

Statement to the 6th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework  
Convention on Climate Change  
Den Haag, The Netherlands, 20 November 2000

by Delmar Blasco, Secretary General of the  
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Mr Chairman, Ministers and distinguished delegates,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make this statement and to bring to you once more the perspectives of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on issues of common concern.

I would like to report to you on the progress and activities of the Ramsar Convention on issues related to wetlands and climate change since the 5th meeting of your Conference of Parties last year. I hope you will agree on the importance of the continuing efforts to strengthen cooperation between our Conventions in pursuing these issues of common interest to our governments.

Since its inception in 1971, the Ramsar Convention has matured into a highly effective, action-based treaty, involving at present 123 countries, advocating and supporting action to manage sustainably the world's wetlands as vital resources providing many functions and services critical to people and their environment.

To support this goal the Convention has assembled an effective "toolkit" that provides practical guidance and assistance on its implementation by governments, international organisations and local stakeholders.

Much of this existing "toolkit" provides guidance of relevance to identifying and managing climate change impacts, and a substantial body of further guidance is now being prepared by Ramsar's subsidiary body, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) for our 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties ~~to be held in Valencia, Spain in November 2002.~~ *next*

Our last Conference of Parties in Costa Rica last year identified linkages between environment-based Conventions as a high priority, and several decisions of the meeting specifically recognised the development of closer working relations with the IPCC and the Climate Change Convention as a particular priority. These were particularly in relation to the integrated management of river basins, the development of global action for the management of peatlands, and the increasing vulnerability of small island states. This was in recognition that the goals of sustainable water and wetlands use can no longer be achieved without taking climate change and its impacts into account.

At your 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties and the 11th meeting of your subsidiary body you requested the Climate Change Convention Secretariat undertake such liaison to determine how cooperation between the Conventions could be strengthened.

In support of this discussion, the Ramsar secretariat presented to your 5th Conference of Parties a discussion paper on "Wetlands and Climate Change" prepared for Ramsar by IUCN – The World Conservation Union. This identified a potential framework for cooperation between our Conventions, and notably between our respective subsidiary scientific bodies and IPCC, and between our secretariats. The review identified three broad themes of common interest. These are:

- predicting and monitoring the impacts of climate change on wetland areas;
- the role of wetlands in adapting to, and mitigating the impacts of, climate change; and
- the role of wetlands, notably peatland and forested wetlands, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We are now taking forwards discussion on how best to turn this proposed framework into tangible actions, and several activities are currently underway under the Ramsar Convention. We have engaged IUCN and its climate change programme, acting in their role as a formal International Organisation Partner of the Ramsar Convention, to coordinate development of these actions.

~~Our Contracting Parties have requested their subsidiary body, the STRP, to prepare for their next Conference of Parties a comprehensive review of the potential impacts of climate change on wetlands, and of the roles that wetlands can potentially play in the mitigating the effects of climate change and sea level rise.~~ To progress this review and guidance the Convention has established an Expert Working Group on wetlands and climate change, which has already provided expert comments on the IPCC's Third Assessment Report.

The work of your SBSTA, and of the expertise of the IPCC in preparing and presenting its Third Assessment Report, can clearly make a substantive contribution to Ramsar's review of wetlands and climate change. As a Convention, Ramsar believes that this work can also make a significant contribution to assisting you in sharing and elaborating the roles and importance of wetland management and restoration as a sustainable technology in the promotion of adaptive strategies through the Climate Change Convention.

Our STRP is also preparing further guidance to Contracting Parties on wetland risk assessment, including the use of early warning indicators, for inclusion on the Ramsar "toolkit". This work is particularly relevant to the areas of work in your agenda on technology transfer, adaptation and capacity building.

Ramsar has already developed with the Convention on Biological Diversity a comprehensive Joint Work Plan that has been strongly endorsed by Parties to both Conventions, who have also urged this approach as a model for developing equivalent links with other Conventions. The current CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan (for 2000-2001) addresses a range of topics of direct relevance to climate change issues, notably including the biodiversity effects of coral bleaching, forest ecosystems, and wetland restoration and rehabilitation, as well as inventory and assessment techniques.

As a Convention Ramsar believes that establishing increasingly direct working relationships between your SBSTA and the IPCC with our Scientific and Technical Review Panel, and linking this with related joint work with the Convention on Biological Diversity, would greatly assist such work on topics of common interest. We consider that this would yield substantial benefits in ensuring that the best possible, and consistent, advice is made available to our governments through each of our Conventions working together.

I hope that this gives you a flavour of the considerable potential and benefits to our governments to be gained from a strong working partnership between our respective Conventions. I hope that, as did our governments at our respective COPs last year, you will continue to support and encourage taking the steps needed to further the development of this partnership in the coming year.