

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
34th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 10-13 April 2006

Report of the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee

First day, 11 April 2006

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Paul Mafabi (Uganda), Chair of the Standing Committee**, welcomed the members of the Standing Committee (SC), Observer States, and International Organization Partners (IOPs) and expressed Uganda's gratitude for the honor of having been able to host the recent meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COPs). He noted that the implementation of the Ramsar Convention is a continuing partnership among the COP, the SC, and the Secretariat, with the advice of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the support of the IOPs. He welcomed the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) as the Convention's fifth IOP and looked forward to fruitful cooperation.
2. The Chair noted that the SC has increased since its last meeting by one more seat for Africa, with an additional seat expected for Asia before the next COP. He welcomed Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Barbados, and Cameroon which have joined the Convention since COP9, and reported that several other states are nearing completion of the accession process.
3. The Chair observed that COP9 set an ambitious agenda for the next triennium, and thus this SC meeting is a crucial one in setting the work plans for the period and beginning the planning for COP10. He welcomed the Republic of Korea as the next host of the COP and pledged the SC's complete support.
4. He noted recent responses from CMS, CBD, UNEP, and FAO on the issue of avian flu and said that COP9 showed that Ramsar (in Resolution IX.23) can respond to emerging issues rapidly and efficiently. He said that as many waterbirds are now migrating back, all Parties need to heed the Resolution's cautions against precipitous actions. Ramsar will work cooperatively with FAO and the lead agency, WHO, on this issue. He noted that COP9, in matters like poverty reduction and water management, moved in new directions for the Convention, without losing its essential mandate, and we need to see how to build on those steps in order to progress towards COP10. He noted that there were other important, difficult issues, like transboundary wetlands, awaiting further consideration at COP10, and promised to build on the cooperative tradition of the SC to move forward.
5. **Ger Bergkamp (IUCN)** welcomed the participants to IUCN HQ on behalf of the Director General and said that at a time when environmental issues seem no longer to be at the top of the world's attention, there is a need to reframe issues and develop a new vocabulary, with terms like security, jobs, economic growth. We need to show people that the challenge of wetland conservation can be part of the solution to people's concerns. He said that there is more awareness among water managers about the role of wetlands and we need to further that. The STRP has a major role in assisting in the use of the Convention's tools and developing new ones. He observed that the Fourth World Water Forum (4WWF) showed increased interest in the water world in integrated water management; this presents an opportunity for Ramsar and the IOPs and should be one of the main focuses of the triennium. He looked forward to significant progress.

6. **Rebecca Tharme (IWMI)** greeted the meeting on behalf of the five IOPs and said that IWMI is grateful for the support of the Secretariat, the IOPs, and the COP for the confidence shown in IWMI being accepted as the newest IOP. She provided an introduction to IWMI's work and noted that it has been working increasingly closely with the STRP and the other IOPs, and she explained that the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture (CA) is co-sponsored by Ramsar, CBD, FAO and others and is in its final phase gathering knowledge globally to provide insights on investments in water for food and their impact on people and ecosystems. She said that she was encouraged to see distinct areas of common ground on strategic knowledge generation with clear policy relevance, active advocacy, and CEPA outreach. She drew attention to a number of challenges and a number of Convention priorities to be addressed, and pledged that the IOPs will continue to work towards the Convention's core strengths while supporting the evolution of Ramsar's role to better penetrate mainstream political agendas. She applauded the recent joint meeting of the IOPs with the Secretariat and promised the IOPs' efforts to coordinate their activities in support of the Convention. [The full text of Rebecca Tharme's remarks will be available on the Web site.]
7. **The Secretary General (SG)** welcomed the participants and expressed thanks to the government of Uganda, which looked after us so well at the first Ramsar COP in Africa. He thanked the Secretariat staff for helping to deliver such good results. He said that COP9 was a turning point for Ramsar COPs, as it met for two fewer days and updated and improved a great deal of guidance for the Parties. Though there was disagreement on terminology, the concept of "ecosystem services" was accepted by everyone. For COP10, he suggested that the role of the Technical Sessions has been overtaken by the excellent side events, many of them sponsored by the IOPs. He also welcomed the new Chair of the STRP, Heather Mackay. He noted the challenge of developing a new National Report (NR) format for COP10 in light of two clear messages: the need for a shorter, simpler NR format, more helpful to implementation, and the need to coordinate reporting requirements with those of other Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs).

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

8. **WWF International** asked for the inclusion in the agenda of a report back from the "chairs' transition" meeting (14 February 2006). **The SG** explained that it was an informal meeting, with no report intended, but that most of its issues appear under other agenda items. He said that it was a successful meeting that should be continued for future post-COP handovers.
9. The draft agenda (DOC. SC34-1 Rev. 1) was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

10. **The SG** reported that Observer Parties are welcome to SC meetings' open sessions and that no participants present require formal admission.

Agenda item 4: Report of the Secretary General

11. **The SG** provided a PowerPoint presentation to complement his report in DOC. SC34-2. He highlighted the success of World Wetlands Day 2006 and invited a look at the display in the lobby, which indicates that WWD has become an important element for many Parties. He drew attention to the number of Parties and groups that are adapting Ramsar WWD materials to local messages and local languages.
12. **The SG** reported on Ramsar participation in a number of recent international meetings, namely the CBD SBSTTA and COP8, the UNFCCC COP and Kyoto MOP, the UNEP Governing Council, the Global Oceans Forum, the 4th World Water Forum, and the IMOSEB Steering Group. He reported on progress with the Himalaya and Andes Initiatives. He presented an organizational chart

of the Ramsar Secretariat illustrating his proposal for a uniform list of revised staff titles, which would constitute a more “matrix” approach to the Secretariat. He said that the staff should bring global lessons to the regions. He indicated that he wished to promote a more cohesive approach to outreach, linking it to fund-raising where appropriate, in which he saw a role for the CEPA Oversight Panel. [The text of the SG’s presentation will be available on the Ramsar Web site.]

13. **Switzerland** amplified the report’s mention in para. 5 of the ECE Water Convention (the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes), explaining its background and recent work in devising a Code of Conduct on the integration of ecosystems in water management and payment for ecosystem services. She said that the Convention had been amended to expand to the global level and, pending the ratification of the amendment by all Parties, invited all Ramsar Parties to follow and join in its progress. **The SG** affirmed that the Secretariat is engaged with the Water Convention discussions.
14. **Wetlands International** noted that the SG’s report focused on the work of the Secretariat and suggested that a broader focus on emerging issues and events would contribute to SC understanding of wider issues involving the Parties, the IOPs, etc. and trigger discussion of any needed new actions. **The SG** noted that the SG’s report is a traditional document summarizing the Secretariat’s activities, but perhaps we could add a future section on emerging issues and invite the IOPs and others to contribute to it. These issues are not now part of the draft work plan because all of that comes from the COP; he indicated that we need a Strategic Plan that is more open to emerging issues and a better mechanism to discuss them.
15. **Slovenia** noted that there is an unfortunate lack of cooperation among the National Focal Points (NFPs) of Ramsar and the CBD. This should be addressed for all five biodiversity-related conventions, but especially for these two. **The SG** felt that this is a crucial issue, a problem for all of the MEAs, about which we always talk but should now do something. He promised that the Secretariat will help if it can.
16. **Gabon** inquired as to how the Convention participated in the 4th World Water Forum and urged that in future Ramsar should play a role in organizing the Forums. He reported that the parliamentarians’ meeting mentioned in the report, in para. 41, has already taken place and was a great success. **The SG** responded that Ramsar was involved in a number of presentations and participation in some sessions and that the “water game” (para. 22 below) proved to be very popular. He applauded the successful parliamentarians’ meeting and saw that as an excellent way to reach key sectors.
17. **BirdLife International** noted radical changes in Europe in recent years (as in para. 6 of the SG’s report) and urged that the SC develop concrete steps for dealing with these that can be built into the work plan. **The SG** noted that the EC cannot join the Convention because of Article 9 but he suggested that a strong MOC with DG Environment, DG Research, and DG Funding will be the best solution. He reported that the UK’s JNCC has suggested the possibility of helping to advance that idea.
18. **Austria** asked for more information about the transition meeting’s development of Terms of Reference (TORs) for the SC officers (para. 65) and, noting para. 69’s mention of “no significant changes” in Secretariat staffing, asked for explanations of existing staffing arrangements. **The SG** promised to provide those TORs to the meeting and, concerning staff, said that he will be reviewing the staffing situation following SC34 to see if any changes are needed. He promised that the SC will receive an update on Secretariat activities every three to four months, and any changes will be notified.
19. **Malawi** noted the presence of Africa in the chairs of the SC and STRP and drew attention to advances in inventories, National Wetland Policies, and management with Ramsar support but said

that assistance is still needed. He said that there are enormous challenges for Ramsar in helping Africa in wetland management, food security, poverty, livelihoods, and drought.

20. **WWF** asked for an update on the Resolution IX.15 request for the government of Greece to advise the SG on the steps being taken to restore the ecological character of the seven Greek Ramsar sites included in the Montreux Record with a view to removing these sites from the Record. **The SG** reported that there has been no response from Greece.
21. **Switzerland** suggested that the Secretariat should obtain all of the 4WWF session reports involving wetlands and make a summary to be distributed to the Parties. **The SG** responded that there would be a lot of work in accomplishing that but that the Secretariat is keeping abreast of it. He said that the ministerial segment was very effective and perhaps we can find a broader exposure for its outcomes.
22. **Japan** reported that the East Asia Australasia Flyway Partnership (para. 33) will be launched in late 2006. Japan raised questions about the reported outposting of the Senior Advisor for Asia to China (para. 70) and about the Ramsar Asia Fund of the Danone Group. **The SG** explained that Danone contributes about €250,000 per year for assistance in a variety of issues for outreach, including WWD and capacity-building workshops. Recently it has funded the production of the “water game”, and a giant form of the game funded by Danone and its Mexican subsidiary Bonafont was extremely popular at the 4WWF, much more effective than traditional booths. He applauded the Flyway Partnership as a good model and reported that the Senior Advisor outposting was an experiment which, given logistical problems, will not be pursued further.
23. **El Salvador** noted that the issue of transboundary wetlands was raised at COP9 and warrants more discussion. He reported that Parties in Central America are making progress on synergies amongst MEAs, including a GEF-funded programme for a plan of action concerning four conventions. He observed that water issues, of both scarcity and excess, are very important for Central America and agreed that the 4WWF reports should be distributed as widely as possible. **The SG** agreed that transboundary wetlands will be an issue for COP10 and reported that he is discussing with the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas the idea of co-hosting a workshop of experts on designation and management of transboundary national parks, hopefully for the first half of 2007.
24. **Bahamas** reported that its National Wetland Policy had been adopted by the Cabinet in March 2006 and that there is a new public/private partnership for wetland restoration with Wetland Care Bahamas.
25. **The Chair (Uganda)** urged that there is a need to explore interactions with the Nile Basin Initiative.
26. **The SG's** responses to the points made are distributed respectively above.
27. **Gabon** pointed to capacity building needs in Africa and urged the creation of a training centre for francophone African countries as there is for English-speaking ones.
28. **The USA** noted that there were no formal minutes of the 14 February “transition” or “handover” meeting but offered to report briefly on it. The temporary committee consisted of the Chairs and former Chairs of the SC and the Subgroup on Finance. The following issues were discussed: developing TORs for the SC and Subgroup Chairs and Vice-Chairs; clarifying the performance evaluation process for the SG; personnel issues, including outposting of the Asia advisor and internal staffing matters, and a mechanism for the SG to work with the SC on future hiring needs; means of briefing new SC members and working group chairs; encouraging Parties to support their delegates in SC chair positions; the work plan, and creating measurable targets; and a positive

discussion of the transition to the next SG vis-à-vis the next COP. The USA suggested that the “transition” meeting role should be continued in future.

29. **China** expressed the wish to come back to some of the USA’s points later if they were not covered under other agenda points. China agreed that it will be useful to have the TORs of the Chairs for reference.
30. **WWF** suggested that the SC give the SG a formal request to seek a response on its Montreux Record sites before the next SC meeting. **The SG** suggested that this should include all other recommendations mentioned in Resolution IX.15 as well.

Decision SC34-1: The Standing Committee requested the Secretary General to follow up on Resolution IX.15, para 27, with requests that the Parties concerned report on their actions in response to those recommendations, and that he report on their responses to SC35.

Agenda item 5: Report of the IOPs’ meeting

31. **The SG** said that the IOPs’ meeting on general cooperation, the key outcomes of which are reported in DOC. SC34-3, was very successful and should be repeated annually 4-6 weeks prior to each SC meeting.
32. **Wetlands International** thanked the SG for this constructive initiative and said that it would be beneficial to the Convention, the IOPs, and the Parties if the IOPs’ role in leading, supporting, and implementing the Convention is made more clear and visible. WI has some suggestions to make, especially on communications and fund-raising, which will be picked later in the agenda.
33. **WWF** noted para. 11 on IOPs interested in joining the CEPA Oversight Panel and asked not to be considered for that, given its active participation in other functions of the Convention.
34. **Benin** asked the IOPs to support African governments more closely in their conservation and wise use efforts. **The SG** expressed confidence that the IOPs have taken note of that and will continue to find more effective ways of assisting the Parties.
35. **Ecuador** urged that 2 February should remain the date of World Wetlands Day, as it is now established at all levels of society.
36. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** drew attention to two short documents by IWMI and other IOPs that illustrate the kind of roles that the IOPs are playing, these concerning the Comprehensive Assessment and mapping.
37. **Uganda** inquired about previous SC discussions of seeking UN recognition of WWD.
38. **The SG** noted that 2 February is experienced differently at different latitudes, but felt that the Ramsar anniversary has such resonance now that moving the date would not be in the best interest. The date seems difficult in some places but a look at the list of activities reported shows many possibilities nevertheless. There has been discussion of merging WWD with World Water Day but he felt that that would not be beneficial, either. He doubted, too, whether UN recognition would be a good idea, as WWD is now owned by local communities, but suggested that we should hook into the UN International Decade for Water.
39. **El Salvador** referred to para. 5 on coordinating the IOPs’ calendars of activities with the Secretariat’s and urged that they synchronize with the Parties as well.

40. **Switzerland** endorsed the suggestion that the IOPs join the CEPA Oversight Panel and collaborate in production of a new Ramsar video. **The SG** noted that the existing video is almost out of stock.
41. **Thailand** urged that the local and regional IOP offices should be coordinating as well, as they are sometimes overlapping or opposed, and that the IOPs should inform the Ramsar Administrative Authorities (AAs) when they are working with local NGOs.
42. **Malawi** pointed out the need for the IOPs to assist African countries, as the Convention is often not well understood there. There should be short courses to train trainers, sponsored between the Secretariat and the IOPs, with other conventions as well.
43. **IWMI** welcomed the good suggestions for the IOPs and committed to making contact with the Ramsar AAs quite soon.
44. **BirdLife** noted that IOP activities at regional and local levels are often more of their work than at the global, and urged that the Secretariat and the SC members help in promoting the IOP relationship at all levels. He drew attention to the suggestion of a small brochure and solicited thoughts on how to assist in that.
45. **Ecuador** noted a need to strengthen the relations between the IOP offices and the NFPs, especially when the Party is an SC member.
46. **Slovenia** observed that the IOPs are helpful at all levels and should be included in the Parties' National Ramsar/Wetland Committees.
47. **Austria** noted that involving IOP experts in Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs) can be a tricky business. It must be clear that the RAM is conducted by the Secretariat and not by an international NGO. Similarly, reporting on and monitoring Ramsar sites must be done by the Parties, not by the NGOs. **The SG** clarified that RAMs never include IOP or any other experts without the full agreement and invitation of the Parties concerned, and that the IOPs monitor Ramsar sites as part of their normal work; this information is never a substitute for data supplied by the Parties.
48. **Turkey** asked, regarding para. 8, whether the Ramsar Convention is intending to become the water convention. **The SG** explained that in his view Ramsar is not becoming the water convention but that it is gradually adding a broadened scope to its work, without violating the Convention text. Wetlands are not isolated spots on a two-dimensional map but need to be seen in an evolving three-dimensional context, which means ensuring linkages to integrated approaches for water and wetland management.
49. **Thailand** suggested that the IOPs should assist the Parties' Ramsar and CBD NFPs to cooperate more. **El Salvador** suggested that the IOPs should coordinate their calendars with the Parties as well as with the Secretariat. **The SG** explained that the calendar item is intended to coordinate participation in major meetings; El Salvador's point is different but relevant.
50. **Wetlands International** expressed appreciation for the level of interest in the IOPs' contributions. In order not to lose momentum, she suggested that the IOPs report back to the SC on a regular basis, to see how well integration and collaboration with the Secretariat and Parties is working and how specific actions are being implemented.
51. **IUCN** noted that a lot of IOP support at national level is going on now and it would be unwise to harm the diversity of those efforts by trying to fit them into too rigid a framework. The Parties should ask themselves which of the IOPs in-country could best assist them.

Decision SC34-2: The Standing Committee noted the report of the February 2006 IOPs/Secretariat meeting and encouraged the Secretariat and IOPs to institutionalize similar meetings on an annual basis. The SC urged the IOPs to establish direct contacts with the Parties' National Focal Points and to collaborate with one another when more than one is located in a Party, and it encouraged the Parties to include local officers of the IOPs in their National Ramsar/Wetlands Committees. The SC also urged SC members to explain the role of the IOPs in Ramsar to other officials in their governments. The SC urged the IOPs to assist the Parties, where appropriate, in implementing the Ramsar/CBD Joint Work Plan, and it invited the IOPs to report regularly to the SC on their relevant activities.

Agenda item 6: Establishment of working groups

52. **The SG** provided background on the SC Subgroup roles and membership requirements, including the Management Working Group, the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45, the Subgroup on COP10, and the proposed Subgroup on the Strategic Plan 2009-2014. He proposed folding the remaining Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 tasks into a new group for the Strategic Plan and National Report Format for COP10.

Decision SC34-3: The Standing Committee accepted the nominations for the Management Working Group of Malawi, China, Bahamas, Samoa (to be confirmed), Switzerland, and the Russian Federation, Japan, and WWF and BirdLife as primary contacts for the IOPs. They will join the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the most recent and present Standing Committees, the Chairs of the most recent and present Subgroup on Finance and STRP, and the Secretary General *ex officio*, as stipulated in Resolution IX.24. The Secretary General was requested to solicit further members from any interested Parties. The Working Group's *modus operandi* will be established at its first meeting.

53. Concerning the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45, its Chair, **the USA**, reported that most of its tasks and recommendations will be passed on to the new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan. The chief pending item concerns the effectiveness of past Convention guidance, which the STRP will take on and the Parties will continue to investigate on their own. He concurred that the Subgroup should be dissolved but conditionally, pending agreement from absent Subgroup members. **The SG** noted that all members are present except Papua New Guinea and Morocco.
54. **Japan** supported the continued work on Resolution VIII.45, and **the SG** suggested that progress on that Resolution be included in the SC35 agenda. **Slovenia** inquired about discrepancies with the proposal in DOC. SC34-5 and **the SG** explained that after consultations with the VIII.45 Chair, the present proposal seems preferable in the interest of minimizing the number of working groups. Little is left for the VIII.45 group to do in any case.
55. **The UK** said that, given the importance of the National Report format and Strategic Plan, it supported the establishment of a new subgroup to focus on these matters.
56. **The USA** reiterated the importance of the unfinished task of assessing the effectiveness of the Convention's guidance, and recounted the Subgroup's efforts to survey practitioners in the Parties. He advocated further efforts to find out how and how well the guidance is being used, and further reports on the results.

Decision SC34-4: The Standing Committee determined to end the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 so that its mandated tasks may be taken up by the Secretariat, the STRP, and a new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan, requested regular reports on the fulfilment of Resolution VIII.45, and instructed the Secretariat to prepare a digest of the unfulfilled tasks of the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 and the manner in which they are being taken up.

57. **The SG** urged that a Subgroup on the Strategic Plan (SP) be created to further work for COP10 for a Strategic Plan 2009-2014 and towards a new National Reports format for adoption by SC35. He urged that the Subgroup should be “elastic” in its working methods.
58. **Austria** and **Japan** called for clear TOR for the new group, with clear responsibilities between the group and the Secretariat. **The SG** suggested that the key function would be to develop the new SP, but to oversee the development of the new NR form as well, which is a separate but closely linked task. He agreed that the Secretariat will take the primary role in proposing drafts for comment, with a final SP draft foreseen by SC36 and a proposed NR form by SC35. He noted that the proposed NR form should be trialed by some Parties before adoption.
59. **Thailand** recalled that the CBD’s COP has called upon Ramsar to develop harmonized reporting for inland waters. **The SG** promised to make every effort to do so but noted that it is not as easy a task as might be thought. **The DSG** noted that timing will be a challenge and our first priority should be to develop a reporting instrument for Ramsar, after which we will respond to the CBD’s request as well as can be.

Decision SC34-5: The Standing Committee created a new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan to advance the drafting of a Convention Strategic Plan for 2009-2014 and supervise the development of a new National Report format for COP10 reporting. The membership will consist of the Vice Chair of the SC (Bahamas) as Chair; Benin, Islamic Republic of Iran, Georgia, Ecuador and the USA for the regions, and the representative from Oceania to be confirmed; BirdLife International for the IOPs; and Japan and the UK as observers.

60. The Subgroup on COP10, following tradition, will be chaired by the host country, the Republic of Korea, and will oversee all logistical and policy matters concerning the COP.

Decision SC34-6: The Standing Committee constituted a new Subgroup on COP10, with the Republic of Korea as chair, and including Kenya, Thailand, Austria, El Salvador, and the USA, and the Oceania member to be confirmed, Uganda (COP9 host country), with Switzerland as an observer and Wetlands International acting as the primary contact for the IOPs.

61. **The Republic of Korea** announced that the dates for COP10 are proposed to be 28 October to 4 November 2008. **The SG** reviewed the dates of other international events during the same time period.

Decision SC34-7: The Standing Committee accepted the proposal by the Republic of Korea that the dates of Ramsar COP10 will be 28 October to 4 November 2008.

Agenda item 7: Convention and Secretariat Work Plans

62. **The SG** explained that the proposed Convention Work Plan is an amalgam of Resolution IX.2 on STRP priority tasks and IX.8 on streamlining the Strategic Plan. He urged that the proposed plan should be used as a trial for this period, to help inform the next Strategic Plan. He said that it need not be a perfect plan, and he noted that the Secretariat’s Work Plan for 2006 is abbreviated because simplicity is better than a complicated, time-consuming instrument, and it can be used as a tick-off assessment later. Annex 3, he said, is an aide-memoire for the Secretariat and SC on all tasks called for.
63. **WWF** listed its own priorities from amongst the Work Plan’s tasks and indicated that WWF feels that the proposed Work Plan is poor, offers no vision, is badly structured, and has vague performance measurements. She urged that IUCN protected area categories and a Wetlands

International review of underrepresented wetland types be included. **The SG** responded that the Plan should be seen as a trial, and that we need to work with it in order to learn how to make it better.

64. **Turkey** drew attention to the guidelines regarding the environmental water requirements which will be prepared by the STRP (Strategy 1.4) and said that there are many wetlands with different characteristics throughout the world. Turkey added that developing a guideline or framework for these different types of wetlands is a complex task, and economic and social conditions should be taken into account. Turkey also indicated the importance of effective coordination among members and non-members of STRP during the preparation of guidelines. **The SG** noted that all countries are facing water allocation decisions, and that we need ideas on how to allocate for ecosystems vis-à-vis other needs – we need to articulate ideas and targets even if they may not be applicable in all cases.
65. **The DSG** noted that the revised RIS takes account of IUCN’s protected area categories in the form and the Explanatory Notes, and that the STRP is charged with examining the term “underrepresented types”.
66. **The UK** and **Slovenia** urged that more specifics should be added to Annex 2 on the Secretariat’s Work Plan, in order to measure progress at the end of the year.
67. **Austria** referred to Strategy 4.4 on a “complete redesign of the Ramsar Web site” and inquired about where this idea has come from, since it was not in the Strategic Plan. He indicated he felt that the Web site is very attractive and appreciated by the Parties. He noted that rethinking the Small Grants Fund funding mechanism needs to be added to the Work Plan. **The SG** responded that Strategy 4.4 relates to what might happen with the CEPA Oversight Panel, as it is always good to have a look at novel CEPA methods.
68. **Thailand** urged that the priority tasks of the SC Subgroups should be added to the Work Plan for a more comprehensive view. **The SG** offered to add these when they have been finalized. **Japan** suggested several detailed changes to Annex 2 and made a clarification on the briefing of SC members, to which **the SG** reiterated his promise to send regular briefings and noted that the Secretariat’s briefings for the missions in Geneva have been very well received and will continue.
69. **Austria** asked for budget and staff cost estimates for Annex 2 in addition to Annex 1 and suggested that the work load looks like too much. **The SG** offered to add those estimated staff times and recirculate the plan. These are only estimates, and we will learn more as we progress the plan.
70. **Slovenia** urged that the decision on the proposed Work Plan should include any new items brought later in this meeting.
71. **El Salvador** commented on the importance of the Work Plans and the need for the SC to be fully informed. The Convention Work Plan should have specific actions so that each Party can interpret them in developing its own planning.

Decision SC34-8: The Standing Committee approved the Convention Work Plan 2006-2008 to be trialed and reflected in the next Strategic Plan, instructed the Secretariat to revise the Convention Work Plan 2006-2008 to include elements agreed at this meeting of the SC and the Secretariat Work Plan 2006 with staff/cost estimates and further specifics, both documents to be circulated to the SC for comment with a three-week period for reply. The SC requested a report on progress on the Annex 3 tasks for the next Standing Committee meeting.

Agenda item 8.1: Action plan on water-related processes

72. **The SG** reviewed Resolution IX.3's mandate on reporting back to the Commission on Sustainable Development on water issues, and he explained the Danone proposal for a high-level Evian Encounter concerning Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). He drew attention to the UN Secretary General's report to the CSD as a way to input Ramsar concerns into that process in 2008. The action plan proposed in DOC. SC34-6 charts a timeline of steps forward.
73. **Turkey** noted that it attaches great importance to implementation of the Ramsar Convention and fulfills its obligations concerning the wise use principle at its Ramsar sites. Turkey says that economic, social, and environmental concerns are interlinked and that there is a great difference of needs, challenges, and priorities worldwide. There is no single answer. Turkey reiterates its reservation that Resolutions IX.1, IX.3, and IX.6 have no legal or other binding effect for Turkey. [The verbatim text of Turkey's intervention is available as an annex to this report.] **Gabon** too noted that priorities are different in different regions and felt that the approach is too global.
74. **IWMI** noted the outcomes of 4WWF in this regard and offered to contribute to the information paper. In preparing an action plan on strategies for ensuring that IWRM is part of the national Ramsar approach, the ongoing work of the Global Water Partnership (GWP) in promoting IWRM globally and in different world regions, as well as information on regional and country-specific strategies and targets for IWRM implementation, and their present status, will be taken into consideration in the preparation of the action paper.
75. **Wetlands International** argued the need for the proposed analyses to reach to the regional and national level, in order to be more relevant to the national planning process, and urged the Secretariat to identify Parties willing to work with the IOPs to develop demonstration cases of different but complementary approaches, in time for COP10. WI offered to assist in convening a working group for that task.
76. **Switzerland** drew attention to the UNEP water strategy and urged the Secretariat and delegates to contact their colleagues in the water sector in order to combine comments. The UNEP group is open to suggestions. Switzerland offered to help on issues of the valuation of ecosystem services and drew attention to the UN ECE "Nature for Water" publications available here. Switzerland agreed with the need for data as well and urged Parties to contribute actual cases, as WI has suggested.
77. **Kenya** welcomed the Action Plan and felt that the involvement of IWRM is critical as water use conflicts are growing, especially in Africa where cases of conflict among local communities, particularly during periods of drought, have increased in recent years. Kenya urged the Convention's IWRM initiative to initiate greater cooperation with regional bodies such as the Nile Basin Initiative in eastern Africa.
78. **IUCN** welcomed the action plan for incorporating wetland values into IWRM within countries and offered to assist Parties where possible.
79. **The SG** expressed his appreciation for these useful ideas and looked forward to working with WI and Switzerland in finding good examples.

Decision SC34-9: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to revise the proposed Action Plan on IWRM, incorporating the Committee's suggestions, and incorporate the Action Plan into the Convention Work Plan and make it available intersessionally.

Agenda item 8.2: Development of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014

80. **The SG** noted that this matter has been discussed and covered in Decision SC34-5 above.

Agenda item 8.3: National Reports format

81. **The DSG** observed that COP9 provided a clear mandate for a simpler and shorter NR format, but with sufficient opportunity for the Parties to provide enough information to identify progress, gaps, needs, etc. He recalled the CBD's request that Ramsar take the lead on developing harmonized reporting for inland waters. The DSG reported that the Secretariat has developed a first-cut analysis combining the Resolution IX.8 strategies with the COP9 short reporting form, and it appears that a form with far fewer indicators is possible.
82. **Ecuador** urged that the Subgroup should devise a form in a simplified format without diminishing the information submitted. The CBD should adapt to our format, because if we try to adapt to theirs, it will become more complicated rather than simpler. **El Salvador** noted that we should not compromise our evaluation by having too general an approach, with objectives that are CBD's and not ours. **Malawi** stressed that detailed information is important but that it should be presented in clear, simple language that is accessible to minorities, youths, and local people. Workshops should be organized to help officials in Africa better prepare their reports for the public.
83. **The DSG** welcomed those suggestions and outlined two stages: to produce an easier-to-use format in clear language and attractive presentation, with clearly formulated questions, and then to analyze potential compatibility with CBD's needs. A draft will be ready by SC35 following input from the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan.

Agenda item 8.4: Review of COP decisions

84. **The SG** outlined the Resolution IX.17 mandate to progress a review of all COP decisions since 1980 with a view to identifying conflicts, redundancies, and superseded tasks, and proposing to COP a consolidation of the body of Ramsar resolutions. He reported that the IUCN ELC quoted an estimate of €50,000 for the work, which is fair but out of our range, and he reported that RSPB has generously agreed to release David Pritchard to spend time on this issue. He proposed that Mr Pritchard be invited to undertake an initial review of the COP's decisions, with Secretariat assistance from Dwight Peck, both of whom have a thorough acquaintance with Ramsar history, for transmittal to the STRP for evaluation and drafting of a definitive recommendation to COP. This document could then be submitted to IUCN ELC for peer-review on legal issues for a much lower cost.
85. **El Salvador** noted that this is a difficult task, dealing with official decisions and including areas of sensitivity. There is a need to determine clearly what was meant by the original Resolutions, what has been done and what has not. The TOR for this work should be analyzed carefully, and there should be a road map for what we want to accomplish, lest we go astray. **The UK** felt that the proposal seems workable but urged that there should be TOR and clear objectives in order to keep a focus for the work. **Japan** agreed that a TOR based on Resolution IX.17 should be provided and requested more information on budget implications, since the IUCN ELC has not yet proposed a cost for the peer-review.
86. **WWF** sought reassurance that the effect of the earlier Resolutions would not be downgraded. **The SG** noted that he could not assure that, since the COP can decide whatever it wants to, but said that no one has ever suggested such a purpose. The purpose of the exercise is to consolidate and simplify the existing Resolutions, not to change them, and both the SC and the COP will have to approve any proposed changes. He agreed that there would be a progress report to SC35 and further consultations with IUCN ELC on costs of the proposed peer review.

87. **Austria** and **Armenia** contributed thoughts to the timeline of the work, and **the SG** proposed that David Pritchard, with the Secretariat's assistance, would first take the bureaucratic approach; the STRP would then take the evaluative approach, without having to begin from scratch; the ELC (if agreeable) would then vet any proposals from the legal point of view, and then SC36 and the COP would take the appropriate decisions.

Decision SC34-10: The Standing Committee welcomed the offer of RSPB to provide time for David Pritchard to undertake, with Secretariat help, an analysis of all Ramsar COP decisions with a view to identifying conflicting advice or policy, redundancies, and superseded mandates, reporting these to the STRP for evaluation, perhaps to IUCN's Environmental Law Centre for legal review, and to the SC for proposal to COP10. This decision is conditional upon the SC's out-of-session agreement on Terms of Reference and a time line for the completion of this task.

Second day, 12 April 2006

Agenda item 8.5: Legal status of the Secretariat

88. **The SG** provided background to the COP's concerns in Resolution IX.10 about the ambiguous legal status of the Secretariat, in which, though the Convention is an intergovernmental treaty, the legal personality of the Secretariat is provided by IUCN and we are thus often treated as an NGO. He described steps that the Secretariat has taken in approaching both UNESCO and the UN ECOSOC in parallel moves, both of which are awaiting a response.
89. **Ecuador** stressed the importance of the matter and suggested that an ad hoc working group be established to pursue it further. It could be composed of Geneva or Bern representatives of governments with regional balance and could thus meet in Gland. **Gabon** and **Argentina** supported the idea of creating a working group.
90. **Japan** pointed out the mandate from COP9, which reads that the Secretariat should submit a report to COP10. Japan believes that it is necessary for the Secretariat to develop a comprehensive report that includes information and comments from relevant organizations. Japan also requested the Secretariat to show the problems and issues that have occurred with the current legal status.
91. **The USA** observed that the Secretariat and Chairs seem to be making progress in the matter and felt that it would be premature to establish another working group at this point. **Switzerland**, the **UK**, **China**, and **Slovenia** agreed that it would be premature. **The UK** noted that the status quo could be one of the options eventually offered to COP10.
92. **The SG** noted that it is really a matter for lawyers to consider and sensed not much enthusiasm for a new working group. He suggested that an information session on the subject could be organized in conjunction with one of the Secretariat's briefing sessions for the missions in Geneva, and he sought Ecuador's assistance in arranging that. He noted that there is not much to be discussed until we have more information, and suggested that he report to SC35 on the matter, where the idea of a working group can be revisited.
93. **Ecuador** reiterated the urgency of the matter and felt that other channels should also be pursued; with or without a working group, everyone should work with the Secretary General to resolve the issue as soon as possible. He felt that there are enough people with legal experience who could help. **Gabon** again called for a working group, which would have no financial implications, and offered the assistance of his mission. **Benin** asked whether there would be any risk in having separate legal status for the Secretariat.

94. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** offered its assistance and suggested that all SC members that also participate in ECOSOC should support the Secretariat. **WWF** reported that amongst UN reform efforts there is a high-level task force on system-wide coherence, and that one of the options being considered is clustering. **The SG** noted that clustering has been discussed before and that the issue is complex because of the great diversity amongst the MEAs. He described reasons for which Ramsar is different in context, which has led to many strengths, including its strong technical base, its well-functioning subsidiary body, and its mechanism for involving the IOPs. This suggests a need for caution. He felt that risks are minimal and less than in not having legal status. He noted that UN recognition would not mean migrating towards the UN system, and that the Resolution explicitly stipulated not changing the present relationship with the host country or host organization.
95. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** noted that the high-level task force recommendations will go to ECOSOC in any case, and thence to the General Assembly, and he suggested dealing directly with ECOSOC. **The SG** agreed on the importance of the ECOSOC route and seconded the suggestion that the Ramsar Parties active in ECOSOC should be urged to assist in applying pressure.

Decision SC34-11: The Standing Committee encouraged a consultative process with the missions of Ecuador, Gabon, and the Islamic Republic of Iran to assist the Secretariat in moving forward in its efforts to resolve the legal status of the Secretariat and requested a report to SC35, at which time the desirability of creating a working group will be revisited. The SC instructed the Secretary General to write to the Director General of UNESCO to request a more expeditious reply to the Convention's inquiry.

96. **The DSG** drew attention to the distribution of a draft report of the first day of the meeting and explained that, in traditional Ramsar practice, participants should pass editorial amendments directly to the rapporteur and raise only substantial issues under Agenda item 14 on adoption of the meeting report.

Agenda item 8.6: Establishment of an Oversight Panel for CEPA activities

97. **The SG** provided background on Resolution IX.18's instructions to SC34 for the creation of a CEPA Oversight Panel – he outlined the objectives of the Panel as given in the Resolution and spelt out in DOC. SC34-11, and he identified the Panel membership also stipulated there, noting that further experts can be invited to participate when needed. He acknowledged that for budgetary reasons the Panel would have to work in English, but said that important outcomes would be posted on the Web site and CEPA e-mail lists in the three languages.
98. **Wetlands International** welcomed the establishment of the Panel as it highlighted the importance of CEPA, especially at local level and especially World Wetlands Day. He nominated WI's Tunde Ojei to represent the IOPs. He urged that there should be two meetings of the Panel, one at its inception (to be linked to the upcoming STRP meeting) and the second a review meeting late in the triennium which would serve as a useful milestone.
99. **Slovenia** supported WI's suggestion and nominated Gerhard Sigmund (Austria) for the Government CEPA Focal Point place. **The Netherlands** supported the remarks of Slovenia and Wetlands International. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** suggested that there should be a Panel member from one of the regional Ramsar centres to inform the Panel of the problems they are facing. El Salvador supported Iran's proposal and recommended that the center in Panama should be invited. **Benin** suggested that the government CEPA NFP should be from Africa to ensure regional balance.
100. **The SG** welcomed the comments and invited the African Parties to make a nomination for the Panel. **Kenya** indicated that the region will make a nomination after consultation.

101. **The SG** noted that if the SC opts to hold two Panel meetings, he will consult to see if it is possible to fund them from the core budget. He took note of the suggestion that it would be helpful to have one of the regional centers represented, though he was not sure how one would choose between them. **The USA** suggested that it would be premature to schedule a second meeting at this time and urged that the first Panel meeting, which should be held prior to SC35, should consider the use of funds for a second meeting.
102. **Switzerland** recalled the idea of the development of a new video as part of the CEPA programme.

Decision SC34-12: The Standing Committee approved the establishment of a CEPA Oversight Panel in accordance with the Terms of Reference, membership, and modus operandi outlined in DOC. SC34-11, welcomed the additional nominations for its membership, and called for a first meeting to be held in 2006.

Agenda item 9.1: Report of the STRP Oversight Committee

103. **The DSG** indicated that DOC. SC34-12 describes the membership of the STRP Oversight Committee, as defined in Resolution IX.11, and reports on its work so far. He described the new composition of the STRP, with 6 regional members, 7 thematic experts, and the representatives of the IOPs, and named the individuals who have been chosen by the Oversight Committee. He noted that no one was chosen for the area of wetlands and human health. The 13th STRP meeting has been set for the end of May 2006, and its main task will be constructing a detailed work programme based on the priorities established by COP9 – the proposed work plan will be circulated to the SC for its approval.
104. **The DSG** outlined the present state of support services for the STRP and STRP National Focal Points, indicating that the list of NFPs has been updated and a briefing message has been sent to them, inviting them to specify their areas of expertise. There is no funding to bring the NFPs to STRP meetings but they will be encouraged to participate if they can. He said that donors are being solicited to support parts of the Panel's work, and cost estimates will be better known after the STRP's scoping at its first meeting.
105. **Heather Mackay, new Chair of the STRP**, reported that the new modus operandi is already working better, allowing earlier scoping of the tasks, especially because the technical work plan has already been well thought out at the COP. She stressed the importance of incorporating input from the NFPs about their needs in their regions, drawing upon their networks, and testing our work against their experience.
106. **Ecuador** highlighted the need for awareness of regional concerns and suggested that SC members could contribute such information. He identified five topics amongst the mandated immediate priorities as the most important in Ecuador's view. **Japan** welcomed the progress in networking the STRP National Focal Points.
107. **Kenya** welcomed the Committee's report but proposed that the work programme should focus more attention on African issues, such as food production, poverty reduction, and the financial implications of the avian flu epidemic. Noting that there are no Africans amongst the thematic experts, he said that the region will consult and make a nomination, perhaps concerning wetlands and human health.
108. **Austria** applauded the new structure of the STRP and noted the continuing importance of interaction with the STRP NFPs, and he urged that the regional STRP members should begin consultations with the NFPs in their regions. **Slovenia** encouraged SC members to check back with their Parties' NFPs, noting the lack of involvement in the past, and **IWMI** requested an updated

list of STRP NFPs and their expertise in time for STRP13. IWMI welcomed Africa's offer to nominate an expert in the field of wetlands and human health in its broadest sense.

109. **Wetlands International** expressed satisfaction at having been able to create the STRP Support Service and is pleased to be working with the Secretariat in taking it over. He was also glad to see a heightened role for CEPA and the central role accorded to the Chair of the WI CEPA Specialist Group. He expressed concern that expectations of the Specialist Group might be disappointed unless some support can be found to facilitate the participation of members of the Group.
110. **The UK** requested more information about the Secretariat's support for the STRP, and **the DSG** cited the message already sent to the NFPs, briefing them on the development of the work programme and inquiring about their expertise in the thematic areas of work. He noted that not all Parties have appointed STRP NFPs and asked the SC to encourage the Parties in their regions to do so – the Secretariat later provided a list of Parties that have not yet appointed their NFPs. He indicated that the Secretariat support for the STRP is threefold: 1) himself, as part of his responsibility for scientific and technical advice, 2) the Web-based Support Service, begun by WI and now being maintained and further developed by the Secretariat, and 3) the Secretariat's development of the NFP network. He said that the new STRP has the best range of expertise of any Panels so far.
111. **Heather Mackay** noted that there is a general concern with the needs of the Africa region. Much of the Panel's work is meant to be generic, and the more interaction we have with the regions the better, and she asked the SC to encourage regional feedback on the Panel's work.
112. **Thailand** noted that the CBD has already developed thematic areas of work and urged the STRP to interact with that convention. **The DSG** outlined the already very close cooperation between the STRP and the CBD SBSTTA and Secretariat, which are invited observers to STRP meetings. He drew attention to our first joint publication, a volume (comprising Ramsar's rapid assessment guidelines) in the technical reports series of both conventions. He noted that CBD COP8 also asked SBSTTA to follow the STRP's work as well.

Agenda 10.1: Themes for World Wetlands Day

113. **The SG** reported that funding for Ramsar WWD materials comes from the Danone Group, not from the core budget, and he proposed the WWD themes of "Wetlands and Fisheries" for 2007 and "River Basin Management" for 2008. He noted that these are themes or subject areas and not the catchier titles or slogans that will be developed later.
114. **Thailand** supported both themes and urged the Secretariat to interact with regional bodies like the Mekong River Commission in promoting WWD. **Ecuador** supported the themes but noted the need to talk about shellfish as well as fish when promoting fisheries.
115. **IWMI** noted that it now shares some administrative arrangements with its sister CGIAR centre, the WorldFish Center, and is currently developing collaborative areas of research with them. She suggested WWD collaboration with the WorldFish Center and offered IWMI's help in making contacts. She suggested "Integrating Wetlands in River Basin Management" for 2008, to keep the focus on wetlands.
116. **Malawi** stressed the importance, in 2008's theme, of drawing attention to river basin cooperation, and urged that there should be much more support for WWD, especially in Africa, in order to help people understand the values of wetlands. **Benin** suggested that, concerning the fisheries theme, the FAO might wish to be involved in WWD as well. **Switzerland** agreed with involving the FAO and thanked IWMI for the improved title. **The SG** drew attention to increasingly close linkages between Ramsar and the FAO.

117. **Armenia** noted the decline of fisheries worldwide and the different approaches to maintaining fish stocks, and he suggested that the 2007 theme might better be “Wetlands, Fish, and Fisheries”. **El Salvador** felt that we should not just be talking about fish but about other features of wetlands as well, and he suggested the theme of “Wetlands, Fisheries, and Wildlife”. A number of participants stressed that the word “wetlands” should be part of the 2008 theme.

Decision SC34-13: The Standing Committee adopted the World Wetlands Day general themes of “Wetlands and Fisheries” and “Wetlands and River Basin Management”, with titles based on these themes to be worked out in due course.

Agenda item 10.2: The Ramsar Advisory Board on Capacity Building

118. **The SG** recounted the history of the Netherlands’ RIZA training courses on wetland management and restoration and reported that, in recent restructuring, the government of the Netherlands, in a letter of May 2005, proposed establishing a Ramsar Advisory Board on Capacity Building with Ramsar participation. DOC. SC34-14 outlines the structure, objectives, and proposed membership of the Board.
119. **The USA** welcomed the proposal as a positive step but pointed out that the title of the Board indicates that it is a body of the Convention itself, and that should be rethought. **Japan** echoed that concern.
120. **Wetlands International** reported that WI is a member of the Board and also represents a group of Netherlands institutions, with the role of identifying regional capacity building needs and bringing together work, fund raising, etc. This group has been formalized as WetCap and the partners have MOUs and joint work plans.
121. **Kenya** drew attention to the need for training activities and initiatives in Africa, such as the Kenya Wildlife Service’s Naivasha Institute. Kenya outlined the possibilities for developing the Naivasha Institute into an autonomous, regional capacity building resource, and **Benin** emphasized the need for a similar training centre for francophone Africa. **The SG** explained that the Secretariat is not in a position to develop such centres directly and that such efforts must come from the Parties. **Gabon** noted that it has a national school for forestry and waterways that could serve as a Naivasha-type institute. **Armenia** illustrated the importance of wetland training activities by recounting the regional training workshops it has been able to organize with support from the SGF and other sources.
122. **The Netherlands** indicated that the Advisory Board could think about retitling the name of the Board.
123. **Turkey**, on behalf of MedWet, noted that the Tour du Valat in southern France has a training of trainers programme focused on northern African countries and that that programme could be applied to other francophone countries. **Wetlands International** reported that its wetlands and poverty programme is focused on West and East Africa and is developing capacity building modules, for which needs assessment is presently going on. **Malawi** said that what Africa is looking for is a kind of leverage for financial support and would ask for the Secretariat’s help in that endeavor; with help, the Naivasha Institute could become a regional centre for both English- and French-speaking countries. **The SG** applauded the Kenya centre’s work but explained that the Secretariat has no additional capacity for fundraising, and he urged the Parties to develop good proposals for regional initiatives for discussion at COP10.

Decision SC34-14: The Standing Committee requested the Chair to respond positively to the proposal from the government of the Netherlands and to ask the Advisory Board to clarify its title and link with the CEPA Oversight Panel.

124. **Gabon** noted that the absence of SC documentation in other languages than English is a hindrance to francophone members. **The SG** sympathized but explained that no funds have been budgeted by the COP for translation of SC documents.
125. **BirdLife International** provided a report on the conclusions of the recent UNEP workshop on “avian flu, wild birds, and the environment”, which largely confirmed the recommendations in Ramsar Resolution IX.23, that there is no justification for killing wild birds and that culling and destruction of habitats is not feasible and may exacerbate the spread of the disease. The seminar was especially concerned that some countries are trying to do so, and that in particular the Russian Federation reported that it has adopted a policy urging local officials to kill wild birds and destroy wetland habitats in the vicinity of domestic poultry.

Decision SC34-15: The Standing Committee stressed that the terms of Resolution IX.23 on highly pathogenic avian influenza should be followed by all Contracting Parties, especially in relation to issues of killing wild birds and the destruction or substantive modification of wetlands, and that the Parties should take a fully integrated approach to managing avian influenza risks.

126. **Achim Steiner, Director General of IUCN**, made a special statement on the occasion of his last Ramsar SC meeting before taking up his new post as Executive Secretary of UNEP. He expressed his gratitude to the SC and other Parties for the excellent collaboration over his five years at IUCN, and said that it has always been a privilege for IUCN to be in its special relationship with the Convention. He recounted IUCN’s deep involvement in wetlands and water issues, which has been evolving over time to provide practical support to strengthen the capacities of countries, NGOs, and the private sector. He noted the need to contextualize wetlands in the broader water issues, as water, the basis of life, can also become the basis of war. The potential of water to cause conflict is of immense importance to the way we interpret conservation.
127. **Achim Steiner** hoped that IUCN’s relationship with the Convention will continue to thrive under his successor and he promised that his interest in the Convention will accompany him to UNEP. He hoped that UNEP will continue to evolve in these difficult times for the environment, caused by a lack of consensus in the international community. He asked for the Parties’ help in providing the support for UNEP needed to fulfill its role, both within and outside of the UN. The UN, he said, is a mirror of global consensus, and he hoped that it would be proved wrong that water is a source of conflict, and that people can live in harmony and solidarity. He promised to support Ramsar in the future.
128. The participants wished Achim Steiner good success in his new undertaking at UNEP.

Agenda item 10.3: Outreach

129. **The SG** presented DOC. SC34-15 which is meant to offer thought-provoking ideas for the SC’s consideration and advice. He provided background on the Secretariat’s work with the Danone Group and the interest he has encountered from other private sector companies in working with the Convention, primarily in communications efforts. He felt that the Convention would be able to increase its outreach work without the need for additional funds. He said that the Secretariat has been delivering high-quality products with nearly no funding, but he said that he believes that we need a better range of communications tools. He said that his private sector contacts have been telling him that our logo is awful and that they urged the development of a better one. He noted that the Parties have said that our present logo is well identified and extensively used in Ramsar site

signage, so he proposed developing a new, clean, more attractive logo for general uses and keeping the present logo for site signage. He suggested that the design of the “Ramsar jewel” might make a good logo.

130. **Gabon** thanked MedWet for its work in North Africa but noted that there is difficulty in communicating with Arabic-speaking countries since there is no Ramsar documentation in that language. He noted that the Secretariat works in hard copy but that, in Africa, where many people are illiterate, radio and television might be better options.
131. **Wetlands International** agreed that the Convention needs to be better understood but urged that the focus should be more upon the key Ramsar messages than upon the ideas suggested in DOC. SC34-15, and that the Convention’s CEPA Programme should form the basis of the communication strategy. Concerning the IOPs, she referred to the IOPs’ meeting’s views on linking Web sites and highlighting the IOPs’ activities and on producing a leaflet or video explaining the IOPs’ role in implementing the Convention, and she urged that these be integrated into the communications plan. **The DSG** replied that he agreed entirely and that the Ramsar communications officer would like to develop a special section on our Web site for background pages on the IOPs. **The SG** suggested that the same should be done for the Parties that have Ramsar-related Web sites.
132. **Austria, Japan, El Salvador, the UK, Slovenia, and Switzerland** indicated their view that the Convention does not need a new logo and should not have a second logo that might confuse people.
133. **Thailand** suggested that the Secretariat should intensify its efforts to reach out to potential donors and discuss parts of the work plan with them.
134. **Japan** said that the outreach strategy might be helpful but noted that the CEPA Programme is still in force. She pointed to the need for guidelines on private sector involvement as there could be involvement with commercial interests.
135. **Ecuador** reported that the Convention and its logo are increasingly recognized at national level. He suggested using the Web pages of the Administrative Authorities, with the help of the CEPA NFPs.
136. **The UK** questioned whether it was realistic to suggest that private/public partnerships on communication could fully recharge the Small Grants Fund, and said that the SGF will need its own mechanism.
137. **Slovenia** noted that many issues suggested in the document should be passed on to the CEPA Oversight Panel for consideration and perhaps for incorporation in the next CEPA Programme. Though Slovenia likes the “Ramsar game” and will translate it into Slovenian, she felt that it should be viewed as part of a more strategic approach.
138. **Switzerland** agreed that these issues should be considered by the Oversight Panel. She said that different communication materials would have to be drafted depending upon the audiences, i.e., public or private sector. She said to be taken seriously by the private sector one must present an appropriate document, and she suggested looking at publications on water published by the private sector, such as the ones of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Switzerland said that it is already time to begin planning for the 5th World Water Forum and that she was disappointed by the Secretariat’s role at the 4th WWF, and she offered Switzerland’s help in planning for the next one.

139. **The SG** agreed that there are many points for the Oversight Panel to review. He acknowledged the comments about the logo, but disagreed on the grounds that the logo works very well for people already inside the Convention but means nothing to people on the outside. He said that Parties should remember the purpose of a logo, which is to communicate to the outside world, not just internally. He suggested that the logo issue be kept under review, and be dealt with by the Oversight Panel.
140. **The SG** suggested that it is wrong that the Secretariat did not try to participate in the 4th WWF, since we were in frequent communication with the organizers, but timely replies seemed difficult to deliver.

Agenda item 10.4: Progress reports on regional initiatives

141. **The SG** explained that DOC. SC34-16 is a progress report on the Ramsar Centre (CREHO) in Panama, which is showing extremely good results. **Ecuador** noted that there is no reference to the member of the Ramsar Secretariat among the Board of Directors and asked that that be corrected.
142. **The SC** took note of the CREHO report and encouraged the Centre to continue its progress.

Agenda item 12: Financial matters

143. **The USA, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, introduced the Subgroup's recommendations to the SC following its meeting of 10 April and addressed each of the agenda sub-items in turn.

Agenda item 12.1: Review of core and projects income and expenditure

Decision SC34-16: Concerning the 2005 surplus reported in DOC. SC34-17, comprising CHF 135,000 exchange rate gain and CHF 21,000 2005 budget surplus, and recognising that the COP9 approved budget for 2006 includes a CHF 36,000 charge on the reserve fund, the Standing Committee 1) authorized a transfer of funds from the 2005 surplus to cover the CHF 36,000 deficit in the 2006 core budget, and 2) approved that the remainder of the 2005 surplus should remain in the unrestricted Reserve Fund, so as to form a contribution towards the 12% of budget in reserve funding anticipated by COP7.

Concerning an intervention by the IUCN Director General on the implications of the cap of 13% of core funding placed by COP9 on the delivery of IUCN hosting and financial support contracts from the Secretariat, the Standing Committee noted the issues raised concerning separating the costs of financial services delivered in relation to core budget and project budget issues, and requested the Secretary General and the IUCN Director General to resolve and report intersessionally to the Standing Committee on these matters.

Agenda item 12.2: Ramsar Secretariat budget for 2006

144. **The SG** reminded the Parties that all contributions to the core budget should be paid on 1 January. **Japan** noted that different budget papers tabled are broken down in different ways, and **the SG** explained that IUCN is providing better and more detailed reporting than we have had before, which for a while may be slightly confusing as we phase in the new approach.

Decision SC34-17: Concerning core budget income and expenditure to date for 2006, the Standing Committee agreed that it saw no problems with the income and expenditure report and noted the budget report provided by the Secretariat.

Agenda item 12.3: Operational Guidelines of the Small Grants Fund

145. **The DSG** explained that the Secretariat drafted the revised Operational Guidelines and has been using them provisionally pending SC approval, and that the Subgroup is recommending an amended paragraph.
146. **Armenia** inquired whether the list of OECD DAC priorities will require an amendment to the SGF proposal scoring system. **The DSG** noted that the new DAC list will have to be reflected in Section C of the scoring chart and recommended that the categories be scored as 10, 7, 3, and 0 points.

Decision SC34-18: The Standing Committee approved the draft SGF Operational Guidelines 2006-2008, subject to the inclusion of an amended text to paragraph 3 of the Operational Guidelines to read as follows:

“3. In line with the criteria established for SGF eligibility by COP6 Resolution VI.6, all countries and overseas territories on the List of Aid Recipients established by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), effective from 2006 for reporting on 2005, 2006 and 2007 (as available in Section G of these guidelines) shall be eligible for receiving assistance from the SGF. In practical terms this means that all developing countries and those overseas territories included in the OECD DAC List provided in Section G of these guidelines have access to the fund.”

And to amend Stage II Section C of the assessment form to reflect the structure of the new OECD DAC list.

The SC also agreed that:

- a) the most up-to-date OECD DAC List of Aid Recipients should continue to be used *mutatis mutandis* as applying to Ramsar Contracting Parties and their overseas territories, and other countries that are eligible for accession, for eligibility for the Small Grants Fund as established by Resolution VI.6;
- b) the Secretariat, when allocating assistance for participation at Ramsar meetings, should use the OECD DAC list in the following order of priorities, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties:
 - i) Least Developed Country (LDC) Contracting Parties;
 - ii) Other Low Income Contracting Parties;
 - iii) Contracting Parties which are Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories; and
 - iv) Contracting Parties which are Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories.
- c) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from LDCs; and
- d) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from other eligible countries in order of priority as in b) above.

Agenda item 12.4: Strategy for improving the status and resourcing of the SGF

147. **The SG** reported that it is a difficult financial climate for attracting any fresh funds but that he envisages innovative methods that can be pursued. He mentioned the possibility of linking with the UNDPs small grants fund and could foresee a wide range of other possibilities, none of which are

quite ready for discussion. **The UK** encouraged the Secretariat to continue searching for additional sources of funding.

148. **Switzerland** suggested that a list of evaluated SGF proposals should be posted to the Ramsar Web site as a kind of portfolio, perhaps in September of each year, which potential donors could consult and choose among for their support.
149. **The SG** noted that our project evaluation procedure is too sophisticated and time-consuming for the amount of money involved and takes too much time, and that we need to examine all aspects of the issue. He suggested that SC35 should continue to examine the issue.
150. **Armenia** observed that low-income countries expect to benefit from participation in the Convention and the SGF has always been one of the most effective means. Armenia has several times benefited from the SGF to undertake inventory, develop management plans, and organize management training courses and scientific seminars. As far as he could see, we are presently as far from a solution to the problem of underfunding as we were six years ago.
151. **Austria** called attention to a number of other funding instruments within Europe that might be available to Ramsar Parties.
152. **The USA** drew attention to the Web site of the US Ramsar National Committee site and said that a list of projects on the Web might make potential donors aware.

Decision SC34-19: Considering the need to further explore and find innovative mechanisms for better resourcing the SGF (DOC. SC34-19), the Standing Committee decided to: 1) express thanks to those countries which have provided, and continue to provide, support to the Ramsar SGF through their voluntary contributions; 2) urge the Secretary General to continue as a matter of priority to find innovative ways and means of securing continuing and additional funding for the Ramsar SGF, including working with key partners, especially the Convention's International Organisation Partners (IOPs), to consider establishment of collaborative SGF initiatives; and 3) request the Secretary General to undertake intersessional discussions on this matter, and report on progress to the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 12.5: Parties with arrears in payments of contributions

153. **The Chair of the Subgroup** reported that the ideas concerning punitive measures were discarded and only methods of encouragement were considered. Several amendments to the wording were adopted.

Decision SC34-20: Having considered the options for encouragement and/or potentially punitive measures provided in DOC SC34-20, the Standing Committee decided to:

- i) request the Secretariat to produce timely and easily readable statements of contributions, including all unpaid portions, for Contracting Parties in arrears;
- ii) request Contracting Parties experiencing difficulties in meeting their financial contributions to propose a plan to provide for the payment of contributions in arrears within a limited period, and to deadlines agreed with the Secretariat;
- iii) instruct that in assisting Contracting Parties to develop such a plan, the Chair of the Standing Committee, the Standing Committee regional representatives, and the Secretary General should make contacts, through diplomatic channels, with those Parties having arrears to plan settlement of their outstanding contributions;

- iv) instruct the Secretary General to undertake discussion on resolving these matters with the diplomatic representation in Switzerland of those Contracting Parties in arrears;
- v) instruct the Secretariat to continue exploring practices applied by other conventions; and
- vi) treat points i-iv above as part of a formal review process, to be communicated annually to the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 12.6: Financial arrangements for MedWet and other regional initiatives

154. **Turkey** asked for clarification of the financial arrangements for MedWet in the core budget. **The DSG** explained the process by which the COP built a three-year retiring window of support for MedWet into Resolution IX.7, which is reflected in the core budget as part of the budget line for regional initiatives. **The MedWet Coordinator** noted that it is important to reduce the MedWet allocation to a minimum over time but always to retain a basic “umbilical cord” to the Convention.
155. In reply to **the UK's** query, **the USA** explained the Resolution's arrangements with allocating funds for regional initiatives over the whole triennium. **The DSG** provided wording for the decision to clarify that timetable.

Decision SC34-21: Having considered the matters raised in DOC. SC34-21 and DOC. SC34-21 Addendum, the Standing Committee decided to:

- i) confirm approval of a core budget allocation of CHF 20,000 to the implementation of the “Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands”;
- ii) establish the process for allocation of core budget funds for 2007 to approved regional initiatives as set out in paragraph 16 of DOC. SC34-21, as follows:
 - a) approve, in principle, an allocation of 2007 core funds to each of those regional initiatives receiving such funds in 2006, with amounts to be allocated based on requests from each initiative, and otherwise similar to those in the 2006 allocations.
 - b) agree that final approval of 2007 and 2008 allocations be subject to:
 - i) confirmation or otherwise by each regional initiative by 31 October 2006 that they are requesting core funding for 2007 and 2008, and the amounts requested; and
 - ii) for 2007, receipt by the Secretariat not later than 15 January 2007, and transmitted to the Subgroup on Finance, of a satisfactory financial report on the use of the 2006 funds allocated. This would be in line with the terms of paragraph 14 of Resolution IX.7.
 - c) Depending on the dates set for the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee, the approvals of core budget allocations to regional initiatives for 2007 be made at that meeting, if it takes place in early 2007, or by electronic circulation to the Subgroup on Finance and then Standing Committee in early 2007.
- iii) urge the Secretariat to continue to provide assistance to the MedWet Coordination Unit in seeking to resolve its cashflow problems consequent on delayed receipt of agreed country annual contributions, and
- iv) strongly urge those Contracting Parties entering into commitments to financially support regional initiatives approved as operating in the framework of the Convention, to make these payments in a timely manner.

Agenda item 12.7: Ramsar Sites Information Service

156. **The DSG** explained that the COP asked the Secretariat to look for ways to reduce the budget line for the Ramsar Sites Database and the Information Service. Discussions are presently underway on consortium approaches in order to provide better service to the Parties at the least possible cost.

Decision SC34-22: Having considered the matters raised in DOC. SC34-22, the Standing Committee decided to: 1) note the report provided by the Secretariat on developments of the Ramsar Sites Information Service; 2) encourage the Secretariat and interested organizations to undertake further work to consider development of a cost-effective consortium approach to the future delivery of the Service, including with all IOPs, UNEP-WCMC and others; and 3) request the Secretariat to keep the Standing Committee informed of progress on these matters.

Subgroup on Finance – Other business

157. **The SG** provided background on the generous offer from the Crane Bank in Uganda to sponsor an award for wetland management capacity building for junior professionals in Africa, as described in the document distributed earlier (a formal announcement will be made on the Ramsar Web site at the end of this meeting).

Decision SC34-23: The Standing Committee welcomed the establishment of the Crane Bank Ramsar Award and warmly thanked the Crane Bank for its support to the Convention by strengthening its implementation in Africa.

158. **Malawi** noted that many wetlands in Africa are becoming degraded and require rehabilitation. Malawi appealed to the Parties to find the means to support the Chair of the SC in his administrative activities and travels. **The SG** said that he recognized the burden on the Chair and will look for support; there is no formal budget mechanism, but it will probably be possible to support reasonable needs of the Chair, and he will report to SC35 on any unforeseen difficulties.

Agenda item 11: Secretary General matters

159. **The Chair** explained that the SG's contract expires in July 2007, and the 14 February meeting of the "transition committee" considered options for putting a search for a replacement in place.
160. **The SG** described the scenarios that are open for the SC's consideration. As his contract finishes on 31 July 2007, his successor would have to take up his post in August 2007, only 15 months prior to COP10, and the recruitment process would have to be got underway soon. It is normal practice to offer the SG a second term, and this would solve the problem for COP10 but lead to the same situation for the next COP. Thus it has been suggested that the SC consider renewing the SG's contract with a shortened term of appointment to 31 December 2008, just after the conclusion of COP10. SC35 could discuss the selection process, and the new SG could be chosen and put in place so as to be at COP10 with no formal responsibilities, making a good transition period with the present SG and the process of Ramsar COPs. The SG suggested that Ramsar terms of appointment should in future be brought into synchronization with the cycle of the COPs.
161. In reply to **Japan's** query, **the SG** noted that his and his predecessor's contracts had been for four years, but would better be established in future for three years, open for renewal.
162. The Standing Committee went into closed session to consider the matter further.

Third day, 13 April 2006

163. **The Chair** reported back on the outcomes of the closed session and, with clarifications from **the USA** and **Slovenia**, introduced the decision that had been agreed.

Decision SC34-24: The Standing Committee agreed to extend the contract of the Secretary General and congratulated Dr Peter Bridgewater on the job well done so far, and it noted that there seemed to be merit in the idea of aligning the tenure of the SG with the triennial cycle of meetings of the Conference of the Parties. The Committee tasked the Management Working Group to examine reports from IUCN's Human Resources office on the exact period of contract extension that seemed sensible and the possibilities of aligning the term of the SG's appointment with the cycle of the COP, and to report back to SC35 on these matters, and it requested the Management Working Group to agree a mechanism for conducting the Secretary General's performance evaluation.

Agenda item 13: Dates of the next Standing Committee meeting

164. **The SG** outlined the problems of finding suitable dates early in 2007, given the availability of rooms at IUCN and hotel rooms in the region and the dates of other international meetings. He proposed the week of 19-22 February 2007, Monday-Thursday. He suggested that Parties block out the Friday as well, since an additional day might be needed to accommodate the various working groups.
165. **China and the Republic of Korea** noted that because of their New Year holidays the week of 19-22 February would be inconvenient. The Republic of Korea is intending to bring quite a large delegation in light of COP10. The Secretariat staff was able to determine that the preceding week, while not ideal, would be feasible.

Decision SC34-25: The Standing Committee set the dates of its 35th meeting for the week of 12-15 February 2007 and agreed to keep 16 February open until the development of a more detailed agenda of business can determine whether or not it will be needed.

Agenda item 14: Adoption of the report of the meeting

166. **The DSG** explained the traditional method for adopting the meeting report, which is that for the first two days' draft reports the participants inform the rapporteur of their desired editorial changes and raise substantial issues under this item of the agenda. The SC members are then asked to empower the SC Chair to adopt the final day's report on their behalf. The report will then be posted and circulated in English, and the decisions will be posted and circulated in the Convention's three working languages as soon as they have been translated.
167. **The Chair** asked for confirmation of the memberships of the Subgroups on the Strategic Plan and on COP10 (Decisions SC34-5 and -6 above) and verified the agreed dates for COP10 (Decision SC34-7 above).
168. **Slovenia** reminded the meeting that it may be necessary to amend the Convention Work Plan 2006-2008 in light of the decisions of SC34 and that the Secretariat has been requested to provide staff/cost estimates to the Secretariat Work Plan 2006. She suggested that the amended documents, when ready, should be circulated to SC members for comment within a period of three weeks, which was agreed (see Decision SC34-8).
169. At **Slovenia's** suggestion, there was further discussion of BirdLife International's intervention concerning avian influenza and national policies, and a new Decision was agreed on that matter (see Decision SC34-15).

Decision SC34-26: The Standing Committee adopted the first two days of the draft report of the meeting and authorized the Chair of the Committee to approve the final day on its behalf.

Agenda item 15: Any other business

170. **Switzerland** announced that there will be an exhibition on water in Zaragoza, Spain, that will run from June to September 2008.
171. **The MedWet Coordinator** made a PowerPoint presentation on the annual EcoFilms Festival in Rhodes, Greece, and the increasingly well-known Ramsar/MedWet Award in the field of water and wetlands. The exposure for Ramsar and MedWet is considerable and the cost is only €4,000 per year. The Festival will run from 20 to 25 June 2006 with an awards ceremony on 24 June.
172. **The SG** announced that at the CBD's COP8 high-level segment a memorandum of cooperation among a number of MEAs and organizations directed at implementing the 2010 biodiversity targets was agreed.

Agenda item 16: Closing remarks

173. **The SG** expressed his thanks to the Secretariat staff for a fantastic job of facilitating the arrangements for and work of the meeting. He specifically noted the work of Montserrat Riera whose birthday it is this weekend, and the Chair presented her with flowers and promised to sing the birthday song later. There was considerable applause.
174. **The SG** also thanked all participants for their hard work and constructive spirit, and he expressed his gratitude for the excellent work of the Chair and Vice Chair.
175. **The USA** particularly noted the very successful chairmanship of Paul Mafabi of Uganda. There was considerable applause.
176. **Bahamas, the Vice Chair**, offered his thanks to the Secretariat and staff, the Chair, the SG, and the Deputy Secretary General.
177. **The Chair** thanked everyone for their constructive contributions and said that it has been a good start to the triennium. He offered special thanks to the staff of the Secretariat and to the rapporteur, and he especially thanked the interpreters. There was considerable applause. He wished everyone a safe journey home and closed the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Annex I

Statement by Turkey under Agenda item 8.1

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the Secretariat for the efforts during the preparation of the meeting.

Mr Chairman,

Turkey attaches great importance to THE implementation of the Ramsar Convention since its accession. In this context, Turkey fulfils its obligations emanating from the Ramsar Convention to rehabilitate the wetlands by taking into consideration the “wise use principle” in its Ramsar sites.

As all of us are fully aware the three pillars of sustainable development, namely economic development, social development and environmental protection, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In this regard, conservation of wetlands is one of the priorities of cooperation in environmental matters among related stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman,

There is great heterogeneity in the demographic, social and economic conditions of watersheds and river basins worldwide. Different countries and regions have different needs and priorities and are facing different challenges. There can not be a “one size fits all solution”. The management of transboundary wetlands by taking into consideration the water standards of certain regions should not be an appropriate way to reach our common goals. Therefore, the multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and multi-institutional character of river basin management could not be achieved in a “specific or common terminology” in the efforts of the engagement of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands dealing with water and river basin management.

With the above understanding, Mr. Chairman, the Turkish Delegation would like draw your kind attention to DOC. SC. 34-6 para. 1 and para. 2 referring to Resolution IX.3 and IX.1 concerning “engagement of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in ongoing multilateral processes dealing with water” and “additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept” respectively.

In this regard, my delegation would like to reiterate its reservation expressed at the 9th Conference of the Parties of the Ramsar Convention last year in Uganda, regarding Resolutions IX.1, IX.3, and IX.6, and would like to declare that the Resolutions IX.1, IX.3, and IX.6 have no legal or other kind of binding character for Turkey.

The Turkish Delegation requests that the Secretariat ensure that this statement is reflected in all related documents of this meeting.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.