

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

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

DOC. SC25-2

Agenda item 5

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is requested to note and comment upon the report and to take decisions, as appropriate, concerning the issues raised in it.

1. This report covers the period between 2 December 1999, the close of the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee, and 25 September 2000. It covers major developments that the Bureau is aware of concerning the different chapters of the Strategic Plan, and in particular the activities of the Ramsar Bureau.

General Objective 1 of the Strategic Plan: Universal Membership

2. Six new Parties have joined the Convention during the period under review, four from Africa and two from Europe: **Belarus, Benin, Libya, Republic of Moldova, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania**. There are 122 Contracting Parties at present.
3. In Africa, Nigeria has indicated that they have already sent the instruments of accession to UNESCO. Workshops have been organized in Cameroon and the Central African Republic to raise awareness on wetland issues (functions, values, threats and management options). As a result, Cameroon and the Central African Republic are taking steps for accession. WWF is assisting Cameroon and the Central African Republic through the Cameroon office and the Living Waters Campaign to prepare the Ramsar Information Sheets as part of the required documents for accession. Djibouti, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe have indicated that they have initiated the process for accession. New contacts are being established in Angola and Mozambique, where the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation has contacts at very high level.
4. In Asia, Azerbaijan has indicated that the instruments of accession have been sent to UNESCO. Lao PDR and Tajikistan are in the process of identification and the preparation of the Information Sheet and map for the first Ramsar site. Wetlands International has communicated to the Bureau Bhutan's interest in the Convention and the Bureau is following this up.
5. An invitation to join the Convention has been sent to the United Arab Emirates. There are plans to organize a subregional workshop in Dubai. The Regional Coordinator is making efforts to establish contacts with Brunei, Maldives, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

6. In the Neotropics, the Regional Representative from Trinidad and Tobago was supported by the Bureau to attend the Intergovernmental Meeting of the Caribbean Environment Programme in February 2000, in Kingston, Jamaica, to make contacts with key players in the region and promote the importance and benefits of becoming Parties to the Convention. A Ramsar workshop for Caribbean island states is planned for late 2000. Contacts were made with the head of the Environment Agency of Guyana (the only South American country not yet a Party) and a complete set of information materials were provided.
7. The Bureau has maintained contacts with officials from Cuba and Dominican Republic regarding their accession to the Convention. Dominican Republic has indicated that they have initiated the process of accession. Cuba has stated in several international fora that they have acceded to the Convention, but UNESCO has not yet received the accession documents.
8. The Bureau has not been informed of any other efforts on the part of Standing Committee members and/or other Contracting Parties in relation to membership, as per paragraph 20 of Resolution VII.27. The target for COP8 is to have 150 Contracting Parties. A renewed effort should be made in the next 18 months in order to achieve that target.

General Objective 2 of the Strategic Plan: Wise Use

9. The Bureau, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the support of a number of partners, has launched "The River Basin Initiative". The initiative aims at establishing a network to link and support activities and projects in which the principles and practice of integrated management of biodiversity, wetlands, and river basins/ catchments/ watersheds will be demonstrated. For more details see DOC.SC25-11.
10. On 21-22 June the Bureau hosted the 2nd meeting of the Wetland Restoration Working Group of PIANC, the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses (also known as the International Navigation Association), which groups all the major business interests in harbours, maritime and river navigation. The group is chaired by Russ Theriot of the Waterways Experiment Station (US Army Corps of Engineers), and is mandated over the next two years to produce guidelines on wetland restoration for the use of private sector concerns involved in harbour development and maintenance. Ramsar's Regional Coordinator for Europe is a member of the Working Group and brings the perspective of environmental organizations. This kind of cooperative participation in industry's efforts to be environmentally responsible is seen as a promising field of endeavor.
11. The Ramsar Convention is actively involved in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), a four-year, 20 million US dollars, international scientific study, subtitled "A joint assessment of condition and change in ecosystem goods and services undertaken for the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Wetlands, and other partners, facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme". More details on the MA and Ramsar's participation are found in document DOC.SC25-13.

12. The Ramsar Bureau participated in the Millennium Wetland Event, in Québec, Canada (6-12 August) featuring the annual meetings of the Society of Wetland Scientists, INTECOL, the International Peat Society, and the International Mire Conservation Group. The Ramsar Deputy Secretary General spoke at the opening ceremony and the Ramsar traveling exhibition was on display, together with a permanent demonstration of the Ramsar Web site and the constant viewing of the Ramsar video. The Bureau provided assistance to some Standing Committee members for their attendance, as well as to scientists from the Neotropics with funds from the Wetlands for the Future Initiative.
13. The Deputy Secretary General attended a meeting of the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP) in Cape Town, South Africa, 17-24 September 2000, to review the completion of Phase 1 of its work and consider its Phase 2 programme. He also attended a CBD Liaison Group meeting, in the context of the CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan, to consider the preparation of materials for its upcoming SBBSTA meeting in 2001, which will be preparing follow-up to CBD's interim guiding principles endorsed by CBD COP5. Invasives will be a major topic for discussion at the next CBD COP in 2002, and IUCN's guidelines and CBD's interim guiding principles will feature prominently in the Ramsar STRP's advice to our own COP8 in 2002.
14. In Africa, the following developments can be reported in the area of institutional capacity for wise use. Côte d'Ivoire has established a National Wetland Network and Tanzania has established a coordinating mechanism for the implementation of the Convention at local level (Ramsar site) and at national level. This mechanism includes a technical body (National Wetlands Technical Committee) as well as a decision-making body (National Wetland Steering Committee). This was undertaken with financial support from the Swiss Grant for Africa administered by the Bureau.
15. Concerning policy and legislation, Benin has started the process for the development of a National Wetland Strategy, Botswana is pursuing the development of a National Wetland Policy with technical input from the Ramsar Bureau, and Chad is undertaking a review of the legal framework and institutions for wetland management, with financial support from the Ramsar SGF.
16. Ghana has adopted a National Land Policy that recognizes wetlands as environmental conservation areas and precludes all practices that threaten wetlands and water courses feeding wetlands. Consequently Ghana has developed and adopted a National Wetlands Conservation Strategy "Managing Ghana's Wetlands". The country has also adopted specific regulations for wetland management with an emphasis on Ramsar sites (core areas, authorised activities, proscribed activities and restricted activities). Kenya is developing a National Land Policy and a National Wetland Policy, and Zambia is continuing the work for the formulation of a National Wetland Strategy, with the financial assistance from the Swiss Grant for Africa administered by the Bureau.
17. In Asia, a GEF PDF B project has been approved for the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands and the Ramsar Bureau is acting as the International Service Provider, being responsible for the recruitment of international consultants. The Bureau is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Project. Iran is also preparing an Integrated Management Plan for the Hara Biosphere Reserve with a financial support from the Ramsar SGF.

18. The Bureau has participated in the 5th Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy/Action Plan.
19. In Europe, Greece and Spain have adopted national wetland strategies or action plans (both reprinted on the Ramsar Web site). Wetlands International's Moscow Office published the Strategy and Action Plan for Wetland Conservation in the Russian Federation. The publication is a result of the National Wetland Conference that was held in February 1999 in Moscow by the State Committee of Environment Protection and Wetlands International, which was the first intersectoral and national conference of its kind, with about 400 participants.
20. The MedWet Coast, a 15 million GEF-funded project, is now being implemented in wetlands and coastal areas in Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian Territories. The project also includes a series of regional activities, managed by the Tour du Valat in France. The Convention is a member of the project Steering Committee through the MedWet Initiative.
21. The Bureau, with the assistance of a summer intern, has completed a study of National Wetland Policies and related instruments, and National Ramsar/Wetland Committees, in European Contracting Parties. The report, including analysis and a series of recommendations, will be used as a basic working document for the Ramsar European Regional Meeting scheduled for Slovenia in October 2001.
22. In the Neotropics the following SGF projects related to wise use have been completed: Argentina: "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Highland Andean Wetlands in the Northwest"; Chile: the National Strategy for the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands was completed in February 2000 and its adoption by the new government is expected soon; Surinam: the management plan for the North Coronie Area was finalised.

General Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan: Awareness of Wetland Values and Functions at All Levels

23. Annex I contains the list of Contracting Parties that have designated their government and NGO National Focal Points for Wetland Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA), with the names of the designated individuals.
24. The Bureau has been able to start implementing some aspects of Resolution VII.9 (the Convention's Outreach Programme). The immediate planned activities include:
 - **Engaging a consultant** to prepare guidance for Contracting Parties to assist them in (a) identifying their current needs and priorities in wetland CEPA and, based on these findings, (b) developing a Wetland CEPA Action Plan. The consultant's work should be ready by 15 December and the guidance should be distributed to CPs in January 2001.
 - **Developing a Ramsar CEPA e-mail discussion group** for all interested parties (but in particular for the designated CEPA National Focal Points) to disseminate and share information and materials. There will be one for each of three working languages but of course any individual can join any of the groups.

- **Developing a broad base of resources, information, training programmes and useful links to other Web sites** with CEPA information at a location on the Ramsar Web site. The Bureau has already begun collecting such materials and it is hoped that contributions will come from the Ramsar network worldwide.
25. The Bureau has sent a letter at the end of September to all Ramsar Administrative Authorities informing them of the above activities and encouraging the Parties to move forward in their main areas of commitment:
- **Appoint a National Government Focal Point and an NGO Focal Point for Wetland CEPA.** A list of those countries that have already made such appointments was appended to the letter (this is also being recorded on the Web). These individuals will form the key contact figures for implementing the Resolution, and the Bureau hopes to be in regular contact with them as the programme moves forward.
 - **Review their wetland needs and priorities,** and, in the light of this, **develop a Wetland CEPA Action Plan.** Some CPs may move forward on this on their own.
26. In addition, the Bureau plans to pursue the following activities:
- Develop a leaflet for the general public that will focus on Ramsar sites, what they are, where they are, how they are designated, and the importance of community involvement.
 - Request the CEPA National Focal Points to identify which of their Ramsar sites have visitor centres, and whether they have wetland/environmental visitor centres elsewhere in their country. Working through the NFPs, the Bureau can encourage them to help strengthen the identity of Ramsar sites for the general public. Apart from encouraging them to erect signboards at their Ramsar sites, perhaps the Bureau can think of some way to establish a 'corporate identity' – e.g., perhaps a standard Ramsar plaque for the signboards. The site visitor centres and wetland/environmental centres will of course be prime contact points for disseminating information, and the Bureau could aim to work with its partners in helping to establish a network of centres.
 - Develop a Powerpoint presentation specifically on Ramsar and CEPA that NFPs can use.
 - Look into the possibility of increased collaboration with WWF's Living Waters Campaign, as it soon enters its second phase.
 - Survey the NFPs for information on the incidence of Ramsar and wetland information in formal school curricula.
27. In Asia, Wetlands International has established a coordinating mechanism through its Japan office for the implementation of the Convention's CEPA programme at the subregional level. They are organizing a workshop in Japan in October and inviting CEPA focal points from Southeast Asian Countries.

28. The Bureau published a colorful brochure entitled “Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in Western Asia”, describing the Convention and its relevance to the region – it is accompanied by a resource paper entitled “Wetlands in Western Asia”, which provides information on the types of wetlands found in the region, the goods and services that wetlands provide, and the benefits that countries of the region stand to gain from joining the Convention on Wetlands.
29. In Africa, WWF’s Living Waters Campaign has produced a video news release on Lake Chad. This has been broadcast on major media programmes, including CNN and Euro News. The cassette is available at the Ramsar Bureau.
30. Discussions are underway with the Secretariat of the UNCCD for a possible joint action that could contribute to the implementation of the Ramsar Outreach Programme, including the production of a video on wetlands in arid lands.
31. The video on the Ramsar Convention and the Ramsar information pack have been distributed extensively throughout the regions, and through the missions and field visits undertaken by Bureau staff there has been an increased dissemination of the Convention’s material in a large number of Contracting Parties. A Chinese version of the Ramsar video was produced with funds from the Evian/Danone project.
32. The Bureau has also updated the video on “The Ramsar Convention of Wetlands: its history, evolution and future”. This 17-minute show describes the seminal MAR Conference in the Camargue in 1962, where the Ramsar story really began, and covers the main events up to 1999 (an earlier version was first prepared by Environment Australia and screened at Ramsar COP6 in Brisbane in 1996).
33. A new magazine has been launched to track developments related to the global water debate and to advocate the sustainable use of this precious commodity. Entitled *World Water Watch: the Magazine of the Freshwater Environment*, the publication is planned for four issues a year -- the first appeared in January 2000, and the second, a special issue on the Second World Water Forum and Ministerial Conference in the Hague, appeared in early March. The Bureau and WWF provided modest financial support to the magazine and in exchange two central pages have been devoted to the Convention, with text prepared by Ramsar staff, in each issue.
34. A Ramsar traveling exhibit, for spreading the Ramsar wise use message to large venues whenever and wherever possible, has been produced. Financed by the Evian/Danone project and designed by Saatchi & Saatchi, the exhibition has already been mounted in Kenya, Canada, Japan, and Jordan at major international meetings, attracting considerable interest and positive reactions. The Bureau is now considering reproducing the exhibition on a set of posters and providing at least one set to each Administrative Authority.
35. The Ramsar brochure has been re-edited, with an updated text and a new graphic design. An attractive Ramsar bookmark was also produced and is available for free distribution.
36. The Bureau actively supported the celebration of World Wetlands Day in 2000, with the distribution of a considerable number of information and promotional materials, and is planning to do the same for WWD 2001. Because in 2001 the celebration marks the 30th

Anniversary of the Convention, the Bureau is trying to identify a sponsor among Contracting Parties and/or Partners for the organization of a major event to mark the occasion. A brochure about WWD 2001 has already been produced and distributed with the last issue of the Ramsar Bulletin. As in the past, the Convention's Web site will host news of WWD2001 plans and reports of activities sent in by the participants; activities were reported to the Bureau from more than 50 countries last year.

37. The Ramsar Web site constitutes the main communications tool of the Convention and continues to receive very positive comments for its quality in design, content, and daily updating. Over the year 1999, the Ramsar Web site increased the number of its visitors by 50%. There were an average of 8,893 User Sessions per month (up from 6,000 per month a half-year earlier) and 106,719 in total for the year. This amounts to 293 readers per day over the year, with 496,248 of our pages viewed over the course of the year. Nationally-speaking, the hits came from 144 nations, with about 50% from the USA, followed by UK, Canada, and Australia, but also with 89 from Croatia and 68 from the United Arab Emirates, just for example. The average user spent 19:19 minutes on the Ramsar site, up from 17 minutes last year.
38. The Bureau is seeking corporate sponsorship for its Web site in order to generate additional resources for the programme of outreach activities. The type of acknowledgement that would be given to the sponsor or sponsors on the entrance page of the Web site and elsewhere, and the monetary contribution that the Bureau would seek to obtain in exchange for this, will be a matter of negotiation. It goes without saying that sponsorship could only be accepted from corporations or businesses whose environmental behaviour is not at odds with the aims of the Convention. Generous corporate sponsorships would allow the Ramsar Bureau to increase its contribution to wetland conservation and sustainable use, and could be reflected both upon the Web site itself and in other ways.
39. In the context of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, the MedWet Secretarial Unit at the Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre, Thessaloniki, Greece, has continued publishing the MedWet Newsletter under the supervision of the MedWet Coordinator, and has developed and maintains the MedWet Web site. The MedWet Project Development Unit at the Station biologique de la Tour du Valat, France, has published, partially funded by the Ramsar Bureau, another book in the MedWet Series: *Wetlands and Hydrology*, by Dr. Mike Acreman, with a preface by the Ramsar Secretary General.

General Objective 4 of the Strategic Plan: Capacity Building

40. The Bureau has published the series of nine Ramsar Handbooks for the Wise Use of Wetlands (the "Ramsar Toolkit"), comprising all of the Convention's guidance documents in a supporting context of case studies and illustrations, as well as the Convention's Work Plan 2000-2002. The English version of the Toolkit was published in March, the Spanish version in July, and the French version in October 2000. A set of the handbooks is being sent to the Minister in charge of Ramsar issues in each of the Contracting Parties, with a covering letter and a "Briefing Note for Ministers and other high level decision-makers".
41. The toolkit has also been sent with a covering letter to the UNDP Resident Representative in more than 100 countries (Ramsar Contracting Parties and non-Contracting Parties). In addition, the toolkit is being distributed to various groups of users in government agencies,

international organizations and NGOs. Due to the high cost of sending each boxed set of handbooks, a special allocation is being made in the budget for this purpose.

42. The feedback the Bureau is getting about the handbooks is very positive and the requests being received indicate that these are increasingly being sought for use at subnational and site level.
43. The Ramsar handbooks should also be available on the Web thanks to the support of the Global Environment Information Centre of the United Nations University, which undertook the conversion of the files into PDF format and the posting on the Web. A test site has been established at www.geic.or.jp/Ramsar/ and final decisions on the medium of distribution, possibly also including Web versions in HTML and PDF versions on CD-ROM, will be made over the next month or so.
44. In Africa, a training course has been undertaken with the financial support of the Evian Project for 13 French-speaking African wetland managers at the Garoua School for Wildlife Management, Cameroon.
45. The Bureau has contributed to a training course for senior government officers from West and Central Africa organized by Wetlands International in Accra, Ghana, on the development and implementation of National Wetland Policies. The French NGO Western Palearctic Migratory Birds (OMPO) has organized two training courses on wetland management with technical assistance from the Ramsar Bureau. The courses were undertaken for the benefit of wetland managers from Niger and Togo.
46. Workshops on wetland management and the Ramsar Convention have been held in Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Tanzania, thanks to the assistance of the Swiss Grant for Africa. These workshops were aimed at raising awareness at different levels: decision-makers (including parliament), government institutions, NGO, wetland managers and representatives of local communities.
47. Within the context of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) the Bureau invited countries in the 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.
48. In addition, on the recommendation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, three MedWet networks are being established: a) MedWet/Regions, involving administrative and/or autonomous regions in MedWet countries, animated by Tour du Valat in France; b) MedWet/Sites, involving wetland sites where MedWet tools have been or are being applied, animated by the Institute for the Conservation of Nature in Portugal; and c) MedWet/NGOs, involving non-governmental organizations in MedWet countries, animated by the Mediterranean Programme of WWF International.
49. The Ramsar Bureau has contributed to a Regional Workshop for the effective management of protected areas, jointly organized by the Centre for Environment &

Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), UNESCO and UNDP, and held in Damascus, Syria, in September 2000.

50. In fulfilment of the Ramsar 25th Anniversary pledge made in Brisbane in 1996 by Australia, that country is taking strong initiatives to provide training opportunities in wetland management for the Oceania region. To this end, it has established the “Asia-Pacific Wetland Managers Training Program”, an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia that is managed and funded through the National Wetlands Program, and \$800,000 AUS has been committed to the initiative over a three-year period.
51. The Secretary General has continued to serve as chair of the Board of the International Courses on Wetland Management and on Wetland Restoration organized annually by RIZA in Lelystad, The Netherlands, and Bureau staff has lectured again at the 2000 Management course, as in the past. Discussions are underway with RIZA for a possible joint action in Asia that could contribute to the advance in the area of training at the regional level.
52. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a total of 20 projects funded by the Wetlands for the Future Initiative financed by the US Government were completed during the period under review, as follows:
 - Argentina: a) Education for the conservation of the coastal wetland of Rio Grande in Tierra del Fuego; b) Training programme on limnology in the Ramsar site Laguna Blanca; c) Monitoring wetland biodiversity and management of the Littoral Mesopotamia; and d) Training of local communities, NGOs and IGOs on the management and restoration of the Ramsar site Lagunas de Guancache.
 - Brazil: a) Strengthening of the Mangrove Bioecology Laboratory; b) Geographic Information System course.
 - Chile: a) Participatory conservation of the Bofedal Jachajawira in the north of Chile; b) Training on integrated management of highland wetlands in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru.
 - Colombia: a) Diagnostic and ecological assessment of the ancient Sinu river basin, with emphasis on Cispatá Bay and surroundings marshes - dissemination of results; b) First National Ramsar Training Course (Coveñas, 3-7 April 2000).
 - Costa Rica: a) Production of a special edition of Vida Silvestre Neotropical on the occasion of COP7; b) Training of indigenous communities on wetland wise use and conservation; c) Training course on strengthening the local capacity for management and restoration of wetlands.
 - Mexico: a) Training for the management and conservation of tropical wetlands; b) Training on wise use and promotion of responsible fishing in the Ramsar site La Encrucijada; c) Training course on the Veracruz Model - an innovative approach to training, public awareness and capacity building for wetland conservation.

- Nicaragua: Training for decision-makers on wetland management and conservation in the municipalities of the Lago Cocibolca.
- Peru: a) Workshop on conservation of wetlands in the South Pacific (with participants from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Wetlands International and the Ramsar Bureau); b) Environmental education in the Ramsar site Lagunas de Mejia, including production of a video.
- St. Lucia: Capacity building in participatory wetland management in the insular Caribbean.
- Suriname: In-service training for the Suriname Administrative Authority in the Trinidad and Tobago Forestry Division.
- Mesoamerica (IUCN Regional Office): Training on Mapmaker software.
- Regional: Eight delegates from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Peru were supported to attend the Millennium Wetlands Event held in Quebec, Canada, in August 2000.

General Objective 5 of the Strategic Plan: Effective conservation of sites included in the Ramsar List

53. The Regional Coordinators and their Assistants have initiated a thorough review of the information held on each Ramsar site by the Bureau in Gland and by Wetlands International in The Netherlands (where the Ramsar Sites Database is maintained under contract with the Bureau), in order to have a complete and clear picture of the quality of that information at the disposal of the Convention, including maps, and to put order into the manual files. Twenty-five years of collecting information by the large number of staff and volunteers that have passed through both institutions have created, naturally, some degree of confusion that the Bureau will endeavor to remedy as soon as possible.
54. Attached as Annex II is a report from the Ramsar Sites Database Manager at Wetlands International on the status of the database.
55. The Bureau has signed a memorandum of understanding with Wetlands International, which maintains the Ramsar Sites Database under contract with the Convention, and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network, CIESIN (Columbia University, USA) for “Cooperation for the Development and Operation of a Data Gateway for Ramsar Site Information”. The MOU’s general objectives are to “develop an on-line Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway through a multilevel, multidisciplinary, diverse resource base, including spatial, tabular and graphic data, all of which can be accessed through a common search interface”; to “encourage innovation in information dissemination and decision-making by sharing expertise on relevant information technologies, including interactive, on-line tools for encouraging dialogue and participation among diverse user groups”; and to “facilitate the development of more powerful data-sharing capabilities within the Ramsar community by sharing expertise on such new technologies. Examples of this may include the development of applications using the Spatial Database Engine (SDE®) and OpenGIS®, incorporation of wetlands data catalogs

into the Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway, and sharing of expertise on metadata management". Dr Antoinette Wannebo, CIESIN's focal point on the project, has been active over the past year as an invited expert on the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), as has Wetlands International's focal point, Scott Frazier, Senior Wetland Inventory Officer at WI.

56. CIESIN personnel demonstrated the latest version of the Ramsar Data Gateway among the exhibits at the Millennium Wetland Event in Québec City, August 2000, and their updated report on the progress made in the implementation of the MOU is appended to this report as Annex III.
57. The Bureau and Wetlands International have continued their efforts to increase the quality of the information on Ramsar sites, in particular in relation to the implementation of paragraphs 14-18 of Resolution VII.12 calling on a number of Parties to submit missing or incomplete information on their Ramsar sites and/or to update the information concerning sites that have been designated before 31 December 1991.
58. Some progress has been made, but the large majority of Parties called upon in the COP7 Resolution have not yet responded to the request of the Conference of the Parties.
59. In Africa:
 - Mauritania has provided excellent updated Ramsar Information Sheet and new maps for the Banc d'Arguin Ramsar site. This is used as a model for new Ramsar sites.
 - Ghana has reviewed the boundaries of existing Ramsar sites, and, as a result, the surface area for three sites has been changed. The Bureau is therefore requesting the Administrative Authority to provide updated Ramsar Information Sheets and maps for all sites. This is all the more timely to be undertaken since this Contracting Party has adopted new regulations for wetland conservation that include the designation of core areas for Ramsar sites and the definition of authorised activities, proscribed activities, and restricted activities.
60. Concerning Ramsar sites management, a GEF project has been approved for the preparation and the implementation of a management plan for Lake Fitri Ramsar site in Chad and for the proposed first Ramsar site in Nigeria (Nguru Lake) and a potential Ramsar site in Cameroon (Waza-Logone).
61. 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 sites. The Ramsar Regional Coordinator for Africa represents the Convention in the project's Steering Committee.
62. The Ramsar Bureau has been cooperating with the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The Presidents of Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, and high-level representatives of the Presidents of Cameroon and the Central Africa Republic met on 28 July 2000 in N'Djamena for the 10th summit meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, with the President of Sudan participating as an observer, and took a long step forward in ensuring a sustainable future for Lake Chad and its large catchment. SFR 40,000 grants have recently been awarded or are planned for each of the Commission Member States by the WWF Living Waters

Campaign to assist in the designation of related Ramsar sites in each of them, and a Global Environment Facility (GEF) project has been approved specifically for Ramsar designation and an appropriate management plan for Lake Chad and its basin. The LCBC Heads of State agreed a Final Communique welcoming the Ramsar, WWF, and GEF initiatives and calling for further donor support, and issued a memorandum declaring all of Lake Chad as a transboundary Ramsar site as soon as the relevant studies can be completed.

63. The MedWet Coordinator and the Regional Coordinator for Europe have provided support to the collaboration between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia on the Neretva River wetlands.
64. In Southern Africa, the mouth of the Orange River forms part of the boundary between South Africa and Namibia, with both countries having designated their respective parts as Ramsar sites. Both countries are now hard at work planning the integration of these two sites into a single jointly-managed transboundary site. South Africa has requested Ramsar Forum members' advice on harmonization of legislation, institutional arrangements for management and coordination, and day-to-day management.
65. In Europe, four 1997 SFG projects related to Ramsar sites management were completed: one project on restoration and rehabilitation of the Ramsar site Lake Sevan in Armenia; one project in Estonia for "Integrating conservation and wise use for the management of Matsalu Ramsar site"; one project in the Slovak Republic for the restoration of Ramsar site wetlands along the Morava River; and one project in the Russian Federation for "Development and implementation of management plans for three wetlands of international importance (Volga and Kuban Deltas)".
66. On World Wetlands Day 2000, the Prime Ministers of Albania, Greece and The FYR of Macedonia met in the Prespa Lakes region, on the Greek side, and declared the "Prespa Park" involving the Ramsar sites in the region. The Bureau is now assisting the three countries and the NGOs involved in the initiative for the development of a sustainable development plan for the Park. To this end, the Bureau, through the MedWet Coordinator, who played an important role in the launching of this initiative, is organizing a meeting to be held in Tirana on 15-17 October 2000.
67. In celebration of World Environment Day 2000, the Environment Ministers from Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine gathered in Bucharest, in a meeting jointly sponsored by WWF and with participation by the Ramsar Bureau. The Ministers adopted two major documents: 1) an Agreement on the Establishment and Joint Management of a Transboundary Protected Area in the Danube Delta and Lower Prut River, by the Governments of Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine; and 2) a Declaration on the Cooperation for the Creation of a Lower Danube Green Corridor, by Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. The Ramsar Convention Bureau was asked to serve as the Depository for the new 4-state Declaration and has accepted to do so.
68. In the Neotropics, the following SFG projects related to Ramsar site management have been completed: Peru: the management plan for the Ramsar site Junin Reserve has been drafted and adopted; hopefully its implementation will take place in the near future. Venezuela: the project on evaluation of fisheries in the Ramsar site Cuare Wildlife Refuge was finalised in July 2000.

69. Work financed under the Danone/Evian project to promote technical exchanges among managers of Ramsar sites on the East Atlantic coast (Europe and Africa) and in deltas was successfully completed by the two institutions subcontracted to do so, the Biological Station Tour du Valat and the League for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife France).
70. In relation to the Montreux Record (MR) of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference, the following developments have taken place:
71. The Democratic Republic of Congo has requested inclusion of the Parc National des Mangroves in the Montreux Record because of adverse change in its ecological character. The Bureau has sent to the Administrative Authority the Montreux Record Questionnaire in order to get the necessary information for inclusion in the List. The questionnaire has been filled out on the Parc National des Mangroves, and the site has officially been put on the Montreux Record.
72. A Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) has been undertaken for MR site Ichkeul National Park in Tunisia in collaboration with Eurosite, IUCN, and the World Heritage Centre. The mission report is available on the Ramsar Web site.
73. Another RAM has visited the MR site Djoudj National Park, Senegal, and Diawling National Park, Mauritania. This mission, which involved all of Ramsar's official partners and the World Heritage Centre, is assisting Senegal and Mauritania to control or eradicate invasive species that are bringing about changes in the ecological character of these Ramsar sites. Djoudj National Park is already on Montreux Record and Diawling will be considered for inclusion in the Montreux Record. As a result of the mission's recommendation, Senegal has requested emergency assistance from the Bureau in order to take some immediate action. The assistance was granted with funds from the Swiss Grant for Africa.
74. The Government of Bangladesh has requested inclusion of Tanguar Haor (a newly designated site) in the Montreux Record because of adverse changes in its ecological character. The Bureau has sent to the Administrative Authority the Montreux Record Questionnaire in order to get the necessary information for inclusion in the Record.
75. In the Neotropics and North America, Contracting Parties with sites listed in the Montreux Record were contacted, as well as all CPs which had stated they had sites in which ecological changes were taking place. An update will be provided at the time the Standing Committee meeting.
76. The Ramsar Bureau has been receiving advice on threats affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands in a number of Contracting Parties. The following is a summary of the complaints received and the action taken by the Bureau, in alphabetical order by country:
- Argentina. The Bureau received an invitation to participate in a public hearing concerning plans for oil exploration in the area of the Lagunas de Llanquanello Ramsar site, as well as complaints about the possible negative effects of this activity on the site. The Bureau invited the Administrative Authority to represent the views of the Convention at the public hearings and transmitted the complaints received.

Informal contacts indicate that the Administrative Authority is dealing with the matter but no official response had been received at the time of preparing this report.

- China. Complaints were received concerning the possible adverse effects of a planned railway project on the Long Valley wetland, located in the Shenshen River catchment near Hong Kong. This wetland area leads to the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site. The Bureau transmitted this complaint to the Administrative Authority, noting Article 3.2. of the Convention: “Each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 [currently the Ramsar Bureau].”
- Costa Rica. Complaints were received in relation to the Ramsar site Tamarindo and development in the Tempisque River Basin, where the Ramsar site Palo Verde is located. The Administrative Authority was contacted and inspections were carried out. Fines were imposed on offenders and restoration of damage was requested.
- Germany. The Bureau received information to the effect that the State Government of Hamburg had issued a decree reducing the Landscape Protection Area of Mühlenberger Loch, which coincides with the area of this Ramsar site. The Bureau wrote to the Administrative Authority requesting it to inform the Convention about its position on this matter, and asking if the German Government was intending to invoke Article 2.5 of the treaty to justify the reduction of the area of the Ramsar site. While there have been exchanges between the Regional Coordinator and the German authorities on this matter, the Bureau has not yet received an official response to the letter of the Secretary General, dated 7 January 2000. The Bureau considers that reduction in the area of Ramsar sites is a very serious matter at a time when the Conference of the Parties has not yet adopted an interpretation of the principle of “urgent national interest”.
- Honduras. A large number of complaints were received in relation to developments affecting the Ramsar site No. 1000, ‘Wetland System in the Southern Region’. The Administrative Authority was contacted. The Bureau was informed that the site was inspected and that the environmental license to proceed with the activities affecting the site had been denied. Since there have been subsequent complaints that the government decision is not being followed, the Regional Coordinator is visiting the site at the end of September and meeting with the Minister of Environment to discuss possible further steps.
- Japan. The Bureau received complaints about developments that would affect the ecosystem of the Sanbanze wetland in Tokyo Bay. While this is not a Ramsar site, the Bureau contacted the Administrative Authority on the basis that Article 3.1 of the Convention provides that “The Contracting Parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and *as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their*

territory' (emphasis added). In response, the Bureau was informed that the Environment Agency of Japan is dealing with the matter and is having consultations with the company that was proposing the developments in the site, so as to avoid or reduce the impacts. The EAJ assured the Bureau that it "keeps making every possible effort to conserve wetlands and shallow waters, and to realize 'the wise use of wetlands in their territory' that is prescribed in the Ramsar Convention".

- Panama. Complaints were received in relation to developments in the Bocas del Toro wetlands. The Administrative Authority was contacted and a joint inspection with the Ramsar Bureau was carried out. Agreement was reached with the developer to modify the project.
- Poland. Echoing concerns expressed by COP7 through Resolution VII.12, in relation to possible water engineering works on the Vistula River, the Secretary General wrote to the Prime Minister on the basis of the information received at the Bureau that the government was planning to go ahead with the plans. The Under Secretary in the Ministry of the Environment replied saying that "respecting international recognition for the Vistula ecosystem importance in Europe and having regard to The Republic of Poland commitments within the Ramsar Convention frameworks, I would like to assure that the way of the lower Vistula management is treated by our administration with concentrated attention." Some time later, having received information to the effect that the Polish Cabinet was about to approve the construction of a second dam on the Lower Vistula at Nieszawa, the Secretary General wrote again, saying in summary: "I may not be aware of environmental impact assessments and other studies that might have been carried out to incline your Cabinet to take such a decision. Nevertheless, allow me, with all due respect, to echo once more the concerns expressed by the Conference of the Contracting Parties in the above-mentioned Resolution. I am sure that the Conference will be very interested in the developments on this issue at its next meeting in 2002 in Spain." In his reply, the Minister of Environment said that in relation to the planned developments in the Vistula River Valley "a conflict will not arise [with the Conventions] as we do not plan to establish legally protected areas within the section of the river in question". The information available indicates that the government is planning to go ahead with building a dam at Nieszawa.
- Republic of Korea. The Bureau received an urgent request from NGOs to visit the Republic of Korea in relation to the Saemangum Wetlands reclamation project, which was seen a very serious and negative development. The Bureau indicated that for an official visit to the country it will require an invitation from the Administrative Authority. If the invitation was forthcoming, the Bureau would seriously consider sending a representative. The invitation has not been received, and in this case the Administrative Authority was not contacted.
- Spain. Complaints were received concerning the Ramsar site Delta del Ebro in Catalunya. The Administrative Authority was contacted and, in consultation with the local authorities, a Ramsar Advisory Mission was organized on 18-22 September 2000. The Regional Coordinator for Europe led the RAM, which also involved two Ramsar external experts and a number of Spanish experts from the central Ministry

of Environment and the Ministry of Environment of Catalunya. The RAM report should be ready soon.

- Sri Lanka. Complaints have been received about developments affecting the only Ramsar site in Sri Lanka. The Administrative Authority was contacted. As a result, the AA has now requested permission to devote the SGF grant that was originally approved for another project (where they are facing difficulties with implementation) to attend to the situation at the Ramsar site. The Bureau is evaluating the request.

77. In relation to the cyanide spill in Romania that affected the Tisza river basin and the Danube through Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, the Ramsar Administrative Authority in Hungary indicated that a serious ecological-environmental catastrophe took place between 1 and 11 February in river Szamos and Tisza affecting a planned quadrilateral (Hungarian-Romanian-Slovakian-Ukrainian) Ramsar site and indirectly affecting 3 already existing Hungarian Ramsar Sites (Lake Tisza, Martely, Pusztaszer). It appears that all the endemic and highly vulnerable fish species and the fragile invertebral fauna were seriously affected. In fact, the pollution has almost swept out biological diversity along the river Tisza downwards from the Szamos inflow.

General Objective 6 of the Strategic Plan: Designation of New Ramsar Sites

78. In the period under review, 31 new Ramsar sites, covering 6,538,966 hectares, have been designated, and the area of two sites has been extended. There are now 1036 sites in the Ramsar List, covering 78,363,458 hectares.
79. Annex IV contains the list of new designations. Eight new sites correspond to the six new Contracting Parties, representing more than 50% of the new Ramsar site area. Additions to the List by the other Contracting Parties were as follows: Africa none; Asia 6; Europe 8 (7 in the UK); Neotropics 9; Oceania one extension and no new sites; and North America none.
80. These figures indicate that Contracting Parties are being slow in delivering their pledges at COP7 (almost 400 new sites were pledged by 56 CPs). A renewed effort will be required if the Convention is to achieve the target agreed upon at COP7 of having 2000 sites in the List at the time of COP9 in 2005.
81. In the case of the Neotropics, Argentina, Brazil and Honduras have designated the number of sites pledged at COP7. In the case of Honduras, the pledge was to designate 7 sites and so they so did, but considering that the sites were interconnected the Bureau's advice was to designate them as a single site, which is Ramsar site number 1000.
82. WWF Living Waters Campaign is providing assistance to Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria for the designation of new Ramsar sites. In this regard, Algeria has proposed ten new sites that hopefully will be designated before the end of the year.
83. The Indian Government has indicated that it is preparing the Ramsar Information Sheets for 10 new Ramsar Sites, with the assistance of WWF-India and WWF's Living Waters

Campaign. Pakistan has also communicated the intention of designating eight new Ramsar Sites.

84. The Government of Colombia has informed the Bureau that it is in the process of finalising the designation of Laguna de la Cocha as a Ramsar site.
85. The SGF project for National wetlands inventory and conservation in Slovakia has been completed, and in Ecuador the second phase of the inventory of wetlands project was completed for the Provinces of Guayas and Oro. In Guayas, 13 wetlands were assessed and in Oro, 3 wetlands were assessed; of these, 10 are considered as suitable for designation as Ramsar sites.
86. This year, the Bureau has produced the *Annotated Version of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, a 276-pages publication with a short description of each Ramsar site. The List kept up to date by the Bureau had contained only the name of the site, date of designation, area, and coordinates. The Annotated version aims at providing a rapid picture of the importance and values of the sites on the List. It is available in hard copy upon request and on the Web site. The Annotated version is being translated into French and Spanish.

General Objective 7 of the Strategic Plan: International Co-operation

87. The Bureau has continued to attach a very high priority to its cooperation with the other environment-related Conventions, based on two main considerations: a) if the conventions work in close synergy, this should facilitate their implementation by Contracting Parties; and b) on the ground, the issues and problems are all interconnected and as a consequence the conventions would achieve their respective aims more effectively if they promote and support a holistic approach. For more details on synergies with other conventions, see documents DOC. SC25-5 and DOC. SC25-6.
88. The Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation, Mr Alain Lambert, took up his post on 1 August 2000. He has devoted his time mainly to preparing his work plan, as reflected in the Bureau Work Plan 2001 and in document DOC. SC25-29.
89. Funding for the Small Grants Fund constitutes a serious concern. At present, the Fund has a very well established mechanism to evaluate projects and disburse funds, but so far there is no “mechanism” as such to resource the Fund. The Bureau sends out every year a call for contributions to the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in donor countries. The experience so far shows that, since the Administrative Authorities are not “funding agencies”, in most cases only a reduced number of them are in a position to make small contributions, generally out of funds that were left over in their annual budgets. This does not constitute a “funding mechanism”, and so far, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities have not been able to engage the development agencies, or other sources of funds, in their respective countries to contribute to the SGF.
90. The Regional Coordinators at the Ramsar Bureau are finding that, in spite of the recognized usefulness of the Fund, the SGF is also becoming a source of disappointment and disillusionment in the recipient countries, since year after year the majority of the projects do not get support because of lack of resources. It should be taken into account that the SGF is often perceived by recipient countries, rightly or wrongly, as the only concrete support that they can receive from the Convention. If the SGF does not work,

more and more Contracting Parties could start considering that Ramsar is not able to really support them with wetland wise use and conservation, and lose interest on it.

91. Thus, one of the top priorities of the Senior Advisor for Environment and Development Cooperation should be to investigate the possibilities of establishing a concrete and reliable mechanism for resourcing the SGF. If this proves not to be possible, COP8 should seriously consider whether the SGF should continue to be operated by the Convention or not. In this regard, the issue of whether the SGF should be operated by one of the International Organization Partners is dealt with in document DOC. SC25-25, in which the Bureau advises that as long as the SGF is a Convention mechanism, its operation should remain with the Convention secretariat.
92. Under the Wetlands for the Future Initiative, at the end of 1999 a total of 48 projects had been assessed, of which 20 were approved for funding and are in the implementation phase. For the first cycle of the year 2000, 17 projects were submitted, of which 16 were approved. New operational guidelines were prepared and adopted.
93. The Danone/Evian Group has agreed to continue to provide funding to the Ramsar Bureau for the period 2001-2002 (the current project covers the period 1998-2000). The project has been simplified in its scope and funding will be provided by the Danone Group only, without the participation of the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) as is the case with the current project, since the FFEM in general does not renew funding for the same project. The Danone Group funding includes again a cash award of US\$10,000 for each of three Ramsar Awards to be presented at COP8, providing that the Standing Committee accepts this offer.
94. In Africa, ongoing collaborative activities for the preparation of GEF projects for the Lake Chad Basin involve actions with river and lake basin organizations, UNDP, the World Bank and WWF International.
95. OMPO, an NGO working on migratory birds of the Western Palearctic is collaborating with Ramsar in various projects sponsored by the SGF and the Swiss Grant Fund in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Togo.
96. As mentioned earlier in this report, the Bureau is acting as International Service Provider for the GEF project on Iranian wetlands and serves in the steering committees of two other major regional GEF projects. The Bureau will be represented for the first time at the 2000 second annual meeting of the GEF Council, by the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation.
97. In relation to the Rio+10 process, the Bureau has approached the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA), and it has been agreed that the Bureau should prepare two documents for inserting the wetland issues into the process:
 - a) “a thematic review, which would provide a concise analysis (3-5 pages) of the state of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 in the given thematic area” (wetlands in our case). Issues to be addressed might include: main accomplishments and main gaps in achieving sustainable development in the area; main contributing internal and

external factors; and critical trends that should be considered in future work. These reviews will be submitted to the 10th session of the CSD.

- b) “a policy review, which would provide a more detailed analysis (8-10 > pages) of the impact of the policies undertaken to implement the objectives of Agenda 21 and the Programme”. This would be used for the preparation of the Secretary General’s main policy report for the 2002 review.
98. In relation to the Neotropical region, discussions were carried out with EPA, ICRI, NOAA, the Nature Conservancy, the World Bank, the ADB, GEF Secretariat, UNDP, USAID, and WWF-US regarding possible areas of cooperation in the region.
99. The Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) has announced details of the first two US\$ 5,000 awards granted under its Ramsar Support Framework. First, to Wetlands International Cambodia - Mekong Programme and the Cambodia Ministry of Environment to survey potential Ramsar sites in Cambodia, and second, in a matching award provided by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to Dr. Eduardo M. da Silva, Institute of Biology da UFBA, Campus de Ondina, Brazil, for surveys of potential Ramsar sites in that country. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of International Affairs has agreed to award a \$10,000 contribution towards the SWS grant program for this year’s round of grant-making, to fund 2 proposals from the Latin America and Caribbean region. This means that this year SWS has a total of \$20,000 to award 4 grants.
100. A Memorandum of Cooperation has also been signed with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), one of the leading conservation NGOs in the USA. Through the MOU, TNC will endeavour to use its network of Partners, representatives, Associate Organizations and individual experts to assist and further the work of the Convention. TNC will also incorporate promotion of wetland conservation and wise use in its programmes of work at international, regional and national levels.
101. Following the Standing Committee decision in 1999 concerning Ducks Unlimited US’s request for International Organization Partner status, the Bureau has been in contact with DU and the possibility of signing an MOU is being assessed at present.
102. Concerning the International Coral Reefs Initiative (ICRI), Australia represented the Bureau at the ICRI meeting in Noumea in May 2000 and made a presentation on its behalf, and the US focal point for STRP will represent the Bureau to discuss the coral designation criteria at the next meeting, which will be held in Bali in October 2000.
103. The Bureau has been working very closely with WWF’s Living Waters Campaign in relation to new Ramsar sites designations in several countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Neotropics. As examples of the results of this collaboration, Algeria has announced the designation of 10 new sites, Colombia is considering designating seven sites, and Ecuador eight sites.
104. Collaboration with IUCN continues to be very active and positive, particularly with various IUCN programmes at headquarters, and mainly in relation to several STRP Working Groups. IUCN is the lead agency in the working groups dealing with incentives and with climate change. Cooperation is also active with several of IUCN regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Neotropics. An MOU has been signed with IUCN

concerning the Global Biodiversity Forum organized on the occasion of major meetings of the environment-related conventions. The Ramsar Bureau will cooperate in the organization of the Forum sessions, will be one of the sponsors, and will have an ex-officio status in the Steering Committee of the GBF. The next GBF will be on biodiversity and indigenous people, possibly in March 2001, on the occasion of the next meeting of the CBD Working Group on Article 8(j) (indigenous and local communities knowledge).

105. BirdLife International has continued to support the Convention in several areas, including its annual donation for Ramsar Advisory Missions. BirdLife national chapters have also been at the forefront in raising concerns about the situation in a number of Ramsar sites. David Pritchard (RSPB and BirdLife) has spent a week of his leave time working at the Ramsar Bureau, making an analysis of the cultural values of Ramsar sites based upon Ramsar Information Sheets. His report on this matter and on a number of other observations concerning the quality of the information maintained at the Bureau have been very valuable for future Bureau action.
106. Collaboration with Wetlands International concerning the Ramsar Sites Database and several areas of STRP work has been very positive. Discussions have been held concerning cooperation in the area of private sector involvement in wetland issues, and it is hoped that cooperation in the area of training will be firmed up soon.
107. The World Water Forum in The Hague in March 2000 was an important event – both the Ministerial Declaration and the Framework for Action that came out of the sessions give recognition to the management and protection of freshwater ecosystems, though not as fully as Ramsar would have wished. The issue has, of course, been given its due recognition in IUCN's Water for Nature Vision, which was discussed during the Forum, but the question now is how well that will be integrated into the "center vision", the Vision for Water, Life, and the Environment, and into the Framework for Action. Although there has been real progress in the past few years in advancing ecosystem conservation in the World Water Vision process, it is unfortunately still considered as somehow separated from the central issue of water for people.
108. The Convention, through the MedWet Coordinator, is now represented in the Mediterranean Committee on Sustainable Development established by the Barcelona Convention, and in the Mediterranean Technical Advisory Committee (MEDTAC) of the Global Water Partnership (GWP). The MedWet Coordinator has also been appointed member of the European Commission's Forum for Environment and Sustainable Development, and coordinator of the Working Groups on the 6th Environmental Action Programme and on Spatial and Urban Issues.
109. The Asian Wetland Symposium 2001 organized by Ramsar Center Japan (RCJ) will be held in August 2001 in Malaysia. It has been agreed that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) funds for this event will be transferred to RCJ through the Ramsar Bureau. Thus first collaboration with ADB may lead to future collaborative work.
110. The former Regional Coordinator for Asia represented the Bureau at the preparatory meeting of the 4th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, and the Secretary General attended the Conference itself, recently held in Kitakyushu, Japan.

General Objective 8 of the Strategic Plan: Institutional Mechanisms and Resources of the Convention

111. Resolution VII.22 of Ramsar COP7, entitled *Collaborative structure for Mediterranean wetlands*, approved “the establishment of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) within the framework of the Convention, as a forum for collaboration on wetland issues in the Mediterranean and as an advisor to the Convention in this region”. MedWet/Com held its 3rd meeting in the island of Djerba in Tunisia, at the invitation of the Ramsar Administrative Authority in that country, the Directorate General of Forests, on 1-5 April 2000. Twenty-three countries from the Mediterranean basin were present, plus other intergovernmental and non-governmental MedWet/Com members, making a total of some 100 participants. The meeting reviewed the work done during the past year under the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative and approved a series of recommendations for action until 31 December 2001. The meeting included a Technical Session on “The cultural aspects of Mediterranean wetlands and their potential contribution to the sustainable use of wetlands resources”, which approved a series of recommendations for action in this area of the social sciences, which would constitute a new area for the Convention’s work, traditionally focused on the biological aspects, and more recently the hydrological aspects, of wetlands.
112. MedWet/Com3 demonstrated that the MedWet Initiative is gaining momentum in terms of the commitment of participating countries and agencies, the number of projects being executed and planned, and donors’ interest. MedWet/Com4 will be held in Portugal in June 2001, at the invitation of the Ramsar Administrative Authority, ICN, the National Institute for Nature Conservation. Turkey has expressed an interest in hosting MedWet/Com5.
113. The Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel held its 9th Meeting in Gland on 27-30 June 2000, with the participation of almost all its members and a large number of invited experts and observers. The meeting was followed by a special workshop on inventory on 1st July. The main business was assessing the progress so far in getting through the enormous work plan of tasks requested by the 7th Conference of the Parties (1999) and the Strategic Plan 1997-2002, and charting the way forward in order to be ready in time for COP8 (2002). The revised STRP Work Plan appears in DOC. SC25-12.
114. The Bureau has maintained close and very effective contacts with the Ministry of Environment in Spain in relation both to the preparations for Ramsar COP8 in 2002 and to Spain’s role as Chair of the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP8. These issues are covered in document DOC. SC25-14, 15, 16 and 17.

Staffing issues

115. The current Bureau staff chart appears in Annex V. The chart reflects the following changes of personnel and rearrangement of responsibilities. These changes did not have financial implications in terms of the amount of resources devoted to staff costs. Staff changes were as follows:
- Nick Davidson took over the position of Deputy Secretary General in February 2000.

- Alain Lambert took over the post position of Senior Advisor for Environment and Development Cooperation in August 2000 (this new staff position was authorized by the Standing Committee in 1999 at the request of COP7).
 - Najam Khurshid took over the position of Regional Coordinator for Asia in March 2000.
 - Julia Tucker left the Ramsar Bureau in February 2000 (going back to IUCN, to the Office of the Director General).
 - Ibrahim Shaame took over a new post of Accountant in April 2000.
 - Annette Keller took over the position of Administration Coordinator, a full time post partially replacing Julia Tucker (Annette had been working as SGF administrator, part time).
 - Paulette Kennedy took over the position of Finance Assistant and Projects Administrator, working under the supervision of the Accountant.
116. While not listed in the staff chart, Sandra Hails has worked at the Bureau under contract on a part-time basis during the whole year on different projects: production of the Ramsar handbooks in the three languages, maintenance of the Ramsar database of wetland experts, and, at present, the Outreach Programme.
117. The MedWet Coordinator, Mr. Thymio Papayannis, has expressed the wish to be replaced in his function, on the basis that he considers that he has made his contribution to the MedWet cause (which has definitely been the case!) and that the time has come to pass the torch to someone else. Fortunately, Mr. Papayannis has indicated that he will continue to support MedWet in areas in which he has particular expertise and/or access to the right people. More details on these issues are given below.

Finances

118. The financial situation of the Bureau continues to be normal. Annual dues are being paid by Contracting Parties regularly, with only a few exceptions of delays and/or arrears in payment. Fiscal Year 1999 was closed with a surplus, mainly due to the strengthening of the value of the dollar deposits kept by the Bureau. Income and expenditure during the current year up to 31 August 2000 and the forecast till 31 December 2000 indicates that the fiscal year should also be closed with a balanced budget, as approved by the Standing Committee.
119. Generous voluntary contributions have again been received in 2000 from the Swiss and US governments. The annual voluntary contribution from the Swiss government is used for projects in Africa, while the 2000 voluntary contribution from the US includes allocations for the Wetlands for the Future Initiative (projects in Latin America and the Caribbean and attendance to the Millennium Wetlands Event in Canada), a contribution to the Small Grants Fund, and support for the STRP Working Groups.
120. The Secretary General and the MedWet Coordinator have devoted considerable attention to the future arrangements and funding of the MedWet Coordination function. A generous offer has been received from Spain for the location of this activity within the IUCN Mediterranean Office that will be established in Malaga, South of Spain, but consultations among MedWet countries are still going on this subject. More details on this issue are given in document DOC. 25-30.

121. In previous years the Secretary General has communicated his concern to the Standing Committee about the implications of the agreement between IUCN and the Swiss Government on fiscal matters, by which IUCN/Ramsar were responsible for the provision of social security benefits to their foreign staff, at the same level as provided by the Swiss government. These provisions, particularly in the case of unemployment, are quite generous and this represented a potential threat to the stability of the Ramsar budget. The agreement has now been revised, and as from 1 July 2000 all IUCN/Ramsar employees have gone back to the Swiss social security system. Switzerland has agreed that IUCN/Ramsar continue to retain as non-earmarked income the income tax paid by foreign staff, which in the case of Ramsar represents an additional income of some SFR 160,000 per year.
122. Finance issues are presented in documents DOC. SC25-21 to 27.

ANNEX I

**Government and NGO National Focal Points for Wetland
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designated by Contracting Parties at 25-9-2000**

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ANNEX II

Status of the Ramsar Sites Database

Report on the Ramsar Database to the 25th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee

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Wetlands International

27 September 2000

Developments and Actions	Relevant links
<p>I. At RSC 24 it was reported that “clickable” interactive maps had been created for all African Contracting Parties, featuring links to locality maps for all their Ramsar sites. This has been continually developed and updated. Also in the intervening period, the interactive map presentation has been extended to all Asian Contracting Parties, the Russian Federation, The Netherlands and Estonia. The relevant URL is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar_database/regional_menu_list.html. Maps showing Global and all Ramsar-regional distribution have been routinely updated. The relevant URLs are: as above and http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar_database/global/ramsar_global_map.html</p> <p>Where available, electronic format site maps have (often been enhanced and have) been linked into the aforementioned presentation (e.g. Indonesia, Russian Federation, South Africa and Tanzania). In addition, detailed locality and/or site maps have been rendered using a GIS/ mapping package for a number of countries including Botswana, Estonia, The Netherlands and The Russian Federation.</p> <p>In addition, available satellite imagery covering Ramsar sites has been linked into the Ramsar Database presentation (e.g. Estonia, Indonesia, Russian Federation).</p>	<p>Annex from Resolution VII.9 The Convention’s Outreach Programme 1999-2002</p> <p>¶ 33. A more accessible database for the Wetlands of International Importance - As the List of Wetlands of International Importance rapidly expands, a priority is to make the information about these flagship sites more freely available by electronic means. The database, managed for the Convention by the Wetlands International office in the Netherlands, will be introduced on the World Wide Web by the end of 1999. Capacity for answering a range of queries on-line is envisaged. Contracting Parties, in developing their Wetland CEPA Action Plans, should anticipate this development and plan for increased use of the Ramsar sites database as a promotional and information tool.</p> <p>Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 3.3.1 Review the Bureau's communications activities, especially those related to the creation and functioning of regional and national communication networks; develop new material and use of technology, and improve existing material.</p> <p>Action 5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS).</p> <p>Action 5.4.3 Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through</p>

<p>(continued from previous sheet)</p> <p>The WWW RDB presentation now runs to over 1250 web pages, including approximately 250 maps and charts.</p> <p>A CD-ROM presentation was produced for a Netherlands Nature Fair to inform the Dutch public about their Ramsar sites and the Convention.</p> <p>See also IV and VI below.</p>	<p>Electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs.</p> <p>Contract Annex references: Action 1.6; Action 2.2</p>
<p>II. The on-line version of the 1999 edition of the Directory of Wetlands of International Importance (originally published on CD-ROM and issued at COP7) is currently being converted to HTML (the standard web page language) to increase speed of access and capacity for cross-linking. In this latter regard, links to country, locality and site maps are being established (e.g. Algeria, Botswana, South Africa). The web presentation is a "living" version of the 1999 Directory, meaning first that updates or corrections are being effected where needed, and secondly that new site entries are being drafted for sites which were designated since the Directory was published on CD-ROM (~10% so far -- these new entries will be posted in due course). The new HTML Directory, and other elements of the on-line RDB presentation, are easily reached via the website Ramsar Database menu, especially the new "Quick Access" button/page.</p> <p>The direct relevant URL for the HTML Directory of Ramsar sites is: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramсар_database/Ramsar_Dir_HTML/1st_read_the_Introduction/Introduction.htm</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 3.3.2 Develop existing Bureau productions, notably the Newsletter, videos and CD-ROMs.</p> <p>Action 5.3.4 Review, update and reprint the Directory of Ramsar Sites for the 7th COP (1999), and produce, for the 8th COP (2002), a summary of sites listed between the 7th and 8th COPs.</p> <p>Action 5.4.3 Make the database widely accessible (read only versions) through Electronic networks (the Internet), run-time versions on diskettes and CD-ROMs, and by the publication of special reports and other outputs.</p> <p>Contract Annex reference: Action 2.3</p>

<p>III. A running detailed assessment of the status of Ramsar site Information Sheets (RIS) and site maps is available from the Ramsar Database section which has developed databases for this purpose. These, sometimes in-depth, assessments are routinely provided to the Bureau on demand; a detailed summary was presented to the Bureau and the STRP (9th Meeting).</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.3.1 Ensure that the maps and descriptions of Ramsar sites submitted to the Ramsar Database by the Contracting Parties at the time of designation are complete, in the approved standard format of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands, and provide sufficient detail to be used for management planning and monitoring of ecological character.</p> <p>Action 5.3.2 Ensure that missing or incomplete data sheets and/or maps of listed sites are submitted as a matter of priority and in the shortest possible time, as a means to enhance the relevance and use of the Ramsar Database.</p> <p>Action 5.3.3 Ensure that data sheets on Ramsar Sites are regularly updated, at least for every second meeting of the COP, so that they can be used for reviewing the achievements of the Convention, for future strategic planning, for promotional purposes, and for site, regional and thematic analysis (Resolution VI.13).</p> <p>Action 5.4.1 Assess data currently available in the database and identify any gaps in the data provided by Contracting Parties.</p> <p>Contract Annex references: Action 1.1; Action 1.4; Action 1.7</p>
<p>IV. Concerning the MoU between Ramsar Bureau, Wetlands International and CIESIN/Columbia University to develop a Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway (see http://www.ramsar.org/key_ciesin_mou.htm): The Ramsar Database section has consistently, and in a timely fashion provided the CIESIN organization with Ramsar Database updates, background and interpretative information, scenarios and examples, and recommendations concerning the development of the Gateway. Most recently, the RDB section has provided detailed input through a series of instalments on the prototype Gateway website, first unveiled in late June 2000. Plans are in place for the RDB manager to travel to CIESIN in October 2000 to provide further direct input. For more details on this project, see also: http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramsar_database/rdb_partners.html#gatewayProj</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS).</p> <p>Contract Annex references: Action 1.6; Action 2.4</p>

<p>V. A new assessment of the status of under-represented wetland types was conducted and presented for and to the Bureau and STRP (9th Meeting). Distribution maps were created and posted on the Ramsar Database presentation. Further analysis was conducted for the Bureau with regard to Resolution VII.21. The new relevant URL is: Http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/ramсар_database/global/ramсар_under_rep.html</p>	<p>Resolution VII.11 on the Strategic framework for the List Resolution VII.21 on intertidal wetlands</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 6.2.1 Promote the designation for the Ramsar List of an increased area of wetland, through listing by new Contracting Parties, and through further designations by current Contracting Parties, in particular developing countries, in order to ensure the listing of a representative range of wetland types in the Territory of each Contracting Party and in each Ramsar region. Action 6.2.3 Give priority attention to the designation of new sites from wetland types currently under-represented on the Ramsar List, and in particular, when appropriate, coral reefs, mangroves, sea-grass beds and peatlands.</p> <p>Contract Annex reference: Action 2.2; Action 3.2</p>
<p>VI. A new Ramsar Database application is being developed. A decision was made to stop development of the database application in its former software language and adopt new database software (MS Access/Visual Basic) to improve utility (and longevity) of the RDB application. In 2000, 34 days of programming have been implemented so far resulting in an advanced prototype, currently undergoing testing. This has, so far, primarily concerned the data input half of the application. In connection with this, a simple hierarchical land use classification to replace the old keyword system currently in use, is under development.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 5.4.2 Upgrade and update the database to meet assessed needs and revise its structure accordingly, including the feasibility of developing a Geographical Information System (GIS).</p> <p>Contract Annex reference: Action 1.2; Action 1.3 See also the other relevant links across from section I (left column) above.</p>

<p>VII. Prepared an HTML presentation on a systematic approach to application of Criterion 1 for the 9th STRP meeting.</p> <p>Collaborated in a draft Guideline on designation of Peatlands for the Ramsar List (presented at the 9th STRP).</p>	<p>Resolution VII.11 on the Strategic framework for the List</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997-2002</p> <p>Action 6.2.1 Promote the designation for the Ramsar List of an increased area of wetland, through listing by new Contracting Parties, and through further designations by current Contracting Parties, in particular developing countries, in order to ensure the listing of a representative range of wetland types in the Territory of each Contracting Party and in each Ramsar region.</p> <p>Action 6.2.3 Give priority attention to the designation of new sites from wetland types currently under-represented on the Ramsar List, and in particular, when appropriate, coral reefs, mangroves, sea-grass beds and peatlands.</p> <p>Contract Annex reference: Action 3.1, Action 3.2</p>
<p>VIII. Provided extensive information servicing to the Ramsar Bureau and a wide external audience. Since the 24th RSC meeting approximately 85 information requests have been serviced by the RDB section (not including all servicing provided to CIESIN). Two three-monthly logs of information servicing activity have been provided to the Bureau in 2000. In-depth attention has been given to Ramsar sites and dams, invasive species, under-represented wetland types, World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve sites that are also Ramsar sites, and assessments of Ramsar site information and maps.</p>	<p>Applicable to many SP objectives.</p> <p>Contract Annex reference: Action 2.1</p>

ANNEX III

Update on the Ramsar Data Gateway

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Update on Ramsar Gateway
September 26, 2000
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In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in February 2000 between the Bureau of the Convention on Wetlands, Wetlands International and CIESIN, the following summarizes the work completed so far towards the development of the General Objectives detailed under Article 1. This report highlights CIESIN's contributions¹.

Towards the development of an on-line Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway through a multilevel, multidisciplinary, diverse resource base, including spatial, tabular and graphic data, all of which can be accessed through a common search interface (Article 1, 1.1), the following has been accomplished:

A. Database model development and data ingestion:

1. CIESIN developed a data model to accommodate the Ramsar data (tabular, graphical and spatial) and other data holdings within and outside of CIESIN.
2. Data dictionary development is under way.
3. Data for Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway.

Type	Name	Source	Progress/Issues	Data Dictionary
Text	Ramsar Sites Database	Wetlands International	October 1999 version ingested	Draft version completed. Technically adequate, needs conceptual work.

¹ Support for the Ramsar Data Gateway is provided by Columbia University and the Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC) (NASA-contract #NAS5-98162)

Text	Directory of Wetlands of International Importance	Wetlands International	Electronic dataset partially completed, summary sheet headings broken down into fields	Draft version completed.
Text	Ramsar Annotated List	Ramsar Bureau	Electronic dataset completed. Text information broken down to fields.	Draft version completed.
Text	GRoWI	Wetlands International	Dataset already electronic.	Under construction.
Spatial	Ramsar Site Boundaries	WCMC	Dataset not yet provided.	
Spatial	Case studies of Ramsar sites using remote sensing/GIS	Ramsar Site Managers	Several spatial datasets received. Development of ingestion method under way.	

B. On-line search interface:

1. Alpha prototype version of an interactive search interface for the Ramsar Sites Database was completed for the June 2000 STRP meeting (<http://sedac.ciesin.org/ramsardg/>). Initial comments and reaction received from STRP.
2. CIESIN exhibit at Quebec 2000 received input and commentary from international pool of wetland scientists and professionals.
3. Reviews, comments and critiques on alpha prototype of interactive search interface for the Ramsar Sites Database received from Wetlands International and select reviewers.

C. Data management and next version of search interface:

1. CIESIN to host and partially support visit by Scott Frazier, Wetlands International, October 8-11 2000, for technical meetings and discussions with CIESIN Information Technology staff.
2. CIESIN organizes technical meeting (October 12-13/14) between parties to the aforementioned MOU and invites organizations addressing similar data and information management issues (BCIS). Provisional agenda and participant list included.

The meeting will serve as a forum for the exchange of information on existing and future databases to be integrated into the Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway, how to achieve desired functionality of such a gateway, and how to maintain the databases included in the Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway. Discussions will be divided between the “big picture” architecture of the open network, and the “nuts and bolts” mechanics needed to make it work.

Some issues to be considered regarding the “big picture” architecture:

- synergies between existing and future databases being undertaken by the invited participants
- desired functionality of the Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway
- ways forward to pool our resources and avoid duplication of effort
- integration of spatial data
- potential funding sources to support additional enhancements

Some issues to be considered regarding the “nuts and bolts” mechanics needed to make it work:

- data formats (standards and documentation)
- data dictionaries
- data maintenance and updating (long and short term)
- data archiving
- metadata standards
- data redistribution and attribution issues

D. Spatial data

Development and incorporation of spatial data into the Ramsar Wetland Data Gateway has not progressed at the same pace as that of tabular data. This is in large part due to the inaccessibility of Ramsar site boundaries. Issues of updates and quality control will need to be addressed if and when this dataset is acquired. These activities will have considerable financial costs associated with them. As access to and integration of these data with tabular data are of extreme value and importance to the Ramsar community, an effort to obtain funding to move this activity forward would be advisable.

E. Next Steps

The technical meeting scheduled for October 12-13 will address many of the issues required to advance this project as well as set a time frame for completion of these. Activity in the few months following the technical meeting will focus on implementing the decisions taken at the meeting.

ANNEX IV

Ramsar site designations and area extensions during the period 2 December 1999 – 15 September 2001

Africa

Benin (new CP)	Basse Vallée du Couffo, Lagune Côtière, Chenal Aho, Lac Ahémé (47,500 hectares) and Basse Vallée de l'Ouémé, Lagune de Porto-Novo, Lac Nokoué (91,600 hectares).
Libya (new CP)	Ain Elshakika and Ain Elzarga, both on or near the Mediterranean coast in the general area of Darnah and Tubruq (Ramsar Information Sheets have not yet been received for them)
Sierra Leone (new CP)	Sierra Leone River Estuary (295,000 hectares)
Tanzania (new CP)	Malagarasi-Muyovozi Wetlands (3,250,000 hectares)

Asia

Bangladesh	Has designated its 2 nd site, Tanguar Haor (9,500 ha)
Iran	Has designated its 19 th and 20 th sites: Govater Bay and Hur-e-Bahu (75,000 hectares) and Sheedvar Island (870 ha)
Philippines	Has designated its 4 th , 5 th and 6 th Ramsar sites: Tubbataha Reefs National Marine Park (33,200 hectares); Naujan Lake National Park in Oriental Mindoro (14,568 ha); and The Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary (14,836 ha)

Europe

Austria	Has designated its 10th Ramsar site: Waldviertel ponds, peat bogs and floodplains (13,000 ha)
Belarus (new CP)	Sporovsky Biological Reserve ("zakaznik") (19,384 hectare)
Republic of Moldova (new CP)	Lower Prut Lakes (19,152 hectares)
United Kingdom	The total of sites is now 156. New designations and extensions are: The Arun Valley site (529 ha); Northumbria Coast (1108 hectares); extension of the Morecambe Bay Ramsar site to a further 1541 hectares; Thames Estuary and Marshes (5589 hectares); Black Bog (183 hectares); Fairy Water Bogs (224 ha); Slieve Beagh (1885 ha); Eden Estuary (6923 ha); and The Inner Clyde Estuary (1826 ha)

Neotropics

Argentina	Has designated its 7 th and 8 th sites: Lagunas de Guanacache (580,000 ha) and Laguna de Vilama (157,000 ha)
Bolivia	Has designated its 3 rd site, Cuenca de Tajzara (5,500 ha)
Brazil	Has designated its 6 th and 7 th sites, Parque Estadual Marinho do Parcel Manoel Luis (34,556 ha), and Baixada Maranhense (1,775,035.6 ha)
Costa Rica	Has designated its 10 th site, Cuenca Embalse Arenal (67,296 ha)
Ecuador	Has designated its 3 rd and 4 th sites, Abras de Mantequilla (22,500 ha) and La Segua (1,836 ha)
Guatemala	Has designated its 4 th site, Punta de Manabique (132,900 ha)

North America

No new designations or extensions.

Oceania

Australia	Has extended the Macquarie Marshes site (1/8/86, 18,143 hectares) by an additional 583 hectares, largely by virtue of a stewardship agreement between government and private landowners
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