

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

1. In a note dated 26 June 1978 and addressed to the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), in performance of its Bureau duties according to Article 8 of the Convention, asked for the opinion of the Parties on the desirability of organizing a Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl.
2. The responses to this note were in favour of holding such a Conference and the Government of the Republic of Italy offered to host it. This proposal was gratefully accepted.
3. The Conference was held in Cagliari, Italy from 24-29 November 1980.

PARTICIPATION

4. Delegations from the following States, Contracting Parties to the Convention, participated in the Conference: Bulgaria; Denmark; Finland; German Democratic Republic; Germany, Federal Republic of; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Italy; Japan; Jordan; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Poland; Senegal; South Africa; Sweden; Switzerland; Tunisia; United Kingdom. Of the other States which are Contracting Parties, Iran and Pakistan had indicated their intention of participating, but were unable to do so, while Australia, Portugal and USSR apologized for being unable to attend.
5. Delegations of the following States, not Contracting Parties to the Convention, participated in the Conference as observers: Algeria; Canada; Chile; France; Guatemala; India; Ireland; Rwanda; Thailand; United States of America. Of the other States which are not Contracting Parties, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nicaragua, Upper Volta and Zaire had indicated the intention of participating, but were unable to do so, while apologies for absence were received from: Argentina; Bahamas; Burma; Egypt; Guyana; Kuwait; Madagascar; Malawi; Malta; Saudi Arabia; Seychelles; Singapore; Surinam; Tonga; Tuvalu; United Arab Emirates; Western Samoa.
6. The following international governmental organizations were represented: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well the Council of Europe and the Commission of the European Communities. Apologies for absence were received from the following international governmental organizations: Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and Organization of American States (OAS).
7. The following international non-governmental organizations were represented: International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP); International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC); International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN); International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB); World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Agenda item 1 - Opening of the Conference

8. The Conference was declared open by Ambassador N. Falchi, President of the Conference.

9. Professor B. Scarpa, Mayor of Cagliari, welcomed the delegates.

10. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Italy, Ambassador N. Falchi emphasized the importance of the Conference and recalled the actions taken in Italy for the conservation of wetlands.

11. Dr. F. Mannoni, "As sessor" for the Environment in the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, reviewed the status of wetlands in that region.

Agenda item 2 - Statements by Representatives of UNEP, UNESCO, IUCN, IWRB

12. The Representatives of UNEP, UNESCO, IUCN and IWRB expressed the views of these organizations on the Conference and mentioned activities which were relevant to the theme of the Conference.

13. The Conference participants observed one minute's silence in memory of the victims of the very serious earthquake which struck southern Italy the day before the opening of the Conference.

Agenda item 3 - Appointment of Credentials Committee

14. Messrs. R. Adams (New Zealand) and A. Chelini (Italy) were elected to this Committee, with Mr. Veit Koester (Denmark) as Chairman.

Agenda item 4 - Report of the Credentials Committee

15. The Committee reported that 21 of the 28 Contracting Parties were present at the Conference. The Committee reported on the approach it had taken when considering the question of credentials, taking account inter alia of the general agreement by the Conference to proceed, as far as possible, on a basis of consensus. The Committee noted that 20 of the 21 Parties attending had already presented their credentials, and that the remaining Contracting Party had indicated its intention to regulate the question of credentials as soon as possible. The Conference took note of the Report of the Committee, agreeing at the same time upon the approach taken by the Committee, and adopted its conclusions. The Chairman emphasized the need, in the future, for each delegation to present, at the opening of the Conference, credentials in line with the requirements of an international conference.

Agenda item 5 - Adoption of the Agenda

16. The Agenda was adopted as it appears in Annex I of the present report.

Agenda item 6 - Adoption of the Rules of Procedure

17. The Rules of Procedure, as set out in document CONF/2, were adopted with the deletion, at the end of the footnote referring to Article 1, of the words "at least four months before the conference" so as to allow full participation of States which had recently deposited their instruments of accession or ratification.

Agenda item 7 - Election of the Vice-Chairmen

18. Messrs. S. Bel Hadj Kacem (Tunisia) and E. Rutschke (German Democratic Republic) were unanimously elected Vice-Chairmen. Mr. H.J.C. Koster (Netherlands) was appointed

Rapporteur.

Agenda item 8 - Review of the Implementation of the Convention

19. The Secretariat introduced documents CONF/3 and CONF/4 and indicated that the numerous national reports received after the preparation of document CONF/3 would be covered in an addendum to this document.

20. Several delegations emphasized that the geographical and ecological coverage were insufficient, and that the best way to improve the situation was to increase the number of Contracting Parties. The delegation of Senegal emphasized the importance of obtaining further ratifications or accessions from among African States.

21. The delegation of UNESCO announced that Portugal had just deposited its instrument of ratification. The Canadian delegation said Canada had deposited its instrument of accession. The Irish delegation said Ireland had signed the Convention subject to ratification and hoped to ratify before Christmas. The delegations of Chile and India announced they hoped their countries would shortly deposit their instruments of accession or ratification, while the delegation of Algeria said its country was studying the possibility of ratification. The French delegation said France attached great importance to the Convention. France had not yet been able to ratify the Convention, but was already concerned with wetland conservation.

22. The Norwegian delegation said many important Arctic wetlands were already protected, though not designated for the List because of difficulties with selection criteria. If appropriate criteria could be adopted, Norway would designate more sites. The New Zealand delegation said several additional reserves could be proposed if the present Conference gave guidance on criteria.

23. The Netherlands delegation submitted a report to the Conference on the development of, and threats to, Oostvaardersplassen and announced that designation of two tidal areas - the whole Dutch Wadden Sea and the Eastern Scheldt - was to be expected soon. The Danish delegation stated a total conservation plan for the sea territory of the Danish part of the Wadden Sea should be ready by next year. A plan for the land areas would then be drawn up, and the site would be designated. The United Kingdom delegation said a large number of sites were currently being studied for designation. The delegation of Bulgaria announced that Bulgaria had recently decided to designate two further wetlands, Atanasovsko Lake and Durankulash marshes. The Japanese delegation indicated Japan had designated one site as a first measure and intended to add further sites. The French, Finnish and Irish delegations regretted the small number of peatlands listed. In this context, it was pointed out that a major blanket bog of international importance, Blar nam Faoileag (Caithness in Scotland), was under immediate threat of destruction. It was further pointed out that peatlands, a refuge for a very special fauna and flora, were under even greater threat owing to the energy crisis. Wet meadows were identified as another wetland type under particular threat.

24. The United Kingdom delegation felt sites could not be designated for the List unless their future was reasonably secure. The Icelandic delegation said Iceland was not ready to designate sites unless the lengthy process of creating nature reserves had been completed. The Danish delegation said the Danish planning system and the relevant environmental legislation allowed protection of wetlands, enabling designation for the List without them being granted reserve status; for this reason, though 6000 sq. km of the sea and land territory of Denmark had been designated, only 6% of designated sites were specially protected according to the Conservation of Nature and Hunting Acts. The total land area of Denmark was 45000 sq. km. The delegation of Chile emphasized that sites to be proposed by

developing countries should be legally protected.

25. The Greek delegation indicated that its national report included maps of designated wetlands and that exact delimitation of sites was being undertaken. Far from being of little practical value, as stated in document CONF/4 para. 42, designation had been effective at Mitrikou: a project to reclaim the whole lake had been abandoned, and two thirds of the surrounding flooded area declared a protected zone with one third devoted to agriculture. The general articles had made it possible at Alyki Lake in northern Greece to compensate for habitat destruction due to agricultural extension in the Axios, Loudias and Aliakmon deltas, and at Visthonis Lake to have a leather factory built approximately 50 kilometres away within an industrial zone. The delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany confirmed that while suggestions for reclamation of Leybucht had existed there was no further likelihood of them being carried out, and that a major part of the Dollart had been protected by creation of a nature reserve. The Italian delegation indicated that their Ramsar designation had prevented change of ecological character at Burano and Valle Cavanata. The Italian delegation suggested that change might be monitored by aerial, perhaps infra-red, photography and that such documentation could be a useful addition to information provided on sites. Some delegations expressed doubts about the practicality of these suggestions. The Swedish delegation explained that the changes designated at wetlands mentioned in document CONF/4 para 65 had not occurred, but might result from alterations in land-use, now under discussion; their designated status had been effective in opposing these alterations. The delegation of the German Democratic Republic indicated that designation under the Ramsar Convention had been effective in protecting wildfowl stocks in artificial fishponds. The boundaries of the Darss wetland had been changed and now included the autumn migration site for cranes and geese nesting in Scandinavia.

26. The positive influence of the Convention in the conservation of wetlands of national importance was recognized by the Conference; delegations of Senegal and Tunisia emphasized the Convention's importance for developing countries, and the need for training programmes in these countries.

27. Several delegations expressed their disagreement with the suggestion in document CONF/4 para. 81, that short term financial gain was accounted more important than long term ecological impact, but recognized the importance of reconciling ecological considerations with socio-economic priorities. The Tunisian delegation presented further information on the 15 Tunisian wetlands figuring in the Directory of West Palearctic Wetlands and announced that a decree establishing a National Park at Ichkeul should be signed in the near future.

28. The delegation of Greece expressed the wish that data collected by foreign scientists visiting wetlands in one of the Contracting Parties should be made available as soon as possible to the relevant authorities of the Contracting Party in question.

29. The WWF representative drew attention to the large scale development projects now affecting most river basins and major wetlands in the tropics. In many cases wetland conservation and management were not merely compatible with development but would enhance it. However, most current development planning did not take account of wetland conservation values. Since the future existence of more than half of world's wetlands depended on these projects, inclusion of wetland Conservation and management in development planning for the tropics was the most urgent challenge facing the Convention. There was wide support for the WWF proposal that governments, development and conservation agencies should jointly review major projects in regional gatherings and that IUCN and IWRB should contact UN agencies with a view to organizing such gatherings.

30. After a detailed discussion on criteria for the selection of wetlands of international importance, the Conference established a working group to examine document INF/1 in the light of the observations made. A revision of the criteria proposed in document INF/1 para. 57 was prepared by this group and appears, as amended by the Conference, in Annex II.

31. The working group also considered guidelines for the selection of wetlands of international importance as they appear in document INF/1 para. 59. In doing so the group also referred to the draft "Criteria and guidelines for the selection, establishment and management of Mediterranean marine and coastal protected areas" discussed at the Intergovernmental Meeting on Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas, Athens, 13-17 October 1980. The group proposed that IUCN and IWRB should together draw up a new set of guidelines after the Conference. The Conference endorsed this view on the understanding that such a document would be of a purely advisory nature.

Agenda item 9 - Strengthening of the Convention

32. The Secretariat introduced document CONF/5. A number of delegations emphasized the high quality of this document and of the presentation.

33. The majority of delegations felt that only a limited revision of the Convention could be envisaged at this stage. It appeared that it was necessary to proceed as soon as possible with the essential changes, namely, the establishment of authentic or official versions of the text in several languages and the introduction of a procedure for amendments which would allow for other desirable changes.

34. A working group was established to prepare specific proposals which, after discussion in plenary, were included in the Recommendations of the Conference.

35. The possibilities of modification were examined point by point. The majority of delegations felt that a general revision of the Convention was not opportune at this time as it could have more negative than positive effects, especially with regard to the number of Contracting Parties and the number of wetlands listed.

36. The need for a permanent secretariat was recognized by all delegations. Specific proposals on this subject, prepared by a working group and revised by the Conference, are included in the Recommendations.

37. Referring to the relationship between the Ramsar Convention and other international agreements, the representative of the Council of Europe recalled the aims of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (signed in Berne in September 1979) and indicated that the Council was ready to cooperate, within the limit of its geographical confines and means, in further promoting and implementing the Ramsar Convention. The representative of the Commission of the European Communities mentioned the activities of Community relevant to the Ramsar Convention.

Agenda item 10 - Recommendations of the Conference

38. The Conference adopted the Recommendations which appear Annex III of this report.

Agenda item 11 - Convening of Subsequent Conferences

39. The conclusions of the Conference on this item are contained in Recommendation 1.9 in Annex III of this report.

Agenda item 12 - Adoption of the Report of the Conference

40. The Conference adopted its report on 28 November 1980.