

**Agenda item 12**

**Review of COP10 and progress with preparations for COP11**

**Action requested:** The Standing Committee is invited to review this brief report and provide its advice as appropriate on the preparations for COP11.

**Introduction**

1. Following the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10) in November 2008, the Secretariat staff engaged in a “lessons learnt” exercise, both to provide an internal aide memoire for future COPs and to identify matters that could be improved for COP11 by amendments to the Secretariat’s planning and to the arrangements agreed with the future host country. The Secretariat seizes this opportunity to renew its thanks to the Republic of Korea for all the efforts that were made to make COP10 a success. This review is a positive and constructive attempt to contribute to the vigor and productivity of future COPs, and consequently, to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The word “review”, therefore, shall take a positive connotation here – the results of the review are meant to help the host of COP11 and the Ramsar Secretariat in their joint efforts to prepare a successful COP 11.
2. After a brief planning session, CEPA Programme Officer Sandra Hails supervised a process whereby staff members contributed their comments and recommendations, and these were compiled into a 12-page collection of such observations called “Debriefing COP10”. The staff were able to comment on and amend successive drafts of this paper, but at no time were the points discussed as a group, and there was no attempt to reach agreement on the validity or relative priority of the points. Thus the “Debriefing” paper is useful only to the Secretariat as a general aide memoire, but it has provided a valuable source for the redrafting of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding to be agreed with the host country of COP11.
3. Many of the points made by the staff members are passing observations, sometimes on matters of very limited importance, but there are some that the Standing Committee may find useful to reflect upon, and there are others which are being integrated into the proposed Memorandum of Understanding.
4. The proposed MOU between the Secretariat and the host country will be circulated directly to the members of the Standing Committee with the agenda papers for its 40<sup>th</sup> meeting, but it is not being placed on the public Web site for download, given the confidential nature of some parts of the arrangements.

**Overall assessment**

5. Nearly all staff members were in agreement that in general Ramsar COP10 was extremely successful. It was felt that the Korean authorities did a very good job throughout the pre-COP preparations, though there are a few points for improvement for which provision should be made in the next MOU. Similarly it was felt that in general the Secretariat's pre-COP preparations were successful, though there again some issues were identified for which solutions should be put in place for COP11.
6. Staff members generally felt that COP10 successfully produced most of the outcomes that had been expected and that significant progress was made for the Convention in that regard. The on-site organization and logistics, both by the host authorities and by the Secretariat, were of a high order, and the COP participants seem to have been very pleased with the results in general and most of all with the hospitality and charming friendliness of the Korean hosts and citizens of Changwon.
7. What follows is a selection of observations drawn from the "Debriefing COP10" paper and presented under the headings used in that document.

### **Management of the COP process**

8. Whilst the host country authorities were generous and friendly in their relations with the Secretariat, during the pre-COP preparations there were several issues in which communications were not prompt or clear and potential problems were left unresolved for some time. There were a number of helpful people and agencies in the host country working on the COP preparations, and some in clarity resulted just from that. Examples would include the management of the accommodations, some of the venue room bookings, firm arrangements for obtaining visas, amongst others. The designation of a single logistics focal point from the Korean side during the COP itself was very much more efficient, and the Secretariat staff have identified a number of ways in which the proposed MOU can be improved, most notably by stipulating a clear and detailed pre-COP timeline and requiring one or a very limited number of official focal points for pre-COP communications.
9. One point that was underlined was that the secondment by Korea of Ms Jiyoun Hwang to the Secretariat some months in advance of the COP helped our communications with the host country authorities enormously, and this practice should be encouraged in the future.
10. Staff members also suggested a number of improvements in the Secretariat's planning process, amongst them weekly internal updates on progress and issues throughout the pre-COP months and clearer demarcation of individual staff members' responsibilities. Some staff members have prepared several COPs already and may have underestimated the amount of orientation needed by newer colleagues. Several members felt that the Secretariat's daily meetings during the COP could have been better organized, and a few wished that better media coverage during the COP could have been arranged.
11. One valuable suggestion was that a "who's who" staff sheet should be made available to participants by various means during the COP, describing the COP roles and responsibilities of our regular and additional Secretariat staff, in order to facilitate the delegates' contacts with the Secretariat.

### **Staffing and staff facilities**

12. In the preparations for COP10, the administrative staff felt extremely overloaded at various times, especially in the areas of pre-registration and some parts of logistics. It was suggested that a more flexible and adaptive method of apportioning responsibilities within the Secretariat should be helpful, but that most importantly an additional clerical staff member should be added for four to six months prior to the COP to help absorb these radical variations in workload.
13. On the positive side, it was agreed that the four seconded skilled staff members from IUCN and WWF were vitally helpful during the COP.
14. The staff working facilities seemed to be adequate in general, but there were severe problems with the noise levels in the working areas. It had been understood that a security person was to have covered the entrance to the staff area, using a mobile telephone to clear visitors who wished to see particular staff members, but that did not happen. Some staff offices were used in effect as delegates' lounges, meeting rooms, and social areas for regional participants, with a constant coming and going of unknown persons. This required complicated arrangements for locking working offices when stepping out, with only one key for each office, and it created extraordinary noise levels for the adjacent documentation and translation workrooms, where concentrated work was going on day and night. One potential solution would be for the MOU to insist upon providing a permanent meeting room for each of the four regional groups, where their delegates could gather formally and informally, and insisting upon public inaccessibility for the staff working areas.
15. It was noted that the MOU should specify that the office used by the Finance Officer must not be dismantled until a full day later than the others, as much of the necessary financial wrap-up can only be completed after the COP. The noise from disassembling the facilities should also be kept to a minimum near the Finance Officer's room on that day.
16. It was observed that the Internet was not accessible from the work rooms for short periods of an hour or so several times each day, presumably because of limited bandwidth in the building, and this caused some inconvenience for the documentation team which was posting COP documents on the Web as soon as they were ready.
17. The function of coordinating press activities should not have been assigned to the CEPA Programme Officer during the COP – the sense was that if we seriously want to provide press coordination from the Secretariat, there should be one person, skilled in that field of work and deeply knowledgeable about Ramsar, devoted to that function throughout the COP.
18. It was agreed that there should be more room for Secretariat members in the plenary hall, and that a working office for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) should be allocated.
19. The hotel accommodations for staff members were perfect, very close to the venue and close to the shopping mall services as well.

#### **Delegate sponsorship / accommodations / visas**

20. There was some doubt about why the fundraising for sponsored delegates was relatively so unsuccessful for this COP, but it was agreed that much thought and perhaps new methods

must be marshaled for COP11. The pre-COP regional meetings were 100% funded for eligible delegates by voluntary contributions, whereas only 41% of the needs for the COP were able to be met. This was identified as a very serious problem that urgently requires a solution.

21. It was felt that the transportation system provided by the Korean hosts for delegates during the COP worked very well indeed, but that it would have been much better if more of the delegates had been sited closer to the venue, for many reasons. In addition, there were some awkward problems about the quality and location of some of the hotels in particular, and it was felt that a more consistent quality of rooms should be sought. Finally, the host's handling of accommodations booking for sponsored delegates had a rocky start, and it is clear that in the MOU much more explicit and firm arrangements should be made with the hosts about who will be booking accommodations, when, and how.
22. Finally, there was a great deal of concern about the delays in making arrangements for obtaining visas, and the staff responses emphasized that much firmer commitments should be made by the host country from the beginning of the COP preparations that the Foreign Office is prepared to be helpful in preparing a convenient process.

### **Registration**

23. The online pre-registration process worked well most of the time, but during the last few weeks an enormous number of Korean participants registered at the last moment, creating an overload for the staff. It was suggested that the pre-registration period should be closed somewhat earlier before the COP than heretofore and additional existing staff be asked to help out with the work.
24. There were occasional glitches in the online registration database, which was designed three COPs ago and tweaked a bit for each subsequent COP, and it has been suggested that financial provisions should be made for developing an entirely new database for the next COP.
25. There were serious problems with the production of participants' badges during the COP on-site registration, and Ramsar staff have incorporated some text into the draft MOU to address those issues.

### **Meetings: regional and contact groups, side and supporting events**

26. It was felt that the regional meetings at the COP were extremely valuable, but that there were some problems, chiefly to do with insufficient time, overlap of some room assignments, and lack of availability of microphones in some rooms. One particular problem was that after room allocations had been agreed, the host country authorities arranged several parallel meetings outside of the COP processes that used some of those agreed rooms; this put some pressure on rooms for COP-related meetings and may have attracted participation from some delegates who should have been more involved in COP debates.
27. There was a feeling among many staff that more time should be set aside for regional meetings during the COP, and similarly that contact group meetings require more time than was available. It was suggested that each of the regions should have a dedicated room

throughout the COP for its meetings and caucusing, in order to avoid the complications of changes in scheduling and overlap. Ideally, interpretation should be made available for contact groups, as needed, although the limitations in this regard were acknowledged.

28. There was some feeling that the side events should be more closely tied to the current achievements of the Convention and Secretariat, whereas others felt that the diversity of issues brought forward by the different side event organizers lent a value of its own. There seemed to be about the right number of parallel side events for the number of participants.

### **Room allocation and equipment**

29. The staff strongly congratulated the host country on the plenary facilities, both the logistics of set-up and the provision of wireless Internet access, electric power for the laptop computers, mobile telephones for the staff, and the organization of volunteers to assist the proceedings. All of these worked very well and should be considered essential for all future meetings of the COP.
30. As mentioned above, there was some considerable inconvenience in the number and allocation of rooms for regional meetings and contact groups. This should be provided for more carefully in the next MOU.

### **Documentation/Translation/Interpretation**

31. Ramsar staff felt that the documentation and translation functions and the Document Distribution Centre both worked extremely well, and that the interpreters once again performed as well as we have come to expect from them. Most of the two translation teams were very experienced in the work of Ramsar COPs, and the volunteer documentation assistant, Ms Rachel Brown, was an invaluable help at the peak times.
32. The method of posting revised documents in English, French, and Spanish onto the Ramsar Web site as soon as they were ready worked very well and seems to have been much appreciated by the participants, and it allowed the Secretariat to photocopy much smaller numbers of hardcopies. It was noted, however, that this method depends entirely upon there being Internet access and electricity available for all participants throughout the venue at all times.
33. The assistance of STRP members in incorporating document revisions and the close collaboration of the Deputy Secretary General, the head of the Documentation Team, and the Rapporteur throughout the COP and subsequently helped to make the process quite efficient and accurate.

### **Credentials**

34. The secretary of the Credentials Committee has proposed a number of suggestions for the future that will help to iron out some of the confusion that arose in the handling of credentials supplied to the Secretariat before and during the COP. The Committee has also proposed a number of changes to the Rules of Procedure which will be brought before the next COP at the appropriate time.

### **Opening ceremony / Ramsar Award**

35. The staff felt that the rehearsal for the Award ceremony was invaluable and should be repeated. There were some dissatisfactions with the opening ceremony itself, but it was felt that the present text of the MOU is adequate if there is more communication with the host from an earlier stage. It was felt that the Danone intervention was rather too long relative to the other parts of the opening ceremony.

### **Overall assessment of the COP process**

36. It was noted that all of the business of the COP was delivered within the allotted time, but it went down to the wire. Suggestions included providing more time for a first reading of the draft Resolutions and trying to discuss the potentially contentious draft Resolutions early in that process in order to leave more time for negotiation in contact groups. Some felt that the next COP should be lengthened by one day, to deal with contentious issues less desperately and perhaps to include an enhanced agenda of parallel technical issues, but that no consideration should be given to the suggestion that the Documents Day/Study Tour Day should be eliminated in favor of additional plenaries, since that day is essential for the Secretariat to prepare the final versions of the draft Resolutions for adoption.
37. As mentioned above, there has been some interest in increasing the time for regional meetings and thus perhaps extending the duration of the COP, but there was also some feeling that doing so might lead to regional caucusing coming to be seen as taking priority over the consensus building for completing the global business of the Convention.

### **Scientific and technical issues at the COP**

38. The role of the STRP members during the COP was beneficial in number of ways, most notably in helping with revised draft Resolutions and hosting technical briefing sessions that were well attended. There was a suggestion that the number of technical briefings by STRP members should be increased, at times at which all COP participants could attend.

### **Ministerial segment**

39. Staff members noted a number of potential good points to holding a ministerial segment in association with the COP, but they pointed out a number of dangers as well, perhaps most notably that sponsored delegate funding might have to be used to enable ministers to attend in place of more knowledgeable members of the Administrative Authorities.
40. No recommendation was made on this issue, but it was noted that, in any case, the Secretariat does not have the capacity to organize the participation in such a segment of ministers and their entourages and that would have to be clearly the responsibility of the host country authorities.

### **COP agenda and sequence**

41. Here it was only noted that the numbering of draft Resolution should be done with greater awareness of the time potentially needed for contact group negotiations, so that more time-consuming texts could be sequenced earlier in the process.

42. There was also a suggestion that an easy evaluation form should be provided to participants of the next COP in order to gain their impressions for future reference.
43. And finally it was noted that the MOU should stress that the host country should provide its financial contributions to the Secretariat only in Swiss francs.

### **Preparations for COP11**

42. As mentioned above, a proposed Memorandum of Understanding is being prepared by the Secretariat and will be provided to the Standing Committee for advice and approval. Following that, the Secretary General will visit Romania, whose generous offer to host the next meeting was gratefully welcomed by COP10, and discuss the MOU with the relevant authorities. In the meantime, the 40<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee will have established its Subgroup on COP11 (agenda item 6), which will oversee the progress from that point onward.