

Summary of the Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

The 7th Meeting of the STRP was held in Gland, Switzerland, 22-23 April 1997. The minutes of the meeting have been rearranged from strictly chronological order to the order of the agenda items. This is a summary, also available in French and Spanish, of the full minutes of the meeting.

Participants:

MEMBERS	INVITED EXPERTS
Africa: Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu, Ghana (chair)	Antonio Carlos Diegues, Brazil
Asia: Makoto Komoda, Japan	Bronwen Golder, WWF
Alternate: Chaman Lal Trisal, India	Rick van Dam, Australia
Eastern Europe: Mihály Végh, Hungary	(EWS workshop only)
Neotropics: Roberto Schlatter, Chile	Donald Baird, United Kingdom
Alternate: Peter Bacon, Trinidad +Tobago	Douglas Holdway, United Kingdom
North America: Mauricio Cervantes Abrego,	
Mexico	SECRETARIAT
Oceania: Keith Thompson, New Zealand	Bill Phillips, Deputy Secretary General
Alternate: Max Finlayson, Australia	Montserrat Carbonell, R.C. for Neotropics
W. Europe: François Letourneux, France	Rebecca D'Cruz, R.C. for Asia
	Tim Jones, Regional Coordinator for Europe
PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS	Anada Tiéga, R.C. for Africa
BirdLife International: John O'Sullivan	Dwight Peck, rapporteur
BirdLife International: David Pritchard	Annette Pavlic, Small Grants Fund

IUCN: Jean-Yves Pirot	Jamshed Kazi, Intern for Asia
Wetlands International - AEME: Scott Frazier	Maryse Mahy, Intern for Europe
Wetlands International: Nick Davidson	Raquel Siguenza, Intern for the Neotropics
WWF International: Elizabeth Salter, UK	Ahoua Traore, Intern for Africa
<u>Photographs of the STRP7 participants and the reception afterward</u>	

AGENDA ITEM #1: Adoption of the agenda

AGENDA ITEM #2: Introduction to the work of the 7th STRP

After a brief discussion of the present role of the Ramsar Convention in the global water debate, it was indicated that the STRP7 meeting must determine what Draft Decisions will be required for the SC meeting in October, to be finalized by the end of August.

AGENDA ITEM #3: Restoration and Rehabilitation of Wetlands

Following a presentation of the work since STRP6 on this issue, discussion ensued about what outputs will be required for COP7 (including a Draft Decision, guidelines and principles on R/R, case studies, and methodologies) and how they can most efficiently be produced. It was suggested that a Scheme be made showing the relations between R/R and other wise use concerns (e.g., ecological character, management planning, monitoring procedures, economic valuation, etc.).

Decision STRP 7.1: The Panel requested that Mr Végh and the Bureau take the lead in preparing a more detailed Draft Decision on restoration and rehabilitation which takes into account the meeting's remarks and incorporates cross-references to illustrate the position of R/R within the system of other Ramsar tools – to be completed in first draft by 31 May for discussion at the Riga Pan-European Meeting (3-6 June), with later drafts to be discussed at other Regional Meetings if possible. The Annex to the Decision should use Mr Végh's agenda paper as an introduction, incorporate further input from the Restoration Specialist Group on methods and approaches, and include lists of information sources, databases, and addresses, perhaps with creation of a Web page of links – to be completed by the end of August. For the case studies, a standard format and selection criteria should be developed by the Bureau, with help from the STRP and the Wetlands International Specialist Group, which will also be asked to clarify definitions –

to be completed by November 1998. The Scheme or Flowchart of relationships among Ramsar tools should be developed by the Bureau.

AGENDA ITEM #4: Ecological Character of Wetlands

The Panel received a report on the experts' workshop on Early Warning Systems for Change in the Ecological Character of Wetlands, which was held on the two days prior to STRP7. The workshop's conclusions chiefly concerned revisions called for in the agenda paper and continued debate on the definitions of "ecological character" and "change in ecological character". After discussion of EWS and Wetland Risk Assessment, the STRP heard a report on a study of the adequacy of the existing Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for providing baseline data for monitoring change in ecological character; this concluded that, although adequate for its intended purpose, the RIS is unsuitable for providing baseline data for detecting changes in ecological character.

Decision STRP 7.2: It was agreed that the idea of using the RIS to gather baseline monitoring data should be abandoned. The notion of ecological character has evolved and should be seen as part of the management planning process rather than as Database-related.

Decision STRP 7.3: After extensive discussions, the STRP determined to recommend the following definitions to the Standing Committee:

"Ecological Character: The sum of the biological, physical, and chemical components of the wetland ecosystem, and their interactions which maintain the wetland and its products, functions, and attributes."

"Change in Ecological Character: The impairment or imbalance in any biological, physical, or chemical components of the ecosystem, or in their interactions which maintain the wetland and its products, functions, and attributes."

Decision STRP 7.4: The STRP requested Max Finlayson and his institution to take the lead in developing a technical document on the use of monitoring data in making management decisions, for presentation to COP7 as an info document. A Draft Decision will also be prepared with assistance from the Bureau.

AGENDA ITEM #5: Management Planning Guidelines

The STRP received the conclusions of both the first survey and the follow-up questionnaire on the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines. It was concluded that the MPG remain relevant but that

there is a need to elaborate them with additional guidance in light of issues raised in the follow-up questionnaire. The meeting moved further toward the view that case studies on various issues should be merged into one compendium, and support was increasing for a Scheme showing interlinks amongst all the Convention's tools, one that would be capable of showing COP7 how all the Convention's fundamental building blocks work together.

Decision STRP 7.5: The STRP agreed to prepare a brief report for the Standing Committee on the findings of the two questionnaires on the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines and delegated drafting this to Drs Komoda and Schlatter by the end of August. By the same deadline, the Bureau and Drs Komoda and Schlatter will prepare a Draft Decision for COP7 which will create links with other Ramsar issues and recommend retaining the current MPG, with the adoption of an annex to the Draft Decision which will provide additional guidance based on issues identified in the follow-up questionnaire; a first draft will be circulated to the STRP for comment. The annex will take the form of a "lessons learned" paper and provide guidelines for implementing key aspects of the MPG, and experts (such as Mike Alexander) will be invited to assist. The draft annex should be circulated for comment to selected respondents to the follow-up questionnaire and finalized by the end of August. Concerning the requested case studies, the Bureau should review all the calls for case studies emerging from COP6 and the Strategic Plan and identify existing case studies that illustrate a number of wise use concepts. This combined set of case studies will be prepared by the end of 1998 and presented to COP7 as an information document.

AGENDA ITEM #6: Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance

The STRP received the Standing Committee's request that the question of new Criteria be reopened, especially with regard to human uses and cultural values and benefits. After considerable discussion of the merits of the issue, including comments by two invited experts, the Panel concluded that human use values should be addressed in the context of the Wise Use Principles and the Management Planning Guidelines, and that the Criteria for Identification should remain based on natural science values.

Decision STRP 7.6: The STRP expressed the desire not to spend any more time in discussion of new criteria based on human uses of wetlands, preferring to focus on a serious look at wise use concepts. The STRP requested Bronwen Golder to present a written summary of her valuable presentation before the end of the week (appendix I).

Following up on call from STRP6 and SC20 for a reorganization of the existing Criteria into two broad categories, the Panel discussed amendments to the Bureau's proposed new wording of the

criteria based on 1) representativeness or uniqueness, and 2) biodiversity, with subsets on species, waterbirds, and fish. The Panel felt that there will be no time to consider the inclusion of other taxonomic groups before COP7, and also called for improved Guidelines to be drafted by a working group.

Decision STRP 7.7: The STRP decided to recommend to the SC the wording of the reorganized Criteria as provided by the drafting subcommittee (appendix II) and determined that a Working Group will draft new Guidelines which will include good definitions and a glossary, a note on endemism, and full cross-references to other tools and issues within the Convention. The Working Group on Criteria Guidelines will consist of Peter Bacon, Bill Phillips, Scott Frazier, and Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, and will ask Mike Acreman to participate especially on hydrological issues; the Group will work by correspondence and will circulate a first draft to the STRP for comment, with a final version ready for the SC by 31 August.

AGENDA ITEM #7: Strengthening Links with other Conventions

The Bureau provided background on the Bureau's cooperation with the CBD on inland water ecosystems and described the Bureau's Proposed Joint Work Plan outlining relevant activities (under way or planned soon), which has been issued as CBD COP4 Info Document #8.

AGENDA ITEM #8: Global Review of Wetland Resources

The Global Review project, funded in part by the UK and implemented by Wetlands International under contract from the Ramsar Convention, is intended to discover how much wetland there is and what state it is in, which entails identifying what information there is, where it is, and how good it is. Progress reports on relevant databases will be due soon. A draft report will be prepared for the IUCN Conference in Dakar, November 1998, then to the Bureau, then to COP7.

AGENDA ITEM #9: Toxic Chemicals

WWF briefed the Panel on current thinking about the threats of endocrine disrupters and other toxics and promised to fulfill the promise made at STRP6 to provide a Draft Decision and background report.

Decision STRP 7.8: The STRP formally acknowledged the work of the late Barbara Rutherford, who contributed valuable input to the STRP in the past, and expressed its sympathy to her family and friends. The STRP requested WWF to provide its background report and Draft Decision to the Bureau by the end of June, for circulation to the STRP for

comments before finalization by the end of August. Ms Salter signified her willingness to meet that deadline.

AGENDA ITEM #10: Economic Valuation of Wetlands

The Bureau reported on planning for a COP7 Technical Session on tools for assessing and recognizing wetland values, and the Panel provided guidance on avoiding a restrictive focus on purely monetary measurements of value.

AGENDA ITEM #11: Environmental Impact Assessment

The Panel welcomed Mr Pritchard's involvement with the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) and discussed ways in which cooperation with IAIA could benefit the Convention.

AGENDA ITEM #12: Ramsar Small Grants Fund

The STRP reviewed proposed forms for progress and final reports for SGF projects and discussed ways in which recipients might be induced to report more reliably. The present situation of the SGF for next year was reported.

AGENDA ITEM #13: Review of the Ramsar Database

The Panel heard Wetland International's report on the present state of the Ramsar Database and its planned products and reviewed the UK's position paper calling for changes in the Ramsar Information Sheet.

Decision STRP 7.9: The STRP determined that the Ramsar Information Sheet is satisfactory for its principal purpose at present (see Decision STRP 7.2). Noting the views of the UK, however, it was felt that the next STRP may wish to revisit the issue once the views of other CPs are known.

The STRP discussed the adequacy of the Ramsar Classification of Wetland Types, relative to its purposes, in light of a number of expressions of dissatisfaction with its scientific accuracy. Reference was made to the published work of the Semeniuks (Australia), which explicitly considers improved classification of inland and coastal wetlands in comparison with the Ramsar system.

Decision STRP 7.10: The STRP determined that the Ramsar Classification System serves the purposes for which it was created, but noted that there are other classifications in

existence. The Panel urged the Bureau to draw attention to the work of the Semeniuks and keep in contact with them. If necessary, a second look will be taken at the Ramsar System at a later date to see whether modification is required. The STRP asked Messrs Thompson and Frazier to work together to see if a glossary can be provided.

AGENDA ITEM #14: Education and Public Awareness

The Panel heard the Bureau's report that a consultant has not yet been found to assist in developing a Ramsar communications strategy for discussion at COP7 and promised to forward suggestions.

AGENDA ITEM #15: The Montreux Record and Management Guidance Procedure

The Bureau's Regional Coordinators reported to the Panel on the progress made in executing the Management Guidance Procedure missions recommended by STRP6.

AGENDA ITEM #16: Any Other Business

The STRP members were invited to assist in the process of securing nominations for the next STRP to be chosen at COP7, and received a report on the progress of the Involving Local and Indigenous People project.

AGENDA ITEM #17: Next Meeting

Decision STRP 7.11: It was agreed that the present meeting's minutes will be circulated to participants in draft form next week, with comments required within a week after that. It was also agreed that no more meetings will be needed before the next Standing Committee, since outstanding issues and required documents can be dealt with by correspondence.

AGENDA ITEM #18: Closing Remarks

Ms Ntiamo-Baidu sincerely thanked the STRP members for their support over the years and congratulated them on having got through their full agenda. Mr Phillips on behalf of the Bureau thanked the members for their expert guidance and particularly thanked Ms Ntiamo-Baidu for guiding the STRP process so ably.