

## Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

6th Meeting of the STRP, Gland, Switzerland, 15-17 April 1997

### PARTICIPANTS:

#### MEMBERS

Africa: Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu, Ghana (Chair)

Asia: Makoto Komoda, Japan

Eastern Europe: Mihály Véghe, Hungary

Neotropics: Roberto Schlatter, Chile

North America: Allan Smith, Canada

Oceania: Keith Thompson, New Zealand

Western Europe: François Letourneux, France

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#### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

BirdLife International: John O'Sullivan

BirdLife International: David Pritchard

IUCN: Jean-Yves Pirot

Wetlands International - A, E, ME: Scott Frazier

Wetland International - A, P: Taej Mundkur

WWF International: Chris Tydeman

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#### INVITED EXPERTS

Max Finlayson, Australia

Peter Hurst, WWF International

Barbara Rutherford, WWF International

Frank Vorhies, IUCN

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#### SECRETARIAT

Delmar Blasco, Secretary General

Michael Smart, Senior Policy Advisor

Montserrat Carbonell, R.C. for Neotropics

Rebecca D'Cruz, Regional Coordinator for Asia

Tim Jones, Regional Coordinator for Europe

Tom Kabii, Regional Coordinator for Africa

Julia Tucker, Administrator

Mireille Katz, Executive Assistant

Renée Ferster Levy, Assistant to Mr. Smart

Dwight Peck, rapporteur

#### AGENDA ITEM #1: Opening of the meeting

1) The Chair welcomed the participants and pointed to the ambitious agenda. The Secretary General welcomed the participants and noted that this is the STRP's crucial meeting for COP7 inputs, because the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC), in the week of 29 September 1997, will

make the key decisions for the 7th COP, especially on issues to be discussed there, and the 21st SC meeting (September 1998) will be devoted to approving the documentation for distribution. He thanked the Senior Policy Advisor for taking responsibility for STRP6 and its documentation and Renée Ferster Levy for assisting Mr Smart in preparing for the meeting.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #2: Adoption of the agenda**

2) The agenda for the 6th Meeting, as presented in DOC STRP 6.1, was adopted by consensus.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #3: Review and adoption of the report of the 5th STRP meeting**

3) The report of the 5th STRP meeting (Hungary, June 1996), as presented in DOC STRP 6.2, was adopted by consensus.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #4: Review of the STRP Work Plan**

4) The Secretary General explained staff reassignments which affect the Bureau focal points; the Regional Coordinators, who were overwhelmed by the necessity of contributing to the Bureau's "global" responsibilities in addition to their full-time work for the regions, have been relieved of non-regional tasks, all of which will henceforth fall to the Secretary General and the Senior Policy Advisor.

5) The Senior Policy Advisor introduced the revised STRP Work Plan, DOC STRP 6.2a, developed at the 5th STRP meeting and incorporating a few alterations made by the SC19 meeting at the time that it was formally approved. The few changes chiefly concerned wording on the issue of the Montreux Record. Mr Smith noted that Item #1 of the Work Plan tasks him with responsibility for the whole issue of toxic chemicals and wetlands, whereas he offered only to report on a meeting on toxics and peatlands; the Senior Policy Advisor will amend the Work Plan. The Chair deferred review of progress on fulfilling the Work Plan to the individual agenda items still to come.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #5: Report on STRP matters discussed at the 19th Standing Committee meeting**

6) The Chair described her report to the SC19 meeting and the STRP's definition of three categories of priority of tasks. The SC highly commended the STRP's work, especially its setting clear targets and deadlines, and approved the Work Plan with few changes. The Secretary General noted the SC's adoption of "People and Wetlands: The Vital Link" as the overall theme for the 7th COP in Costa Rica, which emphasizes the interrelationships between human populations and wetland resources.

7) The Senior Policy Advisor explained the SC's decision on a methodology for assessing and approving SGF proposals; the SC will maintain its role in the approval process, to be facilitated by preview by the Subgroup on Finance, which worked well for that meeting. The SC urged development of an SGF assessment form to simplify and objectify the process of weighing the technical value and practical feasibility of each proposal; after input from various parties, especially the Subgroup, the present draft of this form has been tabled as DOC STRP 6.13a. No longer need all proposals be reviewed by the partner organizations; the Bureau is now invited to seek assistance from STRP members, SC Regional Representatives, IUCN, WWF, and Wetlands International experts as appropriate. The Secretary General made previous proposals aimed at streamlining the cumbersome SGF assessment process, and though COP6 and SC19 did not approve his suggestions, the present new method promises to simplify this part of the Bureau's work. Which is a good thing, because, for the first time, the SGF has a sizable sum of money to work with (already about SFR 800,000 for 1997) and more than three times more projects than last year, which shows growing interest in and need for the SGF.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #6: Information from the Ramsar Bureau, including COP7 Technical Sessions**

8) The Secretary General noted that the Convention has surpassed 100 Contracting Parties (CPs), now at 101, and Congo has decided to accede. The Convention is now more widely seen as a useful instrument. Financially it is doing well: the USA is apparently able to pay its full contribution to the core budget (25%), and key projects, including the SGF, have received generous contributions. The STRP members are invited to keep up with regular news of Bureau and CPs' activities on the Ramsar Web site, and if they should lack access to the Web the Bureau can fax new material to them on a roughly weekly basis as it now does to SC members.

9) The Senior Policy Advisor chronicled recent links with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the CBD's decisions (COP3, November 1996) inviting Ramsar to act as the lead partner in wetland biodiversity matters, and identifying freshwater ecosystems as the key issue for the next CBD COP. He observed that all Brisbane COP6 documents have now been published, and he described the Bureau's survey of CPs' progress in developing national wetland policies, which shows success in getting away from a concentration on site conservation and towards a broader policy approach. The MedWet initiative is progressing, under Ramsar, into an important regionwide effort. He noted that this will be his last STRP meeting. The Regional Coordinators reported on recent events in their regions.

10) **Africa:** Mr Kabii noted the accession of Malawi and Botswana (the Okavango Delta is now the largest Ramsar site); interest in Ramsar is growing and there is much interest in project development for SGF and GEF. The February 1997 African Desk Officers meeting for partners and related

secretariats encouraged synergies, and the 12-14 May West African subregional Ramsar meeting in Dakar will do the same.

11) **Europe:** Mr Jones mentioned the accession of Georgia and Ukraine and the Bureau's continuing role in helping to obtain data on Ukraine's 22 planned Ramsar sites. Much work has gone into the Pan-European Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy, for which the Bureau is coordinating wetland issues. The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement could enter into force as early as 1998 and the Bureau is enhancing links with the secretariat. The Eastern European CPs are now eligible for the SGF, which partially accounts for the large increase in SGF proposals. The MedWet LIFE project for involving five more countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Albania, and Croatia) in the MedWet initiative is progressing well. There will be a pan-European Ramsar meeting in Latvia in June 1998, and suggestions for technical issues to be discussed there are solicited.

12) **Neotropics:** Dr Carbonell noted the accession of Bahamas in the Caribbean and is awaiting word from UNESCO on Nicaragua. The Neotropics has named more new sites in the past six months than ever, including five Chilean sites in the Puna highlands region. The Neotropics has submitted 37 proposals for the SGF and still more for the Wetlands for the Future programme, for which the December 1996 call for proposals was sent to some 500 contacts in the region. Several countries are working on National Wetland Policies (NWP) and there is growing interest in updating Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs). Applications of the Management Guidance Procedure (MGP) are planned for Guatemala soon and hopefully for Costa Rica by early 1998. There is closer cooperation with IUCN and WWF personnel in the region and with other conventions at the national level.

13) Dr Schlatter noted the publication of the updated Ramsar Manual in Spanish and thanked the Secretary General and Dr Carbonell for their work on it. He also thanked the Bureau and BirdLife International for assistance in preventing construction of a proposed pulp industry site 20km upriver from the Ramsar site; this shows the value of international instruments in such matters. He described assistance to the National Ramsar Committee of Argentina in October 1996 and informed the STRP of the publication of a draft "Freshwater Biodiversity of Latin America and the Caribbean", a conservation assessment product of a workshop in Bolivia in 1995 managed by WWF and Wetlands International.

14) **Asia:** Ms D'Cruz thanked the Senior Policy Advisor for filling in as interim RC before she joined the Bureau in January 1997. She attended the Northeast Asia meeting in China in March, and will conduct an MGP mission with the Senior Policy Advisor in Iran next week. A regional meeting seems to be slated for about October 1997, brought forward from 1998. Her focus for this year will be on underrepresented habitat types (mangroves, peatlands, and coral reefs) and new sites for the List, as well as promoting the Convention to non-member states. There is no RC for Oceania, but she

coordinates with the Wetlands International Ramsar Liaison Officer in Australia, who devotes halftime to Ramsar work in the Oceania region.

15) Alex de Sherbinin, IUCN Social Policy Group, outlined the project developed in fulfillment of Recommendation 6.3 on "Involving Local and Indigenous People in the Management of Ramsar Wetlands" and solicited STRP help in identifying good case studies. The proposal itself is available from the Bureau and on the Ramsar Web site. The Secretary General noted that the Bureau is assisting with fundraising for this project and would welcome additional suggestions.

16) The Secretary General observed that the Technical Session topics identified in the Strategic Plan are not carved in stone and may be altered by the SC. There is not enough time for too many topics. The format will be decided by the SC, but the present suggestion, worked out with the Costa Rican hosts, argues that, rather than dividing the whole group into halves (of ca.750 people, which would exceed the capacity of the hosts' interpretation equipment), the topics should be presented by expert panels in plenary session, followed by break-out sessions for the seven regions. Though the regional break-outs would be open to everyone, this method would encourage more regional discussion of substantive rather than just administrative matters. Rapporteurs from all seven sessions would produce a group report for the following day's consideration. The SP's proposed Technical Sessions are: best practice in economic valuation of wetlands; EIA best practice; restoration and rehabilitation best practice; and international cooperation.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #7: Criteria for identifying Wetlands of International Importance**

17) Scott Frazier of Wetlands International described his report on the status of Ramsar Database information on criteria used in the designation of existing Ramsar sites. The Chair noted that this information corrected STRP5's erroneous assumption that Criteria 1 is too broad and thus seldom used, which may make the task of modifying Criteria 1 unnecessary. She referred to STRP5's tasking of the review of the Criteria into three clusters: representative and uniqueness, biodiversity, and significance for humans.

18) Concerning Cluster 1, "representativeness or uniqueness", Dr Thompson reported on recent trends on the use of indicators of water quality, as the US EPA's 1996 set of indicators based on the pressure-state-response system, Canada's 1991 set of indicators on "environmental health" and "ecosystem health", and New Zealand's report on environmental indicators tied to UNEP's Global Resource Information Database. He cautioned against too ready reliance on checklist methods that result in a single "ecological health" numerical value.

19) He cited the following factors as requiring consideration in such methods: 1) identification/classification (he called once again for review of Ramsar's imperfect classification scheme); 2)

distinctiveness/uniqueness; 3) representativeness (within each region); 4) connectedness; 5) intactness; 6) diversity (of local and regional species and of habitat); and 7) achievability. This last involves questions of ownership; pre-existing threats and time frames (both spatial and temporal); local government plans; EIA links; and costs. He also discussed issues of education and training of managers and noted that "multiple use" is important when applying these factors.

20) It was felt that most of these concerns can be built into the Guidelines rather than into the Criteria themselves, though the achievability factor helps to meet the call for greater emphasis on hydrological questions. Mr Pritchard cautioned against diverting the purpose of the Criteria: an objective assessment of the intrinsic value of a wetland should decide its suitability for designation, and predictions of achievability are appropriate to separate questions of management priorities on conservation attention. "Productivity" was urged as a factor but it was felt that this shifted the focus away from strictly natural values.

21) The consensus was that the Criteria should be as simple, elastic, and inclusive as possible, rather than restrictive in the sense of disqualifying sites that fail to meet all the tests. Criterion 1(c) was seen as far too complex, with too many factors included and tacked on to it; it could be redrafted, with hydrological factors given their own line, though the Senior Policy Advisor observed that the common theme of 1(c) is the "natural functioning" part, with these factors mentioned only as expressions of that idea.

22) It was agreed that the Guidelines for Criteria 1-3 are too brief and sketchy, and the Panel felt that these questions of long-term achievability and increased hydrological emphasis should be written into them. The Chair noted the need for a balance in the Criteria between welcoming as many new sites as possible whilst at the same time not devaluing the notion of "internationally important wetlands", but it was felt that the elastic and flexible model is to be preferred to the restrictive one.

23) Mr Tydeman observed that, since there is no sign of abuse of the Criteria's openness, there is presently no need to tighten them up. Manmade wetlands are not specifically mentioned in Criteria 1, but it's unlikely that they would be "representative or unique" in any case and would better qualify under other Criteria.

24) Concerning Cluster 2, "biodiversity", the Chair wondered whether, since we already have Criteria based on waterbirds and fish, we should have more based on other species. Her research suggests that it would be very difficult to get adequate numbers on very many of these, and she suggested expanding the Guidelines to include other taxa rather than adding new Criteria only where data is available.

25) Mr Tydeman noted the report presented to the Regina COP in 1987, which concluded that numerical totals don't exist for most species, and felt that the situation is no better now.

26) The Chair observed that the addition of fish criteria was somewhat special, since waterfowl and fish are the main fauna in wetlands, and the members agreed that elaboration of the Guidelines to include more species is better than amending the Criteria.

27) There was also some concern that there should be more emphasis on the importance of vegetation, the whole food chain rather than just the species at the top of it, in determining a wetland's value.

28) Concerning Cluster 3, "significance for humans", Dr Finlayson introduced his report which concludes that socio-economic issues don't fit well with the other criteria but rather are more appropriate as wise use matters. The Convention should certainly continue to be involved in socio-economic and cultural concerns but should not continue development of this Cluster 3 question for the Criteria.

29) After some discussion of the extent to which the COP wished human significance to be considered, it was felt that these concerns should also be built into the Guidelines, so that governments can take them into account if they wish to. This in no way diminishes the importance of socio-economic concerns.

**Decision STRP 6.1: The Criteria have been reviewed and are basically sound, but should be organized into two main "general" categories: 1) Representativeness and Uniqueness, and 2) Biodiversity, the latter of which will give adequate weight to plants and animals, with special sections on waterfowl and fish. Wherever adequate data exists on other species, these factors should be built into the Guidelines. The Guidelines for the Criteria should be made more "user-friendly" and should add emphases on hydrological and socio-economic/cultural benefits of wetlands, as well as on flora and with the possibility of numerical criteria for other taxa. The Senior Policy Advisor agreed to form a team to develop the Guidelines further, and will provide a draft of new Guidelines to the STRP by correspondence by 31 July; absent significant dissent, a finalized draft will be presented to SC20 in September. Some "peer review" will also be sought for the present Guidelines on the fish Criteria.**

30) The Secretary General reported that Simon Stuart, the Coordinator of IUCN's Species Survival Commission, has today offered to assist in this process.

**AGENDA ITEM #8: Ecological character of wetlands**

31) Dr Finlayson reported on the characteristics of Early Warning System (EWS) methodologies, involving monitoring of indicators such as physical alteration, changes to water regime, pollution and eutrophication, and invasive species. He described ecological risk assessment as a structured process leading to a quantitative estimation of the probability of clearly defined adverse biological effects as a result of stresses, often caused by humans. He described the process of a good identification of potential hazards and estimations of the acceptability of various levels of risk, as well as the attributes of several good indicators in this process.

32) To Mr Vorhies's suggestion about identifying the underlying causes of adverse effects, Dr Finlayson observed that these are important but different; the concern here is explicitly with the apparent causes of adverse change in ecological character, which are more amenable to objective testing and monitoring.

33) Dr Finlayson also stressed the importance of assessing the threshold of adverse or detrimental change in ecological character that would be acceptable, given the costs of protection and other factors. It is necessary to accept that a certain amount of pollution and degradation is reasonable and acceptable in any situation involving use of wetland benefits.

34) The Chair noted that this addresses point (d) of this Work Plan item but skips over (a) through (c). A consensus developed that it would be better to separate the questions of developing EWS guidelines from evaluation of the Resolution VI.1 (annex point 2) guidelines, since the EWS guidelines would be valuable anyway and would be held back by inadequacies of the present data in the Ramsar Database.

**Decision STRP 6.2: 1) Mr Frazier will use the Database to provide information to form the basis for testing the Guidelines for Describing and Maintaining Ecological Character (RES VI.1 annex pt. 2), with data for one site from each region and a few more to make ten. 2) Dr Finlayson will be encouraged to arrange to have data on these sites tested for adequacy of existing guidelines.**

**Decision STRP 6.3: The STRP members agreed also to undertake a test of the Guidelines for sites in their regions. The end of August was specified as the deadline for completion, earlier if possible:**

**A site in Australia (Dr Finlayson), in Canada (Mr Smith), in Ghana (Dr Ntiamo-Baidu), in Hungary (Mr Végh), and in New Zealand (Dr Thompson). In addition, Dr Letourneux will seek a possible site to test, perhaps Doñana in Spain; Mr Trisal (India) has been asked to contribute, and Dr Peter Bacon has agreed to carry out a test for a site in the Caribbean.**

35) Those testing the Guidelines will be looking for answers to the following questions, based on the Guidelines themselves, Annex to Resolution VI.1 (pp. 2-3 of the *Brisbane Proceedings*, vol. 4):



## **Definitions**

Assess the adequacy/acceptability of the two Working Definitions (if found inadequate, propose changes).

## **Description of Ecological Character**

Is the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) appropriate for describing ecological character (2.1)? Has the RIS been completed adequately for this site (2.2)? Note any difficulties encountered in obtaining information to complete the RIS. Suitability of the National Report for updating the RIS (2.3)

## **Change in Ecological Character**

Adequacy of the RIS for providing a baseline for assessing change in ecological character (2.4). Can the Ramsar Criteria be used to indicate change in ecological character (i.e., if a site no longer meets criteria, does this indicate change? Or can ecological character change, yet the site still meets the criteria?) (2.5).

## **Monitoring**

Adequacy of existing monitoring programmes (2.6). Means of assessing the ecological significance of any measured change (2.7). Management implications, including need for restoration.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

36) There was discussion of the suitability of National Reports (NRs) as a information updating mechanism, as they are often more political than technical and are commonly compiled by administrative authorities who are far from the sites and often working merely from information on file. Administrative authorities are frequently civil servants lacking scientific background, and it was felt that they seldom seek new scientific information for the NRs.

37) The Secretary General observed that NRs are very important and should cover the overall implementation of the Convention, not just data on individual sites and warnings of change. The Convention does not ask for too much information in order not to discourage CPs from submitting thoughtful assessments. The 20th Standing Committee will decide on a revised format for the National Reports; the Bureau will be working on drafts of that format over the next two months, and he solicited STRP members' input to that process. The new NR format must be ready in time for completion by the CPs in 1998 and the preparation of the regional summaries for COP7. The Secretary General is seeking to revise the system of regional reporting, towards a process that is more useful and lively, a substantial evaluation of the Convention's implementation and less just a formality.

38) The Chair noted that these doubts about the suitability of the NRs for site data updates show the need for just such a test of the Guidelines. Mr Smith suggested that the RIS should have an annex for providing periodic updates, perhaps every five years, to allow measurement of change in ecological character. The Senior Policy Advisor noted that the NRs provide a good occasion for updating data and other measures of implementation but were never meant to contain the updated information within themselves. Mr Frazier said that the Ramsar Database staff do routinely comb through the NRs looking for information with which to update the Ramsar Database.

39) Mr Tydeman inquired whether there is a routine feedback mechanism whereby the Bureau follows up on information in the National Reports; the UK's NR for COP6 was a useful analysis which could easily be compared to the RISs. The Secretary General noted that the Bureau sometimes consults NRs but does not now follow up regularly, though perhaps it should, as that would enhance the seriousness and value of the NRs and reinforce the idea of the CPs' accountability for their obligations. The Senior Policy Advisor mentioned, however, that each COP does include a portmanteau recommendation on individual sites which picks up on issues mentioned in the NRs; he agreed that it would be desirable to make the NRs more important and more publicized, but the CPs must be persuaded to submit their NRs on time.

40) The Secretary General referred to current trends towards developing common reporting requirements for all the environment conventions, in order to reduce the work load of authorities in the Parties. This makes sense, but could be detrimental to good, specific reporting for each convention, since each is really looking for different information and has different emphases.

41) There was some feeling that testing for change in ecological character should include information on positive changes as well as adverse ones. To some extent, however, that serves a different purpose and, though part of good management planning, is not so important for operation of the Montreux Record.

42) The Chair emphasized that this exercise is not intended to be a critique of the RIS, which has already been approved. It is meant to test our mechanisms' ability to obtain sufficient information on change in ecological character, and if they should be found to be inadequate, the STRP will then discuss other ways of addressing that need.

**Decision STRP 6.4: The STRP requested Dr Finlayson to continue development of guidelines on an Early Warning System and threshold of acceptable change. These guidelines could then be discussed at the planned regional meetings and possibly at a meeting one day prior to COP7. Further, in order to provide time for producing a considered document, Dr Finlayson will approach Australian authorities on supporting, and will take the lead in organizing, a workshop to finalize draft guidelines on EWS and determination of threshold of acceptable change before COP7.**

43) Mr Letourneux and Mr Végh agreed that detailed guidelines might be too ambitious and that skeletal outlines and some good examples might be the best that can be hoped for. A "way of thinking" should be the objective, a "protocol" of steps to be got through and things to be kept in mind, of how to deal with what is or isn't possible given the data at hand.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #9: Montreux Record and Management Guidance Procedure**

44) The Senior Policy Advisor introduced documents STRP 6.4 and 6.4a and described the Bureau's diplomatic note to CPs with sites on the Montreux Record, inquiring whether an MGP would be helpful. The number of written responses was disappointing, but more reactions have been received through direct contacts with CPs. Document 6.4a shows present planning for MGP missions in the near future. The Senior Policy Advisor and the Regional Coordinators described ten upcoming missions and the results of some recent ones, Ringkøbing and Nariva.

45) Mr Jones noted that the UK plans to excise 25 hectares from the Dee Estuary without compensation, on the grounds that the overall ecological character of the site will still be unchanged, and the possibility of a dangerous precedent should be considered.

46) Ms D'Cruz observed that the Montreux Record listings for Asia do not include many more sites that should probably be added to the list.

47) The Secretary General announced that BirdLife International has today contributed £4000 for applications of the MGP and that Hungary recently contributed SFR 10,000 for MGP missions in Central and Eastern Europe.

48) The Senior Policy Advisor described the Bureau's practice with "contact letters", sent to the administrative authorities in the CPs whenever the Bureau receives information, from the CP or third parties, about impending changes in ecological character. The Bureau inquires whether the information is correct and whether Montreux Record listing might be in order.

49) A recent case involves Point Lillias in Victoria state, Australia, part of the Port Phillip and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar site, where the Bureau received an official press release stating that the Commonwealth has approved Victoria's proposal to relocate a hazardous waste facility within the Ramsar site and to excise 20 hectares from it, citing "urgent national interest" in accordance with Article 2.5 of the Convention and providing a compensation package of 240 hectares, a buffer zone, and an expensive management plan. The decision is apparently still open to appeal. Official word with details of the decision has not yet been received from Australian authorities. NGOs have claimed that the compensation package must be approved by the Ramsar COP, but that is not consistent with the requirements of the Convention. Australian authorities have suggested that

COP7 include study of and perhaps guidelines for determining "urgent national interest", and they asked the Bureau about the legal requirements for excision. In the only other excision case, Belgium, there was a diplomatic note notifying all CPs of the excision, and probably should be in this case, as it's important to keep reminding the CPs of their obligations.

50) The Senior Policy Advisor noted that, though these "contacts" are frequently mentioned on the Web site, it might be desirable to formalize the Bureau's reporting on all such contacts and make them part of the record.

51) He tabled an example of the kind of requests frequently received by the Bureau (an e-mail just received from the Japan Wetland Action Network regarding planned actions at Isahaya Bay, a non-Ramsar site in Japan) and described the Bureau's procedure for seeking further information in such cases. Dr Komoda reported on his attempt to gain more information on the situation this morning and promised to follow up on it. Mr Tydeman observed that the Convention's obligation for wise use involves all wetlands, not just Ramsar sites, and intervention is thus warranted.

**Decision STRP 6.5: The STRP approved the following timetable for applications of the Management Guidance Procedure in 1997 and early 1998:**

- **Costa Rica: staff will visit in June to set it up for November; likely.**
- **Czech Republic: possible.**
- **Egypt: staff are trying to arrange for December; likely.**
- **Greece: possible.**
- **Guatemala: staff will visit in April to set it up for June-July; certain.**
- **India: likely.**
- **Iran: staff will go in April 1997; certain.**
- **Italy: discussions are continuing concerning Italy's 5 Montreux Record sites and perhaps others, for late 1997.**
- **Jordan: formal request has been received, hopeful of collaboration with UNDP; fairly definite.**
- **Spain: request has been received; very likely.**
- **Uganda: staff are awaiting official request; possible for August.**

52) Tim Jones remarked that the MGP must be flexible and need not always involve long and elaborate field missions.

**AGENDA ITEM #10: Restoration and Rehabilitation of Wetlands**

53) Mr Végh introduced the report by himself and Palle Uhd Jepsen (DOC STRP 6.5) proposing a Technical Session (TS) on restoration and rehabilitation for COP7. He reported that Tom Dahl (USA)

has agreed to help with case studies and with the introductory general presentation on the need for restoration. Mr Végh also introduced DOCs 6.5a and 6.5b intended as discussion papers to start the members' thinking of this issue. He has collected case studies and literature on methodology, ethics, etc., and earnestly solicited additional literature to be sent or cited to him.

54) The Secretary General noted that Technical Sessions should be of interest to all the COP delegates and suggested a better balance in treatment between restoration, which is of interest mainly in the developed countries, and rehabilitation, which is of interest to both developed and developing countries. Dr Thompson and Mr Jones urged that hydrological questions should receive a priority focus in this TS and suggested that a lead person, perhaps from the Commission on Ecosystem Management, be identified to plan a component on hydrology and water regimes. It was agreed that hydrology can be highlighted within the proposed framework. There are presently no criteria for selecting case studies, and Mr Végh welcomed all suggestions.

55) There was discussion of the impact of the proposed revision of the TS format on the proposed framework. The old plan had two days of TSs and one of "host country" presentations, which were badly attended. Costa Rica agrees that host country presentations should be worked into the fabric of the whole COP and three days left for Technical Sessions. Each TS will be for a minimum half day (2 hours of presentations in plenary and 2 in regional discussions) or a whole day, as the topic requires. Further presentations could be made in the regional break-out sessions as well. Though each TS should be planned according to the nature of its topic, the logistics of the situation (particularly interpretation) require a certain pattern involving regional break-out sessions, whether or not the topic is particularly well suited to regional treatment.

56) How the results of the regional break-out sessions will be fed back into plenary debates the following day is a difficult question. It was suggested that the seven break-out rapporteurs could meet in the evening to compile a common report for the next day.

**Decision STRP 6.6: The STRP determined that hydrological questions should receive prominent attention in the proposed Technical Session at the Ramsar COP7 on restoration and rehabilitation of wetlands, that there be a careful balance between restoration and rehabilitation issues, and that additional inputs on case studies and technical literature for Mr Végh would be very welcome.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM #11: Management Planning**

57) Dr Komoda introduced his and Dr Schlatter's report (DOC STRP 6.6) and gave background on the questionnaire (DOC 6.6b) on the Ramsar Guidelines on Management Planning. Some 20 countries responded to the survey, plus 5 sites in Austria. Most CPs that had returned the questionnaire were

using the guidelines and most saw no need to amend them, but some respondents found them too complicated. It would appear that at least 20% of the CPs are using the Ramsar Guidelines. Dr Schlatter expressed doubts, however, about how fully the Guidelines were applied and suggested a review to discover whether it might be possible to simplify them further. A more thorough report will be made when all questionnaires have been received.

58) The STRP had been tasked with publishing ten best case studies, and there was considerable discussion on how to go about doing that. It was generally felt that "best cases" would be difficult to select and less useful than case studies which provide the best lessons, both good and bad, on the process of management planning, the plans themselves, and the plans' implementation, in explicit relation to their objectives and the problems they were intended to resolve. It was discovered that the Bureau's Regional Coordinators had already developed a document listing promising case study sites in their regions but it had not reached Dr Komoda.

59) Various resources were identified for development of the case studies publication that the STRP has been tasked to provide. The RIZA people of the Lelystad course in wetland management using Ramsar guidelines should be involved. Case studies should focus on lessons: good planning, good plans, and good implementation, and possibly on a good example of bad planning. There was a general sense that the best authors of such case studies would be the site managers or authors of the plans, who might well feel that it is an honor to have been selected to contribute, rather than STRP-identified consultants working from the literature. The case studies should embrace a range of wetland types, objectives, suitability for local conditions, longterm conservation of site, rather than just the scientifically brilliant.

60) The Senior Policy Advisor ventured that two versions of the management guidelines might be needed: a simplified version and a more detailed one, not a difficult exercise to accomplish.

61) It was noted that this questionnaire on management guidelines is the first real survey the Convention has carried out among the CPs, and the method might be useful in future, on other issues, if not overdone. Dr Finlayson cautioned against relying on the returns alone, when the reasons for not returning questionnaires might be even more significant. Dr Schlatter noted that few of the returned questionnaires had been carefully completed; many were nearly useless. The Chair suggested that a good means of gaining survey information would be to tie the surveys to upcoming regional meetings, with completed questionnaires specified as part of the meeting's agenda; Mr Kabii has already used this approach for the May 1997 subregional meeting in Dakar.

62) The Chair observed that this survey and its results fulfill the STRP's obligations on review of the management guidelines' efficacy, but publication of the case studies still remained to be worked out. An agreed format, a structure of questions, must be developed and made available to the

prospective authors, who, it was agreed, should be the site managers of chosen case study sites. The idea of "best practice" should be abandoned and best lessons to be learned should be the criterion for inclusion.

63) The Regional Coordinators will advise on which countries would or would not object to approaches directly to the site managers without channelling through the national authority. It was observed that the final project might be published on the Web instead of on paper. The publication's purpose will be to bring out the lessons that can be learned of good and bad practice.

**Decision STRP 6.7: The STRP requested Drs Komoda and Schlatter to draft a structure of questions for the case studies and send it to the other STRP members within two weeks. The Regional Coordinators will suggest likely case studies, and Mr Kabii and Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu will seek more during the Ramsar subregional meeting in Dakar (May 1997). By the end of June, there ought to be a structure of questions for the Senior Policy Advisor to send to the potential authors with a letter seeking cooperation. No Technical Session at Ramsar COP7 will be developed for this issue.**

**Decision STRP 6.8: It was also decided that Drs Komoda and Schlatter's review of the guidelines, based on the questionnaire survey when completed, will be reported to the next STRP, where it will be decided whether changes should be proposed to the COP.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM #12: Economic valuation of wetlands**

64) The Senior Policy Advisor recalled the STRP's previously identified need for co-option of an expert to assist in this. Dr Vorhies observed that incentive measures are becoming a more important issue than valuation itself; valuation should be seen as part of broader conservation economics questions that include incentives as well. Ramsar's forthcoming book on economic valuation will be an excellent tool. He recommended that Ramsar broaden the economic issue beyond valuation itself. Dr Vorhies volunteered to assist the Convention's contacts with a group of conservation economists, "translating" Ramsar-speak for their benefit, for example, but cannot promise too much of his own time.

**Decision STRP 6.9: The STRP gratefully accepted Dr Vorhies' offer to identify a group which might be able to assist in putting together a Technical Session for Ramsar COP7 and to act as focal point in getting that started.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM #13: Global review of wetland resources**

65) Dr Finlayson has drafted terms of reference for a consultant but has not been requested to recruit one. He noted that a lot of work on this issue is being done elsewhere as well. It was felt that

these TOR should include liaison with the Commission on Ecosystem Management's project and the Ramsar consultant's work on input to the CBD (paragraphs 72 and 76). Mr Frazier mentioned the Wetlands International Wetland Inventory and Monitoring Specialist Group as a possible candidate for this work.

**Decision STRP 6.10: The proposed terms of reference for the global review of wetland resources (Attachment 1) were adopted by consensus, subject to harmonization with other work on global review. The Bureau welcomes STRP members' advice on the person or institution to contract for this work.**

66) The Secretary General tabled a printout of the Ramsar Web site's Bulletin Board for 16 April with a headline story on this meeting in progress, and invited STRP members to indicate whether they require weekly updates of Ramsar news on the Web to be conveyed to them by fax.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #14: Strengthening links with other Conventions and agencies**

67) Mr Smith described his report on the 2nd Meeting of the CBD's SBSTTA in Montreal, September 1996 (DOC STRP 6.9), which was a different sort of meeting from STRP since there were some 230 official delegates, many with political rather than scientific backgrounds. His report contains recommendations for continued liaison; the next SBSTTA meeting is in Montreal in September 1997. The STRP tasked Mr Smith with attending that meeting if he can get travel authorization from the Canadian Wildlife Service.

68) It was noted that, although the CBD's 3rd COP, in Decision III/21, invited Ramsar to act as the lead partner in wetland activities and, specifically, requested the Executive Secretary to seek Ramsar inputs on status and trends of inland water ecosystems for its 4th COP, the Bureau has been unable so far to obtain direction from the CBD secretariat as to what sort of inputs are desired. The Senior Policy Advisor observed that the CBD's preliminary document on this subject constitutes a very preliminary draft and begins with a definition of freshwater wetlands that is not in line with the Ramsar definition.

69) The Secretary General expressed his doubts that the very broad Ramsar definition of wetlands is actually accepted and implemented by the CPs. It can be interpreted differently, which may be why the CBD is confused on that point. Perhaps the COP should consider interpreting the definition more clearly so that all the CPs mean the same thing by the term.

70) Mr Tydeman noted that, in the case of marine and coastal zones, CBD seemed to want to develop its own definition. He suggested that Ramsar take early action and ensure that no new definition of inland wetlands be developed. He urged the Bureau to produce the papers for the



SBSTTA meeting in September and thought that WWF would be able to assist. If Ramsar undertakes to do the work, and does a good job, SBSTTA will very likely follow Ramsar's lead on these issues. This does not commit Ramsar to do everything on inland water ecosystem issues; Ramsar will merely be defining the problems as seen by Ramsar and outlining how Ramsar can assist in their solution. Ramsar will thus be setting the framework for the CBD's approach to the problem. Failing that, CBD may reinvent the wheel on its own.

71) Mr Jones agreed and added that it would be a waste of energy to worry too much about the definition of wetlands; it would be preferable to get on with the work and let that speak for itself. Dr Vorhies of IUCN later reinforced the same view by noting that the CBD is rather a framework for action than a well-resourced actor itself; Ramsar faces a large window of opportunity for supplying the CBD with this part of its agenda and thus bringing its own agenda to the forefront.

72) Jean-Yves Pirot outlined the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management's project proposal "Biodiversity in inland water ecosystems" (DOC STRP 6.7e) and hoped that the STRP would endorse the proposal.

73) The Secretary General applauded the proposal and expressed the hope that Ramsar can contribute to its success, but felt that participation in this effort cannot relieve the Convention of its obligation to contribute more directly, and sooner, to the CBD's call for Ramsar's input on freshwater diversity. Drs Pirot and Vorhies agreed and urged Ramsar to use the CBD as a vehicle for the pursuit of Ramsar objectives. It was felt that care should be taken to maintain compatibility of terminology, focus, and methods among the CEM, Ramsar, and other efforts, and Dr Vorhies suggested that the Global Biodiversity Forum meetings might provide a mechanism for that.

74) There was general agreement that Ramsar should advance in this area and inform CBD of its efforts; there is no lack of good will at all in the CBD secretariat for Ramsar cooperation, and probably Ramsar initiatives would be welcomed.

**Decision STRP 6.11: The STRP determined that, though the Convention will begin development of its own inputs to CBD on biodiversity of inland water ecosystems without delay, Ramsar will also cooperate with the IUCN CEM on its project and should seek ways of bringing together the various groups working on wetland biodiversity in order to help coordinate their efforts.**

75) The following morning, Dr Finlayson reported on the advice of the working group (Finlayson, Frazier, Smith, Tydeman, Vorhies) set up to recommend terms of reference for a consultant to develop Ramsar input to the CBD on inland water biodiversity.

**Decision STRP 6.12: The STRP instructed the Bureau to seek a consultant to develop the Convention's input to CBD on biodiversity of inland water ecosystems guided by the following terms of reference:**

**Goal/Aim**

- i) provide a description of the biodiversity issues in these habitats/ecosystems**
- ii) identify priorities and actions for conserving the biodiversity in these habitats/ecosystems**
- iii) identify and describe lead role for Ramsar in coordinating and undertaking such actions/tasks**

- 1. Define/describe habitats being considered (by Ramsar) (e.g., wetland types, Inland and Human-made)**
- 2. Describe/establish status and trends of biodiversity (at habitat, species, and gene levels)**
- 3. Describe and assess human uses of biodiversity (considering values and benefits, conservation, sustainable development)**
- 4. Describe and assess extent of threats and management issues**
- 5. Identify measures and actions needed to maintain and/or restore the biodiversity**
- 6. Identify and describe role of Ramsar in undertaking and coordinating actions to maintain and/or restore . . . . (linkage to other initiatives, Conventions)**
- 7. Set priorities and recommendations to . . . . .**

**Ramsar will keep the CBD up to date and make use of any advice the secretariat wishes to provide as the work progresses, but will not delay the work by awaiting CBD input.**

76) Dr Vorhies suggested that a separate, short document might also be undertaken, containing an analysis of CBD decisions through the first three COPs and noting the activities that are relevant to Ramsar and could be "intercepted". WWF, which assisted with the "Wetlands and Biodiversity" paper for the CBD's COP3, would be delighted to follow up on that by helping on this document as well, and Mr Tydeman offered to look into that.

**AGENDA ITEM #15: Review of the Ramsar Database**

77) Mr Frazier explained the parts of his report (DOC STRP 6.15) dealing with the frequency of Ramsar "wetland types" among Ramsar sites, and detailed the current status of types of data and maps now available for these sites. Wetlands International has undertaken a project to supply the most egregious gaps by preparing draft RISs from its own research in the literature for 75 sites in nine CPs which it was felt would require assistance; 15 have been completed and submitted to the Bureau, to be sent to the CPs for approval. 30 June is seen as the deadline for this effort. The

problem of inadequate or non-existent maps, however (nearly 320 sites), is more complicated and no solution has yet been found.

**Decision STRP 6.13: The revised "Information Sheet for Ramsar Sites" and Explanatory Notes and Guidelines were approved by the STRP by consensus, subject to the introduction of a sentence related to toxic chemicals to the Guidelines (see Agenda Item 16).**

**Decision STRP 6.14: The STRP decided that the updating of Ramsar Information Sheets mandated by Resolution VI.13, article 7, should be applied to all Ramsar sites designated before 31 December 1990, in order to stay in synchronization with the 3-year rhythm of the COPs. For all sites listed before that date, new RISs should be completed, as well as for any sites which still have inadequate RISs.**

78) Concerning Ramsar's list of wetland types, or "classification", Dr Thompson cited an article which critiques the Ramsar classification for inland wetlands, which he noted was based on the Cowardin system and has no good geomorphic basis. He expressed doubt about increasing trouble with these types in coming decades, and felt that the North American, development focus would be found to be inadequate for covering wetlands globally.

79) The Senior Policy Advisor explained that the Ramsar types were not based on Cowardin but were presented to be compatible, in deference to some of the influential CPs. They were built up from experience in compiling wetland inventories in Asia and other tropical areas.

80) There was considerable discussion of whether CPs were really having a problem using the present list of types, and what would qualify as a problem. For example, though Ramsar lists only one category for coral reefs, there are at least 10 generally recognized types of coral reefs, and perhaps to be scientifically sound the Convention ought to allow for these. Ramsar might risk looking insufficiently serious to reef specialists. Imprecision in classification might also lead to management problems later. The CPs may be mislabelling some wetlands and perhaps missing others altogether because of inadequate, perhaps redundant, classification.

81) It is also necessary, however, to consider the purpose of the Ramsar list of wetland types; they are explicitly "intended to provide only a very broad framework to aid rapid identification of the main wetland habitats" and do not masquerade as a scientific classification. For the purpose of encouraging CPs, many with relatively unsophisticated administrative authorities, to list more important sites, large, simple groups of wetland types may be preferable to narrow, precise ones. Mr Letourneux has a doctoral student who is completing a thesis which compares and analyzes many classification types and will provide a copy.

82) Mr Jones noted that reopening the classification of types to change might also reopen political questions, such as whether coral reefs belong in the Ramsar portfolio at all. The Senior Policy Advisor noted that Clayton Rubec of Canada has also expressed interest in this question and would help with it.

**Decision STRP 6.15: The STRP requested Dr Thompson to review the suitability of the Ramsar list of wetland types and determine for the next STRP meeting whether there really is a problem caused by the present classification, and if so, how much change would be required to correct that problem if the STRP were to decide to propose amendments to the list. He should also address the question of what is actually wanted from the Ramsar classification, as the administrative component of its purpose may always preclude it from being the best science. Mr Frazier and Dr Finlayson can be drawn upon as resource persons in that task.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM #16: Toxic Chemicals**

83) Barbara Rutherford and Peter Hurst of WWF International addressed the STRP on recent WWF initiatives which assist in the implementation of Brisbane Recommendation 6.14 on Toxic Chemicals. Outlining her paper (DOC STRP 6.12), Ms Rutherford noted that the CPs would benefit from an evaluation of the potential impact of toxic chemicals on ecological character, best practice case studies, and guidelines on country reporting on this issue for COP7.

84) She noted that her presentation at the Brisbane COP provided background on the problem of endocrine disruptors and hormone mimicry and recommended a book by Theo Colborn, *Our Stolen Future*, published in many languages, on the need to reduce toxic chemicals even when present only in small quantities.

85) Ms Rutherford urged establishment of a liaison mechanism to keep the STRP and the Convention up-to-date on emerging science, and she sought guidance on the products required for COP7. She noted that WWF can contribute on the "community's right to know" issue (involving Toxic Chemical Inventories) and observed that there are other policy documents and guidelines that could be helpful.

86) Mr Hurst offered the illustration of Lake Nakuru (Kenya) Ramsar site, a key biodiversity site threatened by pollutants associated with urbanization, where immune system depression caused by toxins has been implicated in widespread die-offs of flamingos. A project using a PRTR (Pollutant Release and Transfer Register) has got through the pilot stage with success. Mr Hurst described PRTRs as effective and inexpensive and similar to or synonymous with Toxic Chemical Inventories. He suggested that PRTR methods could be useful to Ramsar Contracting Parties, and the Convention could in turn help to replicate this methodology in a range of CPs.

87) An important tool, he said, is the pesticide reduction programme. The OECD's Pesticide Risk Reduction Programme was begun in 1991 and called for steps in reducing risks whilst developing "optimal agricultural production." A survey was carried out in OECD and some FAO countries, and an upcoming meeting in Copenhagen will assess the extent to which these instruments are working. Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands have adopted reduction policies and have achieved notable reductions of 40% to 65% in some cases.

88) Ms Rutherford suggested that advice be offered to the CPs on these issues under the wise use rubric, perhaps with SGF support in developing this, and that progress in pesticide reduction and PRTR be incorporated into CP reporting on implementation of the Convention. She noted that many developed countries have PRTR programmes in place, and the UN Institute for Training and Research has pilot projects in Mexico, Egypt, and the Czech Republic, whilst WWF has pilot programmes in the Czech Republic and South Africa. She noted that a number of intergovernmental fora are helping to get the word out by publications and approaches to conventions, most notably IFCS (Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety), set up in response to Agenda 21 and very relevant to Ramsar.

89) Mr Hurst recounted how sectoral differences within national governments' approaches to chemical pollutants tend to lead to poor coordination, and National Profiles of the overall situation are being put forward to coordinate government and non-government inputs. He suggested that National Ramsar Committees could be encouraged to form links with these National Profile groups.

90) Although the STRP has been tasked to report to the COP on the issue of toxic chemicals, the approved STRP Work Plan had reduced the level of its priority. Nonetheless, Mr Hurst pointed out that the basic guidelines and international mechanisms for addressing this issue are in place, and the question is only how to work them into the Ramsar context. Ramsar could be especially useful in progressing these initiatives at the CP level, and WWF would be willing to offer support in that effort.

91) The STRP discussed whether these questions on toxic chemicals (or "toxic substances," which would include metals) could be incorporated into the Ramsar Information Sheets and/or their Explanatory Guidelines, under question 22. Mr Jones cautioned that Ramsar administrative authorities are not typically the persons involved with these issues, and significant interministerial consultations would be required in order to make substantive responses; the RIS text and accompanying rationale would have to be very carefully worded to avoid useless answers. Mr Hurst added that that is why the Administrative Authorities' coordination with National Profile groups would be important, and suggested that some likely countries be selected and encouraged to establish those links, perhaps with SGF assistance. Mr Smith noted that the Ramsar Guidelines on Management Planning provide a place where these issues can be addressed.

92) Ms Rutherford foresaw a twofold benefit of adding wording on toxic substances to RIS question 22: it would contribute to awareness building in itself and might also help gain needed data from countries for which there is not now much good information.

93) There was discussion about whether it would not be out of order to add toxics to RIS question 22 when sewage and other pollutants are just as significant at many sites, or if the extraordinary importance of this particular threat might not warrant special treatment. It was noted that Recommendation 6.14 itself might justify inclusion in the RIS, but it was also felt that, since the RIS should be kept simple, the Explanatory Guidelines would be the better place for including this issue. It was urged that these issues also be incorporated in other vehicles that reach farther than just Ramsar sites, as in guidelines for National Reports, and the value of case studies, especially emphasizing human use issues, was stressed.

94) Ms Rutherford volunteered WWF's lead in pulling together what is available on these issues and producing some text to be tested in a workshop. She also expressed interest in the Secretary General's proposal that Ramsar and WWF collaborate on a simple publication, building in some examples showing a range of issues and targeted to a Ramsar audience, similar to her presentation at the Brisbane COP but for a wider distribution than the Proceedings. It only remained to be seen how that publication might be financed.

**Decision STRP 6.16: The STRP welcomed WWF's offer to draft one sentence on the issue of toxic substances which will be incorporated into the RIS Explanatory Notes and Guidelines (section 22) just before the sentence beginning "Natural events". The STRP also gratefully accepted WWF's offer to take the lead role in developing a first draft of guidance for the CPs on toxic substance issues, in discussion with the Bureau, and together to explore a joint workshop.**

**Decision STRP 6.17: The STRP also invited WWF to draft the STRP's report to the Ramsar COP7 in Costa Rica, for STRP's consideration and approval, on "the status of toxic chemicals as they relate to wetlands," with advice on what CPs can do and guidelines to assist them. Ms Rutherford and Mr Hurst expressed their willingness to undertake this assignment. If a Technical Session at Ramsar COP7 should grow out of this, so much the better.**

**Decision STRP 6.18: The STRP determined that the Bureau will notify the Administrative Authorities soon that a response to Recommendation 6.14 might be incorporated into the National Reporting exercise and suggesting specific ways (making use of WWF's points) in which this question might be addressed beginning now.**

**AGENDA ITEM #17: Education and Public Awareness**

95) Dr Thompson presented his review of the Convention's Education and Public Awareness (EPA) needs and noted the desirability of targeting three audiences: 1) schools and tertiary education institutions, 2) the general public, including land owners, and 3) professionals without scientific/ecological backgrounds, such as planners, engineers, managers, politicians, and legislators. He noted the need for good examples of wetlands demonstrating ecological values and benefits, as for example the Asian flyway, which has global, national, and local components.

96) He also pointed to the need for the Convention to develop good generic material suitable for translation into specific local languages and contexts. He suggested that a "ten best sites" approach be used in EPA tools, and that the Convention identify wetland types "most at risk" and target them for EPA emphasis. He urged the development of a directory of educational materials and technical training facilities, which would have to be done in conjunction with other organizations such as WWF and Wetlands International. It would be worth exploring how the Internet might be used in this effort; e.g., a few days ago the US Geological Survey posted 50 software packages useful for hydrological analysis.

97) Dr Thompson raised the important question of how Ramsar designation is used at the national and local levels to promote wetland values and conservation. Efforts should be made to make more of this tool. He wondered whether we need to define Ramsar terminology more carefully with specific target audiences in mind. It is a good question whether there are some target audiences upon which efforts should be concentrated or ought the Convention to target them all as well as possible?

98) Mireille Katz briefed the STRP on the Bureau's recent EPA initiatives. A book on wetlands and biodiversity and another on economic valuation of wetlands are now in press, both targeted to planners and policy makers. There will be a meeting on 21 May, involving the Partner Organizations and a number of individuals, which will focus on EPA and on World Wetlands Day, which SC19 officially designated as 2 February annually. The Bureau issued a press release on WWD 1997 and has received feedback on many WWD activities in the Contracting Parties (see list on the Ramsar Web site and Ramsar Newsletter 24). The May meeting will examine what the Bureau and the Partners can do to help the CPs to celebrate WWD in 1998 and subsequent years and will initiate the planning process for a global EPA campaign. The Secretary General will be attending a meeting next week of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communications to appeal for progress in wetland education.

99) Mr O'Sullivan remarked that academic institutions are good targets for EPA efforts because, though getting into the curricula is harder than reaching the general public, the effect is greater as the students go out into the world. BirdLife International is working in this area and will be pleased to send an expert to the May meeting. He apologized for BirdLife's intermittent participation in

STRP6, because of conflicting obligations with the CMS meeting in Geneva, but expressed BirdLife's strong support for the STRP and hoped to contribute more fully to the next meeting.

100) The STRP is not required to take any action on the EPA issue, but the STRP members will be available to assist in these efforts at any time.

#### **AGENDA ITEM #18: Ramsar Small Grants Fund**

101) The Secretary General noted again the new assessment procedures, whereby Bureau staff will seek assistance from STRP members as required. The Chair asked the RCs to discuss these needs with STRP members individually in order not to take up time in plenary.

102) The Senior Policy Advisor explained the manner in which the present draft SGF assessment form (DOC STRP 6.13a) has evolved, originating with a proposal to the SC by Bill Phillips (Australia) and reviewed by the Subgroup on Finance. There was lively disagreement on the merits of omitting or retaining the item on whether the CP making each proposal was current in the payment of its dues. Mr Tydeman questioned whether weighing points against CPs which had previously received grants does not discriminate against the individuals or organizations within those CPs which have not benefited from the previous grants; the CPs endorse the proposals emanating from within their countries, but the proposals are usually not from the CPs per se. It was suggested that the Bureau ought to ask where else the project developers have sought funding, but since that has not in fact been asked it would be out of order to judge proposals on that now.

103) It was suggested that review of the literature ought to be weighted more heavily, though some participants felt that that might discriminate against CPs where these resources would normally be less available. There was a good deal of question whether the assessment form is intended to be a numerical ranking system for choosing some projects rather than others, when resources cannot cover them all, or merely a checklist of minimum requirements.

104) After further discussion of the SGF assessment form, the Chair summarized the most persistent questions as a) concern that the present scoring system does not permit comparative ratings among projects and needs revision; b) differing opinions about whether administrative or technical issues should come first; and c) inadequate emphasis on scientific questions.

105) The Secretary General explained that the subquestions were intended to guide the overall scoring by reminding evaluators of some important issues, but are not exhaustive and were not meant to be individually scored. If each of these were to earn points, all such factors would have to be listed and scored on the form, a much more complicated matter. He noted that several other



points were well noted and, later in the day, the Senior Policy Advisor tabled a revised version for the STRP's consideration.

**Decision STRP 6.19: The STRP approved the revision of the SGF assessment form (DOC 6.13a rev.), which incorporated the comments made during the discussion (Attachment 2).**

106) The Secretary General reiterated the SGF evaluation procedure: 1) each RC makes preliminary evaluations for his or her region; 2) all RCs make a quick review of all proposals from all regions; 3) the Senior Policy Advisor studies the RCs' recommendations and works out any differences; 4) The SPA and RCs determine whether external assistance would be required (from partner organizations, STRP, or regional representatives). 5) The Bureau's proposals are discussed by the Subgroup on Finance, which then 6) submits a recommended list to the SC for approval. There is presently no firm method for "sharing the cake" among regions or among types of project in the event of insufficient resources. The RCs were reminded to consult STRP members whenever they feel that would be appropriate, and STRP members may get copies of any of the full proposals if desired.

**Decision STRP 6.20: The STRP accepted with gratitude Dr Schlatter's offer to draft for the next STRP meeting a similar sort of form for evaluation of completed SGF projects.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM #19: Environmental Impact Assessment**

107) Recommendation 6.2 and Strategic Plan Op. Obj. 2.5 call for review of existing EIA guidelines, possibly with a Technical Session at COP7. The CPs would like some simple guidelines on this, like the Ramsar management guidelines. It seems they feel a need for a set of minimum requirements or standards for Ramsar use when considering wetland development. Mr Jones felt that COP6 did not call for the Convention's own guidelines, which it would be politically difficult to agree upon; case studies would be more in order.

108) It was noted that BirdLife International has been very interested in this question, and the Bureau distributed the text of David Pritchard's presentation to Technical Session A from the Brisbane Proceedings, which included a bibliography and a suggested draft set of EIA guidelines for the Convention. BirdLife, if willing to pursue this work, should be encouraged to get input from non-northern, developing countries and consider non-waterfowl and botanical issues as well.

**Decision STRP 6.21: The STRP welcomed John O'Sullivan's expression of willingness for BirdLife International to continue helping on the issue of guidelines for Environment Impact Assessment and accepted his offer to find out the extent to which his colleagues could continue to take the lead. It was noted that draft documentation would be needed in June and July in order for the SC**

**to decide in September whether the agenda of COP7 should include a proposed resolution or Technical Session. The Senior Policy Advisor will be the Bureau's focal point.**

**AGENDA ITEM #21: Future Meetings of the STRP**

**Decision STRP 6.22: The STRP fixed its next meeting, STRP7, for 24-26 February 1998 in Gland, Switzerland.**

**Concluding Remarks:**

109) Mr Kabii noted that this will be his last STRP meeting and expressed his thanks to the members for their support. The Senior Policy Advisor expressed similar gratitude on the occasion of his last STRP meeting, and the Secretary General thanked Mr Smart particularly for all of his work, both for this meeting and for all others; the next STRP meeting will see a new focal point sitting in Mike's chair, and it is to be hoped that, though Mike's irreplaceable qualities can never be matched, he or she will also serve the STRP well. The Secretary General expressed his thanks to the STRP members for work well done and said he felt reassured by the progress achieved during this meeting. The Chair thanked the members for their time, enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work, and hoped that all of the promises made during this meeting will be fulfilled by the time of the next one.

**Approval of the minutes:**

110) The minutes of the first two days were approved during the meeting, subject to amendments noted in the meeting and to editorial polishing. The STRP authorized the Chair to approve the third day's minutes on its behalf.

Rapporteur: Dwight Peck.