

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

25th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 23- 27 October 2000

DOC. SC25-2
Addenda and Corrigenda

Agenda item 5

Report of the Secretary General

General Objective 1 – Universal Membership

Europe

The Bureau has maintained contacts with officials from Cyprus and Bosnia & Herzegovina regarding their accession to the Convention. Bosnia & Herzegovina has sent the instrument of accession to UNESCO but without designating a Ramsar Site. Cyprus has indicated that it is preparing its instruments of accession.

General Objective 2 – Wise use

Neotropical Region

Venezuela has reactivated its National Ramsar Committee through Ministerial Resolution no. 64, published on 2 August 2000.

Europe

The Bureau has actively participated in the following (sub-)regional events:

- Seminar series in Brussels on the “Implementing the EU Water Framework Directive” organized by the European Commission and WWF
- Conference on “River Restoration 2000” in Wageningen, organized by the European Centre for River Restoration and WATC/RIZA
- Workshop in Kobuleti (Georgia) on “Wetland conservation in the Caucasus” organized by the Georgian Centre for the Conservation of Wildlife and the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network. The workshop, financially supported by USAID’s project for Environmental Information Systems and Networking (EISN), was a success in bringing together for the first time wetland conservation experts from the three main Caucasus countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

General Objective 4 – Capacity building

The Bureau provided support through the Wetlands for the Future Initiative to the following training activities:

- First Annual Conference/Workshop of CARIBWA (Caribbean & Western Atlantic Marine Educators Association), held in Brac Reef Resort, Cayman Islands, August 25 to 27, 2000. 20 people attended the workshop from 14 island/countries and Ramsar provided financial support for travel of 14 participants.
- Central American Marine Turtle Workshop, Belize, 9-15 October 2000. Professionals from all the Central American countries, Mexico, the USA and Venezuela attended the workshop. The Ramsar Bureau was represented at the meeting by Standing Committee member Marco Solano (Costa Rica).

Paragraph 47 – Corrigendum

Within the context of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) the Bureau invited countries in the southern [**not** northern] part of the Mediterranean to submit proposals for the establishment of a North Africa Wetlands Centre that could join the other centres in Europe in the MedWet Team. Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have submitted proposals and an Advisory Committee with the participation of France, Turkey, IUCN and Wetlands International was established to assist the Secretary General in reviewing the proposals. The Secretary General is now considering the advice received and hopes that he will be in a position in the near future to make a proposal to the interested parties.

General Objective 5 – Effective conservation of sites included in the Ramsar List

Paragraph 61 – Corrigendum

Another GEF project has begun with selected Ramsar sites and potential Ramsar sites to be managed for the implementation of both the Ramsar Convention and the CMS/AEWA. This project is coordinated by Wetland International and involves African and European sites. The Ramsar Regional Coordinator for Africa represents the Convention in the project's Steering Committee.

Paragraph 76, complementary information

Argentina. The Administrative Authority replied on 12 October to the Bureau request for information regarding the complaint about the impacts of oil extraction in the Ramsar site, Laguna de Llanquanelo. According to the report, oil exploitation in the area began in the 1940s, although continuous extraction only started in 1979. Following Argentine legislation, the oil company that wishes to exploit eight wells in the area requested the provincial authorities to call for a public hearing, which took place on 30 August 2000.

The Sustainable Development and Environmental Policy Secretariat attended the public hearing and has informed the Bureau that there was no opposition to the project from the participants and that the oil company was requested to take some preventive and mitigation

measures. The Secretariat will continue its close working relationship with the provincial authorities in Mendoza to make sure that Article 3 of the Convention is fully complied with.

Paragraph 76, complementary information

Honduras. The Bureau's Regional Coordinator for the Americas visited Honduras on 26-28 September 2000. Her activities included a visit to the Ramsar site, where she met with the local authorities, the private sector, and government officials from different agencies. She observed there that the shrimp culture project, which is at the origin of the controversy, covers an area of 15 hectares of the 69,711-ha Ramsar site. This area was formerly owned by traditional fishermen who used to have an artisanal aquaculture project a few years ago. The project had been abandoned and the mangroves had recovered. The new owner has made an investment of close to 1 million USD and has rebuilt the old ponds and constructed a road. The shrimps would be ready for harvesting by the end of October 2000.

The Regional Coordinator also had the opportunity to visit another nearby large shrimp aquaculture project where the managers informed her that they are in the process of obtaining ISO 14000 for the environmentally friendly and safe way they are carrying out their activities. They have an impressive water treatment and water quality monitoring system in place, as well as an impressive mangrove reforestation project, and they are administering a small biodiversity reserve.

The Regional Coordinator also met with Minister X. Caballero in her office, together with representatives of a number of other government agencies, including the Attorney General and the Office of the Public Prosecutor, and NGOs. Each participant at the meeting presented a report on the actions that the different agencies have taken in relation to this case, which revealed that an impressive number of actions have been initiated to stop this development.

The conclusions of the meeting were:

1. If despite all the efforts that were reported no one has been able to stop the development, there must be some serious legal weaknesses in the Honduran system.
2. Although it appears unacceptable that this developer has got away with the shrimp aquaculture project without an environmental license, the fact is that legally he would have had the right to do so, if he had followed the existing EIA legal framework, considering that he owns the land and that the area used to be an artisanal aquaculture project.
3. The damage to these 15 hectares, while regrettable, is not sufficiently important to justify the inclusion of the entire Ramsar site in the Montreux Record of Ramsar sites requiring priority conservation attention.

The Regional Coordinator also had the opportunity to discuss with the Honduras authorities other Ramsar-related activities, such as the updating of the management plan for the Ramsar site Barras de Cuero y Salado, for which final approval is pending, and several other activities that are being carried out by the Wetland Conservation Society in the Ramsar site National Park Jeanette Kawas. The management plan for Punta Izopo is being prepared. The

establishment of a National Ramsar Committee was also discussed, and the authorities undertook to make serious efforts to have it in place in the near future.

Paragraph 76, new information

Armenia. The Regional Coordinator for Europe visited both Armenian Ramsar Sites in the company of national experts to obtain a first-hand impression on their status and current management problems:

Lake Arpi reservoir: - A map showing clearly the Ramsar Site boundaries should urgently be provided to the Ramsar Bureau. Due to several pressures on the ecosystem (water abstraction, sewage inflow, disturbance of breeding birds, over-exploitation of natural resources, invasive species), the elaboration of a management plan would be highly desirable. It was proposed to include the nearby lake Ardenis also in the Ramsar Site, given its important value for biodiversity.

Lake Sevan National Park: - The team visited all sites bordering lake Sevan that are mentioned in the final report of the SGF 1997 project "Inventory of the Armenian Ramsar Sites in search of ways for restoration of the lost and rehabilitation of degraded wetlands, especially as waterfowl habitat". It would indeed be highly desirable if the proposed restoration project for lake Lichk could be undertaken as a joint activity with the Stichting Flevoland (in the Netherlands), probably under a site twinning agreement with Eurosite (a partner of the Ramsar Bureau). The Ramsar Bureau attaches great potential importance to the restoration project for the former lake Gilly, profiting currently from a GEF Project Development Facility A grant.

Australia. A message posted recently on the Ramsar Forum affirms that the "Narran Lakes, a Ramsar listed internationally significant wetland, is suffering degradation arising from massive reductions in water flows due to in-stream infrastructure and irrigation. Its ecological values, including its ability to act as a breeding ground for internationally protected water birds, are under threat." The Bureau has not yet contacted the Administrative Authority on this matter.

Czech Republic. The Administrative Authority requested the advice of the Ramsar Bureau for forest and peatbog management in the light of bark beetle calamities in the Sumava peatlands Ramsar Site, adjacent to the Bavarian Forest National Park (Germany). Thus, a Ramsar Advisory Mission is currently under preparation to take place in June 2001 after snow melt.

Iceland. The Myvatn-Laxá region (part) Ramsar Site in Iceland was removed from the Montreux Record at COP5 in Kushiro (1993) on the basis of a Ministerial declaration establishing that the then current mining permit was the last one and that the operation was confined to the northern basin. However, in 2000, the Planning Agency granted a new mining permit including the southern bay, most important for wetland biodiversity. Thus, the Ramsar Bureau has been approached by different sides concerned about possible change in ecological character of this Ramsar Site.

Norway. The Administrative Authority is currently reviewing the boundaries and management of existing Ramsar Sites, including a monitoring programme of threatened species, and finalizing a review that identified new Ramsar Sites. Responding to a query of the

Bureau, Norway informs the Ramsar Bureau that the planned road construction in the Øerlandet RS will not change its ecological character considerably. Additional information about the planned replacement of a road with a bridge, to restore the ecological character of the Tautra and Svaet RS, was promised by Norway in due course.

General Objective 6 – Designation of new Ramsar sites

Algeria has submitted proposals for 10 additional sites; the Bureau has responded with constructive comments on the Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) and has requested the Administrative Authority to review some of them and to provide appropriate maps for each site.

The Bureau has received the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for Palm Islands Nature Reserve in Lebanon, but it has been sent back for amendments in accordance with Resolution 5.3.

Pakistan has submitted the RISs for eight new Ramsar sites which are presently under review. This is a part of the results of a 1991 SGF project.

General Objective 7 – International Cooperation

Europe

The Bureau attended the First Meeting of the Task Force for the Implementation of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe under the Stability Pact, held in Cavtat, Croatia.

An International Working Meeting on the establishment of the Prespa Park was held in Tirana, Albania, on 16-17 October 2000, under the aegis of the Convention on Wetlands and hosted by the Albanian government. Official delegations from Albania, Greece and the FYR of Macedonia took part, as well as representatives of the Regional Environment Centre, UNDP (Tirana and Skopje) and WWF International. The meeting was chaired by the Secretary General of Ramsar. The unanimous conclusions of the meeting include:

- agreement on the establishment of a Coordination Committee with representation from the three countries (with government, local society and NGO participation) and of a secretariat;
- immediate launching of the preparation of a Strategic Action Plan;
- approval of two projects to be funded by Greece;
- joint development of a project under REReP and a second one under GEF / UNDP;
- a strict time schedule was agreed;
- a first meeting of the Coordination Committee is planned in Skopje, FYROM, on 22-23 January 2001.

As to the role of MedWet in this successful transboundary initiative, the following should be noted:

- The initial agreement among the three prime ministers was catalyzed by MedWet since mid-1999.

- The Tirana meeting was arranged and organized by MedWet, which also prepared and circulated its working documents.
- The Prespa Park Coordination Committee was agreed on the basis of a proposal prepared by MedWet.
- MedWet was requested by the three national delegations to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Tirana agreement and especially its time schedule.