

**Report of the 1st Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Argentina,
January 1994**

**First Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel
Buenos Aires, Argentina: 18-21 January 1994**

MINUTES

PRESENT:

The following participants took part in the opening meeting on 18 January 1994. Participation in later meetings was limited, at the request of members, to members, permanent observers, and the secretariat.

Members:

Africa: Steven NJUGUNA, Kenya (alternate for Yaa NTIAMOA-BAIDU, Ghana)

Asia: Muhammad SHATANAWI, Jordan

Eastern Europe: Mihaly VEGH, Hungary

Neotropics: Roberto SCHLATTER, Chile

North America: Thomas DAHL, USA

Oceania: Peter BRIDGEWATER, Australia (alternate for Max FINLAYSON, Australia)

Western Europe: François LETOURNEUX, France

Permanent Observers:

India: Asish Kumar GHOSH

Japan: Makoto KOMODA

IUCN: Edward MALTBY, Jean-Yves PIROT, Michael ACREMAN

IWRB: Michael MOSER

Contracting Party Observers:

Australia: Chris MOBBS

Germany: Kar1-Gunther KOLODZIECJOK

Kenya: Anderson KOYO

Slovenia: Peter SKOBERNE

Switzerland: Aldo ANTONIETTI

Uruguay: Roberto CAL

Non-Governmental Organization Observers:

(a): International

Wetlands for the Americas: Pablo CANEVARI

World Conservation Monitoring Centre: Jeremy HARRISON

(b): National

Bangladesh: S.M.A. RASHID (Nature Conservation Movement)

Ecuador: Lourdes DE JARAMILLO (Fundación Natura), Mario HURTADO (Fundación Charles Darwin)

Secretariat:

Ramsar Bureau: Daniel NAVID (Secretary General)

Michael SMART (Assistant Secretary General)

Monica HERZIG (Technical Officer for Neotropical Region / International Cooperation)

Legal Consultant: Cyril DE KLEMM

1. Welcoming Remarks by the Convention Bureau

The participants were welcomed by Mr Navid, who recalled that the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) had been established by Resolution RES. 5.5 of the Kushiro Conference in June 1993. That resolution had defined the tasks to be performed by STRP, had specified that its members were to be appointed on an individual basis (with due regard for equitable representation of each region), and had also indicated that IUCN and IWRB had the status of observers. As established in the resolution, STRP members for the 1994-1996 triennium had been appointed by the Standing Committee at its October 1993 meeting. Mr Navid congratulated STRP members on their appointment, expressed his pleasure at the broad participation, including Messrs Ghosh and Komoda, who had been given the status of observers by the Standing Committee, and welcomed the many other observers who had indicated their interest in STRP's work. He pointed out that this was the first meeting of a newly constituted Ramsar body; the Convention looked to STRP to make a major contribution to increasing the effective application of Ramsar, and he wished the Panel great success in its work.

In response to the Secretary General's opening remarks, several Panel members emphasized STRP's important role in resolving the Ramsar Convention's scientific needs, while at the same time remaining sensitive to problems arising in individual Contracting Parties.

2. Adoption of the Agenda:

Mr Navid submitted a draft agenda which had been prepared by the Ramsar Bureau. This agenda was adopted unanimously by the participants. The Panel agreed that the Rules of Procedure of the Standing Committee should apply *mutatis mutandis*.

3. Election of Panel Officers:

The Bureau suggested that for a panel of seven members, it would be sufficient to appoint simply a Chairman, and this proposal was adopted. Mr Vegh pointed out that Mr Dahl had previously served as Chairman of the Wise Use Working Group, which to some extent had been the predecessor of STRP, and therefore proposed him as Chairman of STRP. This proposal was seconded by Mr Shatanawi and Mr Schlatter. There being no other proposals, Mr Dahl was elected Chairman of STRP by consensus, and took over the chairmanship of the meeting from that point.

4. Discussion of Working Arrangements:

The Bureau pointed out that the present meeting of the Panel was the first, and that the possibility of future meetings was restricted by budgetary limitations. It would therefore be necessary to do a great deal of the Panel's work by correspondence. The next meeting of the Conference of the Parties would be in 1996, which left two years for substantive work by the Panel. There would be meetings of the Ramsar Standing Committee in October/November of 1994 and 1995 and the Panel might be able to meet in conjunction with these meetings.

5. Priorities for attention by STRP in 1994:

It was recalled that the 1993 meeting of the Standing Committee had identified three issues (among the many included in Resolution RES. 5.5), which should be given priority by STRP in 1994. These were:

Review of the 'Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance' particularly as regards habitat for fish populations;

Review of the 'Montreux Record' and identification of priorities for application of the 'Monitoring Procedure'; and

Consideration of a definition of 'ecological character' and of guidelines on monitoring change in ecological character.

On criteria and ecological character, the Panel requested further background materials as a basis for future discussion. It was noted as a general rule that for both these issues, pragmatic solutions that could be applied by the Contracting Parties in a practical manner were required.

(a) Review of the 'Criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance' particularly as regards habitat for fish populations

Extensive discussions were held about criteria for wetlands as fish habitat. Mr Antonietti emphasized that as few changes as possible should be made to existing criteria, but that some adaptations might be made to underline the importance of wetlands for fish. Mr Smart noted that a new fourth group of criteria relating to fish, similar to the third group of criteria relating to waterfowl, had been suggested. Mr Navid pointed out that it was important to avoid giving the impression that wetlands were important only for waterfowl, and that consideration of their importance for fish was crucial. Mr Antonietti suggested that it was important to think in terms of fish biodiversity, not in terms of fishery production. Mr Schlatter noted that fish should be seen as part of a wetland community. Mr Rashid remarked that the details of fishery practice were the important feature; the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan involved drying out of fishing areas which were important for people dependent on fish production.

Mr Maltby, recalling the extensive discussions on criteria at the third meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Regina in 1987, pointed out that the first group of Ramsar criteria already covered general aspects of productivity, while the second group dealt with biodiversity and gene pool questions; he suggested that establishment of a new group of criteria relating to fish would open the way to an unending series of special criteria; if there were special criteria for fish, then why not special criteria for Protozoa, Odonata, or others? He advised that it was preferable to develop guidelines on fish which allowed flexibility rather than precise formulations which might constrain freedom of action. He commented that considerable scientific debate was currently under way on this issue, and advised consultation with fish experts. Mr Njuguna agreed that it was important to send a message on the importance of fish, and recalled that IUCN's Species Survival Commission had several groups devoted to fish, which could offer advice. Mr de Klemm pointed out that fishery conventions were always concerned with yield, never with fish habitat; Ramsar could help protect habitats, perhaps through reference to communities. Mr Bridgewater emphasized the need to distinguish between fish biodiversity and fish yield. Mr Dahl noted that, as well as fish experts, it might be appropriate to contact coral reef experts.

Following this discussion, it was agreed that, as indicated in Montreux Recommendation REC. 4.2, amendments to the criteria should as far as possible be avoided; however some adaptations might be made to underline the importance of wetlands for fish. These might take the form of a new special criterion for fish or of references in the guidelines to fish. It was further agreed that the Bureau should approach fish experts who had made presentations at Kushiro and other appropriate experts with a view to preparing draft criteria or guidelines for the next STRP meeting; and that members of STRP should also approach fish experts from their own region with this aim.

(b) Review of the 'Montreux Record' and identification of priorities for application of the 'Monitoring Procedure'

The Ramsar Bureau introduced the question of the Montreux Record.

Mr Smart noted that, according to Kushiro Resolution RES. 5.4, the purpose of the Montreux Record was 'to identify priority sites for positive international conservation attention, to guide implementation of the Monitoring Procedure, and to guide allocation of resources available under financial mechanisms'. After the Kushiro Conference, the Bureau had circulated Diplomatic Note 1993/9 on the subject of the Montreux Record on 23 August 1993, suggesting inclusion on the Montreux Record of 73 sites in 36 States, and requesting comments from Contracting Parties. The 73 sites had been made up of:

- 40 sites already included on the Montreux Record before Kushiro;
- 19 sites proposed for inclusion at Kushiro in document C.5.16 ('Review of National Reports submitted by Contracting Parties');
- 2 sites whose inclusion was requested by parties at Kushiro;
- and 12 sites suggested after Kushiro by the Bureau as a result of information in national reports received after the compilation of document C.5.16 or in datasheets authorized by the Parties.

Some responses to the Diplomatic Note had been received before the meeting of the Standing Committee in October 1993. The view of the Standing Committee had been that the Bureau should add or remove sites from the Montreux Record as a result of direct contacts with the Contracting Party concerned rather than by decision of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee, recalling the terms of the Kushiro Resolution on STRP, had therefore emphasized that review of the Montreux Record should be one of the major agenda items for the first meeting of STRP in Buenos Aires.

Mr Smart pointed out that there was an urgent need for STRP to review the make-up of the Montreux Record since the Kushiro meeting had also decided that the Montreux Record should be

'included with the regular circulation of the List' (Annex to Resolution RES. 5.4, item 7). The Bureau proposed to include a version of the Montreux Record with the next formal circulation of the List, and had therefore prepared a revised draft of the Montreux Record for the current meeting of STRP (including 63 sites in 32 States) based on the following criteria:

(i) Retention of sites included on the Record before Kushiro

All sites included on the Record before Kushiro had been retained, unless document C.5.16 had suggested removing them (Netherlands: De Groote Peel), or the Conference had agreed to remove them (Iceland: Thjorsarver and Myvatn). For the moment the Bureau had removed neither Ringkobing Fjord (Denmark), where the Danish authorities had written just before the Standing Committee to say they would provide details justifying removal, nor IJzerbroeken (Belgium) where the Belgian authorities had telephoned the Bureau to request removal of the site and had promised to provide written documentation.

(ii) Retention of sites proposed for inclusion by Kushiro document C.5.16. unless the Contracting Parties concerned disagreed

Document C.5.16 had suggested, on the basis of national reports received on time, the inclusion of another 19 sites. The matter had been widely discussed at Kushiro and a further reminder had been included in the Diplomatic Note. The following 17 sites had been included in the revised draft, although specific approval at Kushiro was only recorded for two, Laguna Colorada and Everglades:

Tonga (Algeria), Laguna Colorada (Bolivia), Srebarna and Durankulak (Bulgaria), Palo Verde (Costa Rica), Unterer Niederrhein (Germany), Laguna del Tigre (Guatemala), Chilka and Loktak (India), Alagol and Shadegan (Iran), Lower Turgay (Kazakhstan), Slonsk (Poland), Djoudj (Senegal), Yagorlitz (Ukraine), Everglades (USA), and Cuare (Venezuela). The Bureau however understood that the Parties concerned by the other 15 sites agreed with their inclusion on the Record. Two sites, Neusiedler-See (Austria) and Khuran (Iran), had been omitted at the request of the Contracting Parties concerned.

(iii) Specific request from the Contracting Party concerned for their inclusion

At Kushiro the delegations concerned had requested inclusion of Kopacki Rit (Croatia) and Nariva Swamps (Trinidad & Tobago). In reaction to the Diplomatic Note, inclusion of four more sites had been requested by the Contracting Parties concerned: Anzali Mordab (Iran), Diaccia Botrona, Orbetello, and Torre Guaceto (Italy).

With regard to the 12 sites suggested in the Diplomatic Note for inclusion in the record as a result of information received after Kushiro in national reports or datasheets, the Parties concerned had requested that eight sites should not, at least for the present, be included on the Montreux Record; the Bureau felt that the other four should also be omitted from the record until the agreement of the Parties concerned had been received.

Mr Smart indicated that if this revised version of the Record was adopted, the Convention would have a dynamic Record (as required by the Standing Committee) and a realistic document which identified priorities for action.

There followed a lively discussion in which members of STRP underlined the need for the Montreux Record to be a dynamic document. Mr Letourneux said that a site might very well be removed from the Montreux Record if one problem was overcome and then reinserted if another arose; the Bureau noted that this had already occurred in the case of Djoudj in Senegal. STRP members insisted on the importance of Contracting Parties providing detailed data and information on sites. As a case in point, members reviewed documentation which had very recently been received from Belgium on IJzerbroeken, and agreed that the site should be removed from the Montreux Record. STRP members agreed that visits to sites on the Montreux Record might be arranged to study the measures taken by the party concerned, if possible in conjunction with the member of STRP for the region. With a view to maintaining the dynamic character of the Record, members requested that the original date of inclusion of a site in the Montreux Record should be indicated; this should reduce the risk of sites remaining for a long time on the record without positive action being taken. STRP members requested the Bureau to provide them with copies of Kushiro document C.5.I6.

Concluding this discussion, STRP approved the Bureau's proposal on the make-up of the Record (with the proviso that IJzerbroeken should be removed) and requested that it be circulated with the next version of the Ramsar List. They noted that the Montreux Record thus included 62 sites in 32 States, nearly 10% of the wetlands designated for the List.

The Bureau then introduced discussion of the Monitoring Procedure. Mr Smart recalled that the Monitoring Procedure had been developed by the Standing Committee in 1988 and endorsed by the Conference of the Parties at Montreux in 1990 through Recommendation REC. 4.7. The Monitoring Procedure usually took the form of a visit to a site by an expert mission, which produced a report for the government concerned. Monitoring Procedure reports became public documents after the government concerned had had time to study them.

STRP members supported the Bureau's view that it was important for the Bureau to be involved in the planning and execution of monitoring missions. In this way Contracting Parties could be reassured that the mission was carried out under the auspices of the Convention and in the

Convention's spirit of cooperation. STRP noted the results of some previous applications of the procedure; members asked the Bureau to provide them with examples of Monitoring Procedure reports, and to pay particular attention to reviewing the application of recommendations of previous missions. They welcomed the Bureau's proposal to prepare a detailed review of the procedure for review by STRP and the Standing Committee in 1994.

The Bureau requested guidance from STRP on sites at which the Monitoring Procedure should be applied in 1994, noting that priority should be given to sites on the Montreux Record and that funding for operation of the procedure had been provided in the 1994-1996 triennial budget. Mr Pirot suggested that it was important to select sites where there was a good potential for success in implementing recommendations; there was little point in operating the procedure at sites which were difficult and costly. Several members of STRP emphasized the need to maintain a regional balance in the choice of sites for application. It was recalled that plans were already in hand for operation of the procedure at the Dee Estuary, UK, and that great emphasis had been placed in Kushiro on the importance of operating the procedure at Nariva Swamps, Trinidad and Tobago. After some deliberation, relating mainly to the urgency of the problems concerned and to the practicality of operations, the following list of priorities was established (subject to the approval of the Contracting Parties concerned and to the possibility that other urgent needs for application of the procedure might occur):

- 1) Nariva Swamps, Trinidad and Tobago (Neotropical Region);
- 2) Dee Estuary, UK (Western European Region);
- 3) Lake Chilka, India (Asian Region);
- 4) Lake George, Uganda (African Region);
- 5) Laguna Colorada, Bolivia (Neotropical Region);
- 6) Slonsk, Poland (Eastern European Region);
- 7) Palo Verde, Costa Rica (Neotropical Region);
- 8) Five Italian sites on the Montreux Record (Western European Region).

Other sites at which the Monitoring Procedure should be applied, as far as funding, time, and practicalities allowed, were:

- Kirov Bays, Azerbaijan;
- Laguna del Tigre, Guatemala (probably not before 1995);
- Shadegan Marshes, Iran;
- Shurgol, Yadegarlu and Dorgeh Sangi Lakes, Iran;
- Alagol, Ulmagol and Ajigol Lakes, Iran;
- Lakes of the Lower Turgay and Irgiz, Kazakhstan (initial visit already made in 1991);
- Lake Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan.

The meeting noted that the possibility of the appropriate regional member of STRP taking part in Monitoring Procedure missions should be considered, and suggested that drafts of Monitoring Procedure reports could be sent before finalization to the regional representative on STRP.

(c) Consideration of a definition of 'ecological character' and of guidelines on monitoring change in ecological character

The Bureau then introduced the third item which the Standing Committee had identified as being of special importance for discussion by STRP - definition of 'ecological character' and of guidelines on monitoring change in ecological character.

Mr Smart recalled that this topic had been discussed at one of the Kushiro workshops and had been the subject of Recommendation REC. 5.2 of the Kushiro Conference. The Convention text in Article 3.2 gave Contracting Parties the obligation to inform the Bureau if the ecological character of any wetland on the List had changed. This concept of 'change in ecological character' was clearly crucial for the implementation of the Convention and the respect of its obligations, yet neither 'ecological character' nor 'change' had hitherto been precisely defined. The Kushiro workshop had felt that further work was required before an acceptable definition could be reached, and had instructed the Bureau, with the support of STRP, to initiate such work with a view to providing draft guidelines for discussion at the next Conference.

Mr Moser remarked that IWRB had devoted considerable time and effort to this topic. A workshop on the subject had been held at IWRB's meeting in St Petersburg, USA, in 1992 and an account of the workshop had been presented to the Kushiro workshop by Mr Crawford Prentice of IWRB; Mr Moser undertook to provide a copy of the report of the St Petersburg workshop for circulation to STRP members. Since Kushiro IWRB had been involved in two further activities relating to this subject - the workshop on monitoring wetland change held in Linz, Austria in October 1993, and the ongoing MedWet project which included a special subproject on wetland monitoring.

Mr Maltby warned of the need for a rational scientific basis for any definition of change; it was important to have a pragmatic approach and not to waste large amounts of money in aiming at an unattainable goal. Mr Maltby and Mr Bridgewater both suggested that the notion of 'induced change' by external factors should be emphasized and that the implications of change for management should be underlined. The participants from Ecuador pointed out that the transformation of wetlands for shrimp production had severely affected wetlands in Ecuador and that precise data on the changes were available.

Several participants pointed out that in order to monitor change, it was important to have detailed data on the site at the time of its designation for the Ramsar List. The meeting emphasized the

need for clear and detailed maps of Ramsar sites to be provided at the time of designation and deposited in the Ramsar database located with IWRB. It welcomed IWRB's offer to conduct a review of the existing database and to respond to enquiries from Contracting Parties. The meeting suggested that the facilities and services available to Contracting Parties from the database should be made more widely known. Mr Bridgewater indicated that Mr Finlayson, the elected member of STRP for Oceania, who had previously been involved in IWRB's work on ecological character, was particularly interested in this subject and would be willing to play a major role in the matter.

The meeting concluded that the subject of change in ecological character was one of extreme complexity and suggested that more detailed discussion be held at the next STRP meeting, after distribution of appropriate documents.

6. Next Meeting of STRP

Participants agreed that another meeting of STRP would be highly desirable in 1994, if possible before the October meeting of the Standing Committee. It was agreed that the dates of 6-8 September should be reserved for such a meeting, and the Bureau and Chairman of the Committee were requested to investigate possibilities of identifying funding.

7. Any Other Business

The meeting agreed that the three topics which had been the main subjects of discussion at the present meeting should remain the principal items for future work of STRP. Other possible topics of interest would be special requests for guidance from Contracting Parties, new site documents, and applications for funding under the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Fund.

It was agreed that the Bureau should put together a package of basic information concerning the Convention to be sent to each member of STRP.