated as quickly as possible, certainly for signature at the Beijing meeting of the GPA.
61. The Senior Advisor for the Americas and Marine and Coastal Issues Focal Point chaired a dialogue on improving synergies between international agreements and co-chaired the dialogue on capacity building on ocean and coastal issues.
62. Finally, in late February there was a meeting of the Consultative Process towards an International Mechanism of Science Expertise on Biodiversity (IMOSEB), organized by the French government in Paris.
63. This meeting had a range of organizations present, including CITES, CMS, CBD and ourselves as the MEAs most concerned, a number of scientists, representatives from GBIF, UNESCO and UNU, as well a range of governments. The discussions agreed broadly on a consultative process, and it is expected that this will take place over the next two years, to establish the need for an IMOSEB, and what mechanisms it might develop.
64. It is fair to observe that there was quite a dichotomy of view between its role as a mechanism to advance assessments, as opposed to developing a stronger corpus of knowledge for implementation.

Goal 4: Implementation capacity

65. On 14 February, the incoming and outgoing chairs of the Ramsar Standing Committee and its Subgroup on Finance met at the Secretariat's premises in Switzerland to carry out a "handover" of experiences for the new team in advance of the first full SC meeting (SC34), 10-13 April (with Canada, the past chair of the Subgroup on Finance, able to join by telephone). Many useful items and methods of working were discussed, including setting terms of reference for the chairs and the vice-chair of standing committee, and issues dealing with the upcoming SC34. This meeting was an interesting innovation which should help this new triennium off to a very good start.
66. On February 28 the heads or delegates of the IOPs met in Gland to discuss the outcomes from COP9 and ways of working together in the coming triennium. This was an extremely useful day, and a full report is at SC34-03.
67. The Secretariat met as team for a whole day in early January to review COP outcomes and look for ways of improving our working in 2006-2008. This was also a very useful exercise and allowed much useful discussion.
68. One interesting discussion concerned the nomenclature of the staff of the secretariat, and there was some support for the idea that we should perhaps use a more standard term

(convention implementation officer) to describe the more professional functions, with Administrative officer to describe the team support functions. This could be matched with a matrix showing the range of tasks individual staff are undertaking, and reflects in a more effective way the complex way the staff in the secretariat have to operate.

69. No significant changes in staffing have occurred, except that Sandra Hails from 1 January is now full-time as CEPA focal point in the Secretariat, as well as still dealing with issues of database management.
70. Dr Guangchun Lei, as the Senior Regional Adviser for Asia, offered to take advantage of a concentration of travel in northeast Asia and a personal opportunity to remain in China to experiment with the possibility of a regional adviser to be based in the region. Although this was only for the period between January and April, it is clear that while savings in travel accrued, there were problems in communication, and opportunity to network with other colleagues in the secretariat. This experiment will therefore not be continued or extended. Also, the rise of regional initiatives gives new challenges and opportunities for the Secretariat to interact with the regions, and vice-versa.
71. For the 2005 cycle of the Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF) 24 proposals were assessed, of which 12 are currently in the implementation stage. A total of 29 WFF projects were closed during the same year. In the case of the Small Grants Fund (SGF), 21 proposals were assessed for the Americas, of which two were approved. Four SGF projects were closed in 2005.
72. Follow-up to CREHO continued during 2005, and the Board meeting took place in Gland in June where the work plan was approved. The needs assessment was finalized as well as the capacity building strategy which were distributed at COP9.
73. The Secretariat participated in activities organized by the Ramsar Regional Center for Central and Western Asia during WWD 2006. This regional center is making good progress in developing its work plan.
74. WWF Hong Kong worked with Cathay Pacific Airlines to set up an Asia Waterbird Conservation Fund, and the Ramsar Secretariat is working with Danone Group to set up a Ramsar Asia Fund, to provide a mechanism for improved funding for Asian regional projects. The Regional Center for Central and West Asia is making good progress in developing its work plan, and has been communicating with relevant countries/CPs in the region.
75. The State Council of China has approved the Ramsar Administrative Authority expanding its office for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, and a network for monitoring migratory waterbird and wetlands has been established in the suite of responses to HPAI, and similar work has been undertaken by other East Asian CPs.
76. Kyrgyzstan successfully made its government institutional restructuring and as part of the response the Ramsar Convention implementation has been strengthened.
77. The Small Grants Fund: 13 proposals, 12 from Asia and 1 from Oceania were assessed, of which only two from Asia were approved in 2005. The SC32 approved SGF from Tajikistan

under emergency assistance and recently approved Jordan's SGF proposal with the additional funds received from Japan on restoration of the Montreux record site Azraq.

78. In 2005, we closed four SGF projects from Asia - Iran, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Thailand and two from Oceania - Palau, Marshall Islands. Kyrgyzstan designated 1 site as a project output, and Fiji's project assessed the institutional capacity building for RC implementation; these will be closed soon. Lebanon SGF was successfully completed with partnership from the MedWet Coast project and CEPA activities in Thailand have been strengthened.
79. 2004 SGF projects from Thailand, India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia & Samoa commenced in 2005 last quarter. Kazakhstan is in process of re-organizing the SGF on institutional capacity building followed by their early decision of the government to join the Convention.
80. The Asian Regional team participated actively in multiple events, such as the joint workshop between Iran and Afghanistan during WWD 2006, Shiga International Symposium on wetland restoration, Korean WWD celebration, Indonesian initiative in Geneva to integrate environment sustainability into Millennium Development Goals, to promote and provide training and information on Ramsar's role in the application of the wise use concept.
81. We collaborated with the *Atelier Technique des Espaces Naturels* (ATEN) of the French government to prepare and implement a pilot project to develop the capacities of Ramsar sites managers in five African French Speaking countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Madagascar and Senegal) in 2005. The French Government has accepted to fund a second phase of the same project in 2006. Ramsar and ATEN are also going to develop a capacity-building project aimed at strengthening the capacity of Ramsar's national focal points to implement the Convention, through training sessions and the development of a simplified manual explaining the role and responsibilities of the Administrative Authority.
82. In 2005, 15 project proposals were submitted from Africa to the SGF for review. After a careful technical review, seven of them were rejected, two needed some improvements and only one was approved due to limited funds.
83. We developed the Swiss Grant for Africa proposal for 2005 with five projects covering four of the five eco-regions of Africa. The proposal was approved by the Swiss Federal Government. We are in the process of preparing the 2006 SGA request for funding.
84. We were able to collaborate with the European Space Agency (ESA) to develop the TIGER project focusing on the use of space technology in water resources management in Africa. The primary objective of TIGER is to help African countries overcome problems faced in the collection, analysis and dissemination of water-related geo information by exploiting the advantages of Earth Observation technology. This has led to a series of ESA projects funded in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, etc. Other projects will be funded during the coming three years. This project represents a tremendous opportunity for African CPs engaged in the preparation of their wetlands inventories. The Ramsar Secretariat sits on the TIGER Steering Committee.
85. The SPREP-based Associate Ramsar Officer is continuing to provide advice and assistance to Pacific Island Contracting Parties (Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa), including the consideration of wetland policy development and establishment

arrangements for National Ramsar Committees. All four Pacific Island Contracting Parties have existing national committees that have taken on the role of National Ramsar Committees. Such committees have been established through other projects such as the UNDP-GEF Biodiversity Enabling Activities to assist Pacific Island Country parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to meet their obligations under this particular convention.

86. The Marshall Islands, as well as non-parties Fiji and Tonga, have previously accessed Ramsar SGF funds to carry out institutional strengthening and review of training needs related to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. Funding has also been secured to carry out capacity building for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention and other biodiversity-related MEAs in the Marshall Islands, the focus being on harmonizing implementation through strengthening coordination across national executing agencies, which at the moment, is still somewhat fragmented.

Goal 5: Membership

87. By January 1 we had notice of our 150th Contracting Party from the depositary, UNESCO, and the number of Parties continues to grow, especially in regions underrepresented, such as the Pacific, Caribbean and western and central Asia. On current progress we should be on target to achieve 165 Contracting Parties able to attend COP10.
88. The Secretariat is working with Afghanistan, Iraqi, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Yemen and UAE for their accession. The Kazakhstan government made the decision to ratify the Ramsar Convention in December 2005, whereas Yemen's focal point successfully convinced the Parliament Committee to review their accession to Ramsar Convention. In early February 2006, the Secretary General paid a visit to Yemen and UAE to encourage their accession.
89. No further information was received about preparations for accession by Andorra, despite repeated earlier indications by the Ministry of Environment that they are actively pursuing the accession process.
90. The accession processes of Sudan, Central Africa Republic, Rwanda and Cape Verde were completed during this year and assistance was provided to Sao Tome and Principe to ratify the Convention. The accession instrument of Cameroon has been signed by the Head of State and sent to UNESCO in Cameroon. When received at UNESCO in France, Cameroon's accession will bring the number of states party to Ramsar to 46.
91. This is a major achievement, as Africa is now the region which has the highest number of CPs.
92. Antigua & Barbuda and Barbados finalized their accession processes at the end of 2005. At present, Dominica and Haiti are working on their accession.
93. Considerable assistance has been provided to Fiji, Cook Islands and Tonga to complete their accession processes. Fiji has submitted its accession instrument to UNESCO. Their National Environment Service currently retains the accession documents for Cook Islands. Tonga has requested an in-country assistance "mission" to help them get their accession activities back on track, which has been affected by staffing constraints. This assistance mission is planned before July 2006.

94. The preparatory activities for accession have been re-invigorated for the republic of Kiribati with full government support pledged to assist the process. The Secretariat is currently assisting the Kiribati government to put together a proposal for their national accession process, and it will be submitted for consideration in the Ramsar SGF 2006 Cycle. They have also been assisted in drafting a cabinet paper and RIS for their proposed site.
95. Secretariat efforts to assist the accession of Vanuatu and Solomon Islands has been afforded a lower priority at this stage due to their human resource constraints. The strategy now is to get Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands and Kiribati to accede rapidly, and then follow up with the Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands later in the triennium.