



“People and Wetlands: The Vital Link”
**7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971),
San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999**

Agenda item VIII

Report of the Chairperson of the Standing Committee

Action requested: This item will be introduced in Plenary on the afternoon of Monday, 10 May 1999. Contracting Parties and observers are invited to note the contents of the report and to raise questions, comment on any aspect of the Report, and/or make recommendations for the future work of the Standing Committee.

Introduction

1. The 3rd Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1987) adopted a Resolution on the establishment of the Standing Committee. At each regular Conference, the Standing Committee membership is reviewed. On this occasion, COP7 has in front of it a draft resolution on “Regional categorization of countries under the Convention, and composition, roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, including duties of Standing Committee members” (see document Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.1).

2. The 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 1996 elected the following members to this Committee, representing the seven Ramsar regions:

Representative Alternate

Africa	Senegal	Uganda
Asia	Malaysia	Islamic Republic of Iran
Eastern Europe	Hungary	Russian Federation
	(both re-elected for a second term)	
Neotropics	Uruguay	Panama
	(both re-elected for a second term)	
North America USA		Canada
Oceania	Papua New Guinea	New Zealand
Western Europe	Germany	France

3. In addition, the host of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Australia, as well as the host of the 7th Meeting, Costa Rica, are voting members of the Committee.

4. Switzerland and the United Kingdom maintained their Permanent Observer status on the Committee by virtue of their being host countries, respectively, for the World Conservation Union (IUCN) which hosts the Convention's secretariat, and Wetlands International, a very close partner of the Convention, also associated with its inception. Later, when Wetlands International moved from the UK to the Netherlands, the Netherlands replaced the UK as a Permanent Observer on the Ramsar Standing Committee. Finally, the four Ramsar NGO Partners, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, The World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), were afforded observer status on the Committee.
5. At a brief meeting after the Brisbane Conference, the Standing Committee re-elected Hungary as Chair, and Uruguay was elected Vice Chair.
6. The Standing Committee has been entrusted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties with several functions, including the supervision of the implementation of policy by the Ramsar Bureau (the secretariat of the Convention), the execution of the Convention's budget, the conduct of Bureau programmes with special regard to the development of annual work programmes, personnel matters, and carrying out specific requests.
7. Notice of each meeting of the Standing Committee was distributed to all Contracting Parties through Diplomatic Notes, and Parties not members of the Committee were invited to attend in an observer capacity if they so wished. A number of Parties have attended SC meetings as observers as a matter of routine, while in 1998 there was a record number of CP attending as observers. The detailed minutes of each Standing Committee Meeting have been duly distributed to all Contracting Parties under the cover of a Diplomatic Note. The full text of the minutes have been distributed in the English language with a summary of all decisions taken in English, French or Spanish, as appropriate. The minutes of the 21st meeting (1998) were translated in full into French and Spanish because of the special importance and sensitivity of a number of issues that were in the agenda. The minutes and the summary with the decisions have also been posted on the Convention's Web site.
8. In the present report, the Chairperson of the Standing Committee highlights the main issues the Standing Committee has dealt with from 27 March 1996, the closure of the 6th Conference of the Parties, to 31 December 1998. If need be, an addendum will be produced to cover the period 1st January - 9 May 1999.

Overview of the main issues considered and decisions taken

9. The Standing Committee met four times during the period under review:
 - 18th Meeting: immediately after the closure of Ramsar COP6 in Brisbane, Australia, on 27 March 1996
 - 19th Meeting: 29 October - 1 November 1996, in Gland, Switzerland
 - 20th Meeting: 29 September - 3 October 1997, in Gland, Switzerland
 - 21st Meeting: 19 - 24 October 1998, in Gland, Switzerland

10. At each of its annual meetings in 1996, 1997 and 1998 the Committee dealt with standing issues on the Committee's agenda, such as:
 - a) Review of the audited accounts of the previous years. It should be noted that the Audited Accounts for each year have been distributed under the cover of a Diplomatic Note to all Contracting Parties as soon as they became available in the three official languages. No comments or questions had been received from Contracting Parties. Thus, the audited accounts for 1995, 1996 and 1997 will not be issued as COP7 documents. As will be noted in the budget papers, these three fiscal years were closed with a surplus that, in line with Resolution VI.17 of COP6, has reverted to the newly established Reserve Fund, allowing the Fund to overpass the level recommended by COP6, e. g., a tenth of the annual budget.
 - b) Review of the financial situation of the current year and the forecast of income and expenditure until the year's end, and adoption of the budget for the following year.
 - c) Review of the implementation of the work plan of the Ramsar Bureau for the current year and discussion of the proposed work plan for the following year.
 - d) Review of reports on the implementation of the work programme of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and recommendations for its future work;
 - e) Consideration of the projects submitted under the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) and approval of the projects to be funded. As noted in Ramsar COP7 DOC.15.5, containing a draft resolution on "Critical evaluation of the Convention's Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF), and recommendations for its future operations", each year there have been more projects suitable for funding than available resources, thus making the decisions of the Standing Committee on this matter particularly difficult.
 - f) Review of the financial and implementation status of other projects undertaken by the Ramsar Bureau.
11. In addition, the following is a list of the main issues dealt with and decisions taken by the Standing Committee at each of its meetings.

18th Meeting: 27 March 1996, Brisbane, Australia

12. Acting upon Resolution VI.17 of COP6, the Committee established a permanent Subgroup on Finance with the following members: Australia, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Uganda, Uruguay, and the USA (Chair). The Subgroup on Finance has convened on the day previous to each meeting of the Standing Committee to review all financial and administrative matters on the agenda and prepare recommendations to the Standing Committee. This has proved to be a very useful *modus operandi* for increasing the efficiency of decision-making by the Committee. In addition, the Subgroup, and in particular the Chair of the Subgroup, has been consulted on a number of financial and administrative

matters between meetings. The members of the Subgroup, and most especially the United States of America as its Chair, should be commended for the contribution they have made to the work of the Convention during this period.

19th Meeting: 29 October - 1 November 1996

13. The Committee approved new Operational Guidelines for the SGF, in which the primary focus for suitability for approval was upon proposals which would help to implement the Operational Objectives of the Convention's Strategic Plan 1997-2002.
14. It was agreed that 2 February should be recognized as World Wetland Day effective from 1997. It was also agreed that the Bureau, time and resources permitting, should work towards designation of 2 February as World Wetland Day by the United Nations, and that the awareness materials for the above celebration should address the benefits of wetlands for the human population.
15. The triennial work plan for the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) was approved, covering the areas of 1) toxic chemicals, 2) economic evaluation, 3) restoration and rehabilitation of wetlands, 4) education and public awareness, 5) ecological character, 6) the Montreux Record and the Management Guidance Procedure, 7) management planning, 8) the Ramsar Database, 9) global review of wetland resources, 10) criteria for identification of wetlands of international importance, 11) the relationship between the STRP and the subsidiary scientific bodies of other institutions, and 12) the Small Grants Fund.
16. It was agreed that there should be no "telephone book" hard-copy publication of the traditional *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance* for the COP7, but the Directory data will be made available on diskette. The *Overview of the World's Wetland Sites*, however, should be updated for COP7. Ramsar Information Sheets should be circulated in mid-1997 for updating the data in existing Ramsar sites with a one-year timetable.
17. Concerning notification of change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites and the application of the Management Guidance Procedure at sites in the Montreux Record, the Committee decided that the Bureau should contact Contracting Parties and follow up on steps taken to address problems of change in the ecological character of sites, and should urge further necessary action and offer its assistance. The Bureau should take a proactive approach in the use of the Management Guidance Procedure.
18. The Committee recommended that Contracting Parties should endeavor to place descriptive signs at all Ramsar sites, and these signs should include the Ramsar logo. A suggested text for these signs was approved for recommendation to Contracting Parties.
19. The Committee endorsed the establishment of a Mediterranean Wetlands Committee under the aegis of the Convention, as well as its terms of reference. The Committee provides guidance to the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, and more specifically in the implementation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy. Membership in the Committee is open to all Mediterranean countries and others in the region with Mediterranean-type

wetlands. The first meeting of the Committee took place in Greece in March 1998, and the second one is scheduled in Spain in February 1999.

20. Concerning the Rio+5 process, the Committee requested the Bureau to contact the Administrative Authorities and formally ask them to approach their governments' authorities dealing with the evaluation of the implementation of Agenda 21 and other decisions of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), in order to call attention to Ramsar achievements, encouraging them to make the Convention's voice heard, particularly in view of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to this issue (June 1997).
21. At this meeting, the Committee decided to establish a Subgroup to respond to the mandate given by COP6 through Resolution VI.22 on the "Consideration of overall cost reduction and in particular of possible relocation of the Ramsar Bureau and its operations". It was decided that the Subgroup, composed of Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, Panama, Switzerland and IUCN, should work by correspondence and report to the next meeting of the Standing Committee in 1997. It was decided that the Subgroup should focus on the terms of reference proposed by Canada:
 - a) Examine all relevant advice from IUCN, CPs, the Swiss government, the Bureau
 - b) Analyze the economic/budget benefits and disadvantages
 - c) Document staff and programme benefits and disadvantages
 - d) Identify political and legal implications
 - e) Address IUCN's suggestions regarding limitation to locations with existing IUCN presence
 - f) Study the processes by which Wetlands International and Desertification relocated and CBD and Climate Change chose locations
 - g) Seek independent advice to craft recommendations for the SC
 - h) Make recommendations about the process for carrying the matter forward, if appropriate
22. Concerning staff matters, the Committee decided to renew the contract for Mr. Delmar Blasco as Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention for the period 1 August 1997 to 31 July 2000..

20th Meeting: 29 September - 3 October 1997

23. The Criteria and Procedure for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award, established by Resolution VI.18 of COP6, were approved, as well as the proposed nomination form. It was also agreed to accept the generous offer from the Danone Group to provide US\$ 10,000 for each of three Wetland Conservation Awards to be presented on the occasion of COP7 in 1999. The Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to look into associating some inexpensive piece of art with the Award.
24. The so-called Evian Project was endorsed. At its 1996 meeting, the Standing Committee invited the Conservatoire du Littoral (a French government agency devoted to purchasing

land for conservation purposes) to continue the development of its feasibility study for the “Evian initiative” to support Ramsar in several areas. Major funding support was to be provided by the Danone Group of food-producing enterprises, including the Evian bottled water firm, and the French Global Environment Facility. A revised study was presented at this meeting which included activities in the areas of training, twinning of Ramsar sites, and communications outreach. The combined contribution of the Danone Group and the French GEF amounts to SFR 1.6 million over a three-year period. (The agreement was signed on 27 January 1998 in Paris by the Secretary General in a ceremony presided over by the French Minister of Territorial Planning and the Environment.)

25. The recommendations of the 3rd meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) on continuing cooperation between the CBD and the Ramsar Convention were reviewed. The Committee also endorsed the Bureau’s proposals for increased collaboration between the two secretariats in preparing documentation on inland water ecosystems for CBD’s COP4, and expressed its support for increased cooperation at national level in the implementation of the two conventions.
26. The Standing Committee urged the Bureau to take further steps to call the Contracting Parties’ attention to the desirability of designating new Ramsar sites and to assist in the process wherever appropriate, especially in helping with the compilation of indicative lists for the CBD.
27. The Standing Committee approved the proposal of the STRP to reorganize the existing Ramsar Criteria for designation of wetlands of international importance (Ramsar List) into two groups based on representativeness/uniqueness and biodiversity; requested the Bureau to proceed with the elaboration of Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for these Criteria; and asked the STRP to investigate the Criteria further, especially in regard to criteria based on cultural values and benefits, and provide a rationale for why they should or should not be included in the Criteria.
28. Taking into account Action 8.1.2 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan, which requires to “keep under review the regional representation in the Standing Committee as the number of Contracting Parties increases”, and the concerns raised about the participation of new Contracting Parties in regional groupings under Ramsar, the Standing Committee agreed to establish a Subgroup to review existing regional categorization procedures and suggest revisions or a new process, for consideration and possible approval at COP7. The following countries were elected to serve in the Subgroup: Canada, Hungary as the Chair, Islamic Republic of Iran, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, and Uruguay.
29. The Subgroup established at the previous meeting on Resolution VI.22 (see paragraph 21 above) had studied the documents prepared on this matter, including an analysis of salary costs in different locations in all continents, and submitted a 30-page report for the consideration of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee decided to accept the recommendation of the Subgroup as follows:

***Decision 20.26:** The Standing Committee accepted the report of the Subgroup on Resolution VI.22 and approved its primary recommendation that the issue of possible Bureau relocation should be dropped from further consideration. It was agreed that anticipated significant cost savings in staff salaries would not result from Bureau relocation.*

It should be noted that no reactions were received from Contracting Parties when this decision of the Standing Committee was communicated as indicated in paragraph 7 above.

30. The Standing Committee discussed a document prepared by its Chairperson in response to Action 8.1.3 of the Strategic Plan: “Review and, if necessary, redefine the roles, responsibilities and possible financial needs of the Standing Committee, prior to the 7th COP (1999)”. The document presented a number of proposals and alternatives for action, and it was decided these should be analyzed by the Subgroup on regional categorization (see paragraph 28 above).
31. The Committee established a Subgroup on COP7 with the following Parties: Australia, Costa Rica (as Chair), Malaysia, the Netherlands, Senegal, and the United States of America. The Committee approved the draft Agenda and Programme of the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties – this document had been developed by the Bureau in consultation with Costa Rica and the Subgroup on COP7 in such a way as to benefit from the “lessons learned” from the Brisbane COP6 and address some of the issues relative to the technical facilities in San José and size of the expected participation. The Standing Committee also approved the proposed five Technical Session topics for COP7, as well as the proposed *modus operandi*, and instructed the Bureau to include a clear explanation of the organization of these sessions with the COP documentation.
32. In response to Action 8.1.11 of the Strategic Plan and Resolution VI.21 calling for review of the format for National Reports, the Committee approved a revised format intended to emphasize the implementation of the Strategic Plan.
33. In order to express its concern about the fires that were burning in Southeast Asia at the time of this meeting, the Standing Committee approved the text of the “Wetlands on Fire” statement, and decided to attach it to the minutes and to issue the statement as a press release immediately.
34. The Standing Committee decided to develop criteria for the admission of new NGO Partners, with a view to submitting them to COP7 for consideration and possible approval. (See the draft decision on this matter in document Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.3)
35. The Standing Committee paid tribute to the commitment and dedication of Mr. Mike Smart, who was leaving the Convention secretariat at that time. The Committee expressed its thanks and high esteem for his invaluable help and effort in the recognition of wetland values, in the development of the Convention’s mechanisms, and in the enhancement of wetland conservation and wise use

36. The schedule of meetings on this occasion included two days of Subgroup meetings, with the Subgroup on Regional Categorization and the Subgroup on COP7 meeting during the first day, and the Subgroup on the Ramsar Outreach Programme and the Subgroup on Finance meeting in the second day. A considerable part of the meeting was devoted to Ramsar COP7 preparations, including the preparations being made by the host country, Costa Rica.
37. At the Standing Committee, consensus was reached on all paragraphs of Proposal No 1, except on paragraphs 4 and 5 and its related Annex, for which the Islamic Republic of Iran, in its capacity as Alternate Representative for Asia in the Standing Committee, has submitted an alternative proposal. In the light of the lack of consensus on these aspects of the proposal, and in order not to break the tradition of the Standing Committee of taking decisions by consensus rather than by voting, it was decided to submit Proposal No. 1 for consideration at COP7 with square brackets on paragraphs 4 and 5 and the corresponding Annex 1.
38. Concerning the composition of and membership in the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), the SC decided to recommend that the STRP should mirror the regional composition on the Standing Committee and adopted the text of the proposed draft resolution for transmission to the COP, without the suggested names of nominees. These will be recommended by the Conference Committee at COP7 (see Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.2). The draft resolution contains an invitation to Contracting Parties to designate National Focal Points for STRP matters.
39. In addition to the draft resolutions already mentioned in previous paragraphs, the SC endorsed the following proposals or processes to generate draft recommendations or resolutions, as contained in the appropriate COP7 documents:
 - a) on new Rules of Procedures for meetings of the Ramsar COP;
 - b) on partnership and cooperation with other Conventions, including harmonized information management infrastructures (as a follow-up to the recommendations contained in the feasibility study prepared by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, WCMC. See Proposal No. 4 in Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.4);
 - c) on rules for partnerships with international organizations;
 - d) on the process to generate a proposal on the strategic framework and guidelines for application of the Ramsar Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance, as part of a “Vision for the Ramsar List”;
 - e) on guidelines for designating karst and other subterranean hydrological systems;
 - f) on a framework for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies;
 - g) on guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
 - h) on guidelines for establishing participatory processes to involve local communities and indigenous people in the management of wetlands;
 - i) on the approach being taken to highlight the issue of ‘Ramsar and water’ in COP7 Technical Sessions I and V, including the preparation of draft COP decisions adopting guidance on river basin management and international cooperation for shared wetlands and river basins;

- j) on a Wetland Risk Assessment Framework;
 - k) on guidelines for international cooperation under the Convention, with further work to be done by a drafting group with the participation of Argentina, Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Switzerland, Uganda, the USA, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, and WWF;
 - l) on the Bureau's approach to advance preparation of a draft resolution on the sites in the Ramsar List: official descriptions, conservation status and management planning, including the situation of particular sites in the territory of specific Contracting Parties.
40. The SC also reviewed the processes in place to prepare proposals on alien/invasive species in wetland systems; incentives to encourage the application of the principle of wise use of wetlands; the Ramsar Convention and impact assessment (strategic, environmental and social); a global action plan to conserve peatlands and mires; the global review of wetland resources and priorities for wetland inventory; and restoration as an element of national planning for wetland conservation and wise use.
41. The draft Outreach Programme of the Convention was endorsed in principle, to be further developed for the COP7 Technical Session III, as well as the proposal to urge Contracting Parties to establish national Education, Public Awareness, and Communications (EPAC) focal points.
42. In addition, the SC decided that in the proposals adopted by the Ramsar COP the distinction between "resolutions" and "recommendations" should continue to be made, rather than grouping all of them under the generic term "decisions".
43. Concerning synergy with other environment-related treaties, the Standing Committee noted and endorsed the Joint Work Plan with CBD, the planned signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the continued development of appropriate text in the draft 'Guidelines for international cooperation' being developed for discussion at COP7, as indicated in 39 k) above.
44. In relation to proposals to be submitted to Ramsar COP7, the Standing Committee requested the Contracting Parties, Standing Committee members, and Bureau to make every effort to ensure that draft COP7 recommendations and resolutions are prepared as far in advance as possible, and that texts on similar or overlapping themes are coordinated. The Standing Committee did not consider that additional formal guidance was needed, beyond that contained in the revised Rules of Procedure.
45. The Standing Committee discussed at length the status of Yugoslavia in the Convention and adopted the following decision:

***Decision SC21.18:** Based on Resolution No. 777 of the Security Council, dated 19 September 1992, and UN General Assembly Resolution No. 47/1 of 22 September 1992, the Standing Committee decided to:*

- 1) *instruct the Bureau to request that the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs within UNESCO (as the depositary of the Convention) clarify the status of the current Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with regard to the Ramsar Convention, based on the stipulations of the text of the Convention and in the light of international law; and*
 - 2) *instruct the Bureau to prepare a conference paper transmitting the results of the clarification sought in Point 1) to the Conference of the Parties as part of the COP7 documentation.*
46. The Standing Committee agreed to bring forward for consideration by COP7 a minimum core budget for the next triennium, with 5% increase the first year, 2% the next, and 2% the next.
 47. It also decided to recommend to COP7 that a minimum annual contribution of Contracting Parties should be established at SFR 1,000 as of 1 January 2000, and determined to pass over the question of sanctions for Parties with unpaid dues with no action on this matter.
 48. A decision was adopted to recommend to COP7 that the Convention should continue to use the UN scale of assessments for determining the financial contributions of Contracting Parties to the Convention's budget.
 49. The 1999 laureates for the Wetland Conservation Award were selected (see Ramsar COP7 DOC. 13.2).
 50. The Standing Committee adopted a new Ramsar logo and decided that the Bureau should launch it on 1 January 1999 by appropriate means. While the old logo has served the Convention very well indeed, it was agreed that the time had come for a fresh, more modern image for Ramsar – one that would reflect the growing appreciation of wetlands for the broad range of functions they perform and services they provide. The renowned graphic design company Saatchi and Saatchi were engaged and prepared the new image for the Convention. As professionals in creating corporate images and designs, Saatchi and Saatchi have provided the Convention with a logo that consolidates the themes of the Convention now and for the future. The word "Ramsar" has become the central element of promoting our work through its incorporation into the logo itself. The turquoise colour, fading from dark to light, symbolises water in all its forms – the essence of wetlands. The square design represents the stability and solidity of the Convention, and the internal curved lines symbolise the flowing of water and evaporation, and living matter. In their presentation to the Standing Committee, Saatchi and Saatchi stressed that the new design has those vital elements of coherence, flexibility and strength.
 51. The Standing Committee supported the initiative of the Government of Panama to create a Ramsar Center for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere; welcomed the support of countries inside and outside the region; urged further support from Contracting Parties; and urged the Secretary General to support Panama in furthering this initiative.
 52. Concerning the legal status of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Switzerland, in its capacity as the institution that hosts the Ramsar Bureau, the Standing Committee instructed

the Secretary General to follow closely IUCN's negotiations with the Government of Switzerland related to its legal status and, if need be, to explore the possibilities of separate legal status for the Ramsar Bureau in Switzerland, whilst maintaining its service arrangement with IUCN.

Comments and Proposals

53. The Ramsar Convention has changed remarkably in the last three years; its recognition and appreciation has considerably increased on the international level. It became an official, cooperative partner of UN treaties, first and foremost of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was able to find new ways and methods to meet the challenges of conservation and sustainable use. It is now necessary that Contracting Parties capitalise on this strengthening and further improve the implementation of the Convention on the national level.
54. Parallel with this better recognition, as the Convention became more visible, some of the sensitive political problems of the international community became more apparent within its framework.
55. There are agenda items and corresponding working documents, which clearly reflect these problems, notably Ramsar COP7 DOC.15.1 on regionalization with Ramsar, and Ramsar COP7 DOC.23, on the status of Yugoslavia. The Standing Committee, in spite of long discussions, was unable to produce a consensus proposal in connection with regionalization, and did not feel authorised to take a decision on the status of Yugoslavia.
56. Although there was general agreement concerning the thrust of the proposal, the draft resolution proposing a complete revision and considerable changes in the regional set-up of the Convention, as well as in the composition, roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, contains square bracketed paragraphs. Furthermore questions detailed in Ramsar COP7 DOC.23 clearly need consideration by the COP.
57. However, it is hoped that during the discussions of these issues at COP7, the representatives of Contracting Parties will particularly bear in mind that Ramsar's mission is "the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world".
58. Unlike many other strategy documents, the Strategic Plan adopted by Resolution VI.14 at COP 6 in Brisbane, is a lively, efficiently-working tool of the Ramsar Convention, serving as a basis for most of the activities carried out on the international level and, according to the national reports, to a large extent on the country level as well.
59. Participants at COP7 will notice that the working documents and draft resolutions or recommendations have been developed with the strong intention to implement the Strategic Plan, to make its Actions realised.

60. As participants will recall, the Strategic Plan defined a few new orientations for the future. Amongst others, greater emphasis was put on education and public awareness, capacity building for all stakeholders, strengthened partnerships with other conventions, catalytic role in finding funds for wetland work.
61. These orientations are reflected in several documents presented to COP7. Some of them are especially recommended to the attention of Contracting Parties.
62. COP7 DOC. 15.9 contains the so-called Outreach Programme, calling for the nomination of Wetland Communication, Education and Public Awareness (Wetland CEPA) focal points and the development of CEPA Action Plans at the national level.
63. At this point it is important to highlight and applaud the developments in electronic communication, especially the Convention's Web site.
64. COP7 DOC. 15.8 offers guidelines for establishing participatory processes to involve local communities and indigenous people in the management of wetlands.
65. In addition to dealing with partnerships with other conventions with special regard to CBD, Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.4 describes the possibility of harmonising the information management of different treaties. This might be another step to strengthen the collaboration among conventions as well as to support parties in meeting their reporting commitments.
66. This same document recalls the wetland-related decisions of the 1998 meeting of the COP of CBD. Thanks to the joint CBD-Ramsar work-plan, eligible projects for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity of inland water ecosystems might be supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). By this Ramsar was able to play a catalytic role in finding funds for wetland work.
67. Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.11 on the strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the Ramsar List also deserves particular attention because of its complex and comprehensive nature. It provides a vision for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, embracing criteria, wise use principles, and wetland classification.
68. Financial questions are regular and sensitive items on the agenda. The budget discussions and the subsequent decision will affect the further follow-up of the Strategic Plan and the output of the Ramsar Bureau. Contracting Parties should carefully consider what they expect from the Bureau in the next three years, to what extent they are ready to equip the Secretariat with financial means, and then make a fair and reasonable balance between these deliberations.
69. Ramsar COP7 DOC.15.5 provides a critical evaluation of the Small Grants Fund both from the aspect of resources coming (or not coming) into the Fund and its usefulness as well as difficulties. Because of the lack of sufficient and predictable income, it has never been an easy exercise to allocate money to projects, and appropriate consideration should be given to the future of this tool.

70. The Standing Committee has continued its tradition of arriving at decisions by consensus during the last three years, although keeping to this practice proved to be difficult sometimes. Different interests, different ways of thinking, different tastes, different approaches, and sometimes different aims, faced one another during the meetings.
71. Experience showed that in order to carry out the Committee's work expeditiously and efficiently, members should make more effort and give more time to Committee activities in-between meetings. The regular contact with member countries in the different regions and the scanning of their opinion about major issues is an aspect that should be improved.
72. The work of the Committee has been supported and facilitated by different sub-groups. However, to use the full potential of these groups again requires more attention from members.
73. With the above in mind, the duties of members of the Standing Committee have been detailed and attached to the draft resolution contained in Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.1.

Acknowledgements

74. In a somewhat unusual way, first I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to the Ramsar Bureau. I wish to emphasise that the Convention on Wetlands is served by an efficient, committed, forward-looking and hard-working Secretariat. What they produce is value for money. Great value for rather limited money, if we compare the financial contributions Parties have so far been willing to pay to Ramsar, with the contributions paid by the same CPs to other conventions.
75. The new orientations, the changing role of the Convention, demand more and different type of work from the staff. In some cases this resulted in changes of personnel. Availing myself of this opportunity, I would like to express my thanks to all former and present members of the staff for their work and unfailing efforts.
76. Let me thank the hosts of Ramsar Regional Meetings, namely, in chronological order, Latvia, Costa Rica, Uganda, New Zealand and the Phillipines, as well as those countries which provided voluntary financial support to the Small Grants Fund and/or to the organisation of meetings, including COP 7. These contributions are detailed in Ramsar COP7 DOC. 15.5 and Ramsar COP7 DOC. 26.
77. I would also like to thank our partner organisations, namely IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Wetlands International, Birdlife International and the World Wide Fund for Nature, for their many services and contributions provided continuously. In particular I would like to express my personal gratitude to Ambassador David McDowell and Dr. Michael Moser, who have left their posts at the helm of IUCN and Wetlands International respectively, for the support they have provided to the work of the Convention, and to me personally.

78. Sincere appreciation should also be expressed for the job carried out by the Chair of STRP, Dr. Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu of Ghana, and all members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.
79. I wish to acknowledge the efforts and sense of responsibility of the individual members of the Standing Committee over the past triennium, with special regard to colleagues who chaired subgroups and/or provided extra help, namely Mr. Marco Solano of Costa Rica, Mr. Herbert Raffaele and Mr. Marshall Jones of the USA, and Mr. Clayton Rubec of Canada.
80. Finally, let me add that I have had the privilege of witnessing and directly taking part in the changes and the development of the Ramsar Convention over a decade, and it has been most rewarding and exciting. Having been chosen to chair the Standing Committee over the last two triennia was particularly honouring and I wish to express my gratitude for the confidence shown in me.

Louise Lakos, Deputy Head of Department
Department of International Cooperation
Ministry for Environment, Hungary
Chairperson of the Standing Committee
25 January 1999