

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), otherwise known as the Ramsar Convention was the first intergovernmental treaty to promote integrated management practices for wetlands and river basins, and for Integrated Coastal Zone management, all essential in ensuring sustainable water resources, and survivable ecosystems in the future. Similar to the Convention on Biological Diversity's ecosystem approach, Ramsar's **wise use principle, enshrined in the convention text**, recommends a holistic approach when establishing wetland and water management schemes, including not only ecological or biological factors, but also social, institutional, economic and cultural aspects. The Ramsar Convention has, since 1971, been a key global force in promoting wise use of wetlands - which in the last 10 years has meant more focus on water, its protection, production and purification. Membership of the Environmental management Group (EMG) helps us work synergistically with other agencies and MEA's on these themes.

The principle thus is based on establishing, or re-establishing, the link between people and nature. Application of "wise use" is crucial to ensuring that wetlands can continue fully to deliver their ecosystem services in support of human well-being.

Some 33 years of experience allows Ramsar to be, today, one of the most practical conventions to help reaching the targets established during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002) and key Millennium Development Goals. By covering Water and Biodiversity we really are the alpha and omega of the WEHAB process!

The water issue has been one of Ramsar's thematic areas for a while now. In the context of the new paradigm of integrated ecosystem management, wetlands are one of the vital elements which help to sustain the waterways that provide our food and drinking water. But the Convention is also addressing the key issue of how to provide water for people, while ensuring ecosystems also *receive* water to enable them to continue to provide ecosystem services on which we all depend. The Convention is shifting thus from the original concept of "wetlands for birds" to the one of "water for people", and the global implementation of integrated wetland and water management.

To achieve all this, the Convention works closely with other environment-related global and regional conventions. It has Joint Work Plans or other collaborative arrangements with the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Conventions on Biological Diversity, Combating Desertification, Migratory Species, and several UNESCO programmes.

We are a Convention strongly based on science, and our subsidiary science body helps prepare material for consideration by Parties when they meet. Our next

conference of the parties will be November 2005, in Kampala, Uganda, with the theme of Supporting life, Sustaining Livelihoods, and I am sure I speak also for Uganda in saying we look forward to welcoming all the delegates here present to Kampala, to really advance global efforts in ensuring functioning wetlands, as well as ensuring water for people, wherever and however they live!