

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

19th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 29 October - 1 November 1996

Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Present

MEMBERS

Africa

Senegal (S. Sylla)
Alternate: Uganda (P. Mafabi)

Asia

Malaysia (D. Danabalan, M. Menon)
Alternate: Islamic Rep. of Iran (B. Riazi, M. Roozebehani, M. Salamat)

Eastern Europe

Hungary (L. Lakos, Chair)

Neotropics

Uruguay (R. Cal Johnston, Vice Chair)
Alternate: Panama (E. Guerra-Quijano)

North America

USA (M. Jones, G. Cintron)
Alternate: Canada (C. Rubec)

Oceania

Papua New Guinea (S. Antiko)

Western Europe

Germany (F. Dieterich)
Alternate: France (F. Lerat)

Host of 1996 Conference

Australia (B. Phillips)

Host of 1999 Conference

Costa Rica (M. Peters, M. Solano)

Apologies: Russian Federation, New Zealand

PERMANENT OBSERVERS

Switzerland (A. Antonietti)
Netherlands (G. Boere)
IUCN (M. Ejigu, J.-Y. Pirot; C. Durocher, G. Alvarez)
Wetlands International (Y. Chew, R. Jaensch, M. Moser)

OBSERVERS

Contracting Parties

Austria (R. Turk)
China (X. Tong)
France (C. Lefebvre)
Indonesia (D. Wahab)
Japan (K. Kawase)
Trinidad and Tobago (N. Nathai-Gyan)
UK (L. Smith, D. Stroud)

Invited NGOs

BirdLife International (J. O'Sullivan, D. Pritchard)
WWF International (B. Gujja, C. Phillips)

STRP

Y. Ntiamao-Baidu, Ghana, Chair

SECRETARIAT

Secretary General (D. Blasco)
Senior Policy Advisor (M. Smart)
Technical Officers (M. Carbonell, T. Jones, T. Kabii, S. Kobayashi)
Support (J. Tucker, A. Pavlic)
Rapporteur (D. Peck)

Standing Committee Minutes

First Day, 29 October 1996

Agenda Item 1

Opening and Welcoming Remarks

Hungary (Chair)

1. welcomed the participants and suggested procedures for the meeting.

Mersie Ejigu (Assistant Director General of IUCN)

2. welcomed the participants and outlined results of the World Conservation Congress in Montreal which bear upon Ramsar concerns: a) a new triennial programme, including support for Ramsar, b) confirmation of the ecosystem approach, c) a mandate for the Commission on Ecosystem Management, chaired by E. Maltby, and d) increased emphasis on water issues. He pledged continued IUCN support for the work of the Convention.

The Netherlands

3. described its commitment to wetland conservation and outreach and looks forward to serving as Permanent Observer as the new host country for Wetlands International.

Agenda Item 2

Adoption of the Agenda

4. The agenda was adopted by consensus, including the Chair's motion to switch items 7 and 8.

Agenda Item 3

Admission of Observers

5. Observers were admitted by consensus.

Agenda Item 4

Statements by the Partner Organizations

Wetlands International (M. Moser)

6. apologized for the absence of Scott Frazier, the Ramsar Database Officer, who was unable to attend because of unavoidable family circumstances. He emphasized the need for the STRP to take care that consideration is given to how to measure the effectiveness of the Convention, the quality of Ramsar and other wetland sites, not just the number. He pledged the assistance of the newly-integrated Wetlands International and its resources.

WWF International (B. Gujja)

7. described WWF efforts in support of the Convention's objectives.

BirdLife International (D. Pritchard)

8. approved of the positive decisions being made in furtherance of Convention aims but cautioned against spreading the Parties' and the Bureau's resources too thin with too many of them. He urged a more proactive use of the Montreux Record and the Management Guidance Procedure. BirdLife is working on ways in which its national bodies can assist, and is studying the possibility of an MoU with the Bureau.

Agenda Item 5

Report of the Secretary General

The Secretary General

9. summarized his report on the status of the Convention and the activities of the Bureau since the Brisbane Meeting, as conveyed in DOC. SC19-2.

Germany

10. requested more information on the MoU with the CMS, and observed that there is now a German translation of the Ramsar *Manual*, available free of charge.

The Secretary General

11. replied that a draft of an MoU with the Bonn Convention has been made but hasn't yet been finalized because of lack of time. The German *Manual* is excellent, but the English one already requires an updating. The new format (in bundled leaflets, as in the French translation) allows for convenient revision of outdated parts. There has also been a recent expression of interest by Friends of the Earth International in becoming a formal partner organization to the Convention. MoUs, either renewals or new ones, are in contemplation with Wetlands International, WWF, and CMS, and one has already been concluded with the CBD.

The Chair

12. thanked Germany and Switzerland for publishing the German and French translations of the *Ramsar Manual* respectively.

Panama

13. noted that relations with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (DOC. SC19-2, ¶55) should be cultivated; Bureau staff should inquire about participating in the CCED. In February, a seminar on the Convention to Combat Desertification will take place in Panama and will also be a good opportunity to improve the working relationships with that Convention. The Secretary General agreed to attend if possible.

Iran

14. encouraged closer relations and an MoU with the Climate Change (SC19-2, ¶56) and Desertification Conventions. The question was raised about why the new TO for Asia will not begin until January.

The Chair and the Secretary General

15. noted that the gap is unfortunate but unavoidable. They both expressed formal regrets that Ms D'Cruz was prevented by work commitments from being present at this meeting, despite the Convention's willingness to pay her travel costs.

Papua New Guinea

16. took the opportunity to thank Australia once again for sponsoring the participation of South Pacific delegates in the Brisbane COP, which has increased awareness of Ramsar in the region.

Agenda Item 6

Convention Finances

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

17. reported on the Subgroup's marathon meeting the previous day and commended the work of all the Regional Representatives (Australia, Germany, Islamic Rep. of Iran, Uganda, USA, and Uruguay), and the IUCN Finance Dept. and the Bureau. He noted the USA's concern about its inability to contribute as much in its voluntary contributions as hoped, because of constraints from the US Congress, which he hoped would ease next year. He commended the Secretary General for belt-tightening, especially when the Subgroup required that the 1994 travel to Australia in preparation for the COP (SFR 49,000) be charged to 1996. He reported on the Subgroup's conclusions, as reflected in the amended documents provided, and noted its recommendation to approve the African Regional Representative's request for SFR 8,200 to acquire equipment needed to communicate within his region. The projected surplus of SFR 5,418 would go to the Reserve Fund.

Malaysia

18. wondered whether the very high SFR 49,000 travel expense had been checked out. **The Secretary General** reported that it was approved by his predecessor and involved two people visiting five cities in Australia; all expense justifications were duly approved by IUCN Finance.

The USA

19. suggested that, in retrospect, it was imprudent to have undertaken the travel with no clear source of funding in view. Further clarification was sought on several points, such as the contingency line, the Reserve Fund, and the meaning of the line on depreciation of equipment. The IUCN Finance team made explanations.

Switzerland

20. offered the welcome news that the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency will contribute SFR 15,000 to help to cover delegate travel for this meeting.

Panama and Wetlands International

21. initiated explanation of arrears and when they are considered bad debts, with explanation of the accruals accounting system and of the Bureau's efforts to follow up on unpaid dues. **The Chair** noted that sooner or later, perhaps at the next COP, the Convention will need to deal with the problem of unpaid dues. Further explanation of the Conference's intent on the Reserve Fund was provided.

- **Decision 19.1: The Subgroup on Finance's report on the 1996 projected budget, incorporating DOC. SC19-3 as revised, was accepted by consensus (Attachment I).**

Small Grants Fund Proposals

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

22. explained the revised DOC. SC19-4 on **Small Grants Fund proposals**, with former categories 1 and 2 merged because new funding removed the need for stepped priorities. He noted other special points and corrections, as seen in the revised documents. It is assumed that the surplus funding for this year will go towards next year. The Bureau will begin follow-up on Group 2 (conditional) proposals as early as next week.

Malaysia

23. applauded the emphasis on training but urged review of the way the Convention approaches training on a country-by-country basis, instead of working with NGOs to "train trainers" on a regional or subregional basis. **Senegal** echoed this priority for projects involving training, especially for Africa.

- **Decision 19.2: The proposed projects in new Groups 1 and 2, totalling just over SFR 500,000, were approved for funding. The Bureau will follow up on the Group 2 conditional proposals and use its judgment about disbursement of funds (Attachment II).**

The USA

24. reminded the meeting that the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US State Department and the Ramsar Bureau are working together on the Wetlands for the Future initiative (with US\$ 500,000 already committed and 250,000 to come). Mr Cintron and the Technical Officer for the Neotropics are working with Neotropical countries to develop more good projects.

Modus Operandi for the Small Grants Fund

The USA

25. concerning the **Modus Operandi for the Small Grants Fund**, applauded Australia's proposed scoring system, which will bring more objectivity and has become the center of thinking about the way forward. He explained the Subgroup's conclusions that the SC should continue in the decision-making role on SGF proposals and outlined a recommended timetable to develop revised scoring system (Bureau draft to Subgroup 30.11.96, replies by 28.2.97, new draft to STRP for 15.4.97 meeting, into practice by May for 1997 proposals or recirculated to Subgroup with any major changes). The USA outlined the spirited debate over which other bodies should be asked to review project proposals; the Subgroup majority favored the view that the Bureau should use its discretion in approaching STRP, NGOs, experts from other secretariats, etc., as it deems useful, whereas Uruguay feels that STRP should always be included, and Iran feels that other secretariats should never be included.

Uruguay

26. explained the reasons for its insistence that STRP members should always be included in the SGF review process, citing conclusions of the regional meeting in Panama in June 1995. This would not preclude evaluation by other bodies as well, when appropriate.

The USA

27. reported that the Subgroup majority recommended the entire unrevised DOC. SC19-5 except for the new page headed Proposed Revisions to SC19-5. Uruguay and Iran represent minority views.

Canada

28. queried the success rate of preparatory projects. The Bureau's Programme Assistant for the SGF reported that of the four countries for which preparatory assistance has been given, two have since acceded, a success rate of 50%, and preparations for site designation are about the same. It was generally felt that preparations for accession should only be funded when there has been a demonstration of the political will to join, something stronger than the conservation authority's good intentions. Acknowledging WWF's doubts about raising further obstacles to funding support, some sign of political will should still be required.

- **Decision 19.3: It was proposed and accepted that the text of the Guidelines should restrict preparatory funding to “eligible countries that have signalled their intention to accede but are not yet Parties [etc.]”.**

The Chair of the STRP (Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu)

29. recommended that the STRP be involved in developing the scoring system from the beginning. This was immediately accepted, and the timetable will be amended to add “with the assistance of the STRP” to step one of the process. She further urged that appropriate regional STRP members be involved in project evaluation, though workload precludes involvement of the whole Panel. Uruguay agreed that not all STRP members need see all proposals, only the regional members; they can decide what other input might be required.
30. There was further discussion of the role of the SC Regional Representatives, who in the revised plan will see all proposals in the end anyway, and of whether the STRP needs to see all proposals or only those on which they can be helpful. **Germany** cautioned that such bureaucratic requirements might impede the Bureau’s efficiency.

The Chair of the STRP

31. felt that involvement of the STRP would relieve the Bureau TOs from blame for declined projects, and urged a regular process of evaluation by a TO, an STRP member, and one other chosen by the Bureau. BirdLife International and WWF International expressed their willingness to assist in evaluations, when appropriate. **Canada** also noted that the SC is really talking about only 3 or 4 STRP members, from regions with eligible Parties, bearing the burden of this evaluation process.
32. Concerning involvement of other secretariats when appropriate, cooperation with the CBD would be seen as a good sign by the donor community. **Iran**, however, feared that this would make Ramsar subordinate to the others, unless the evaluation assistance were truly bidirectional. The **Chair** proposed deleting the phrase on involvement of secretariats, etc.
33. Involvement of the other secretariats after approval, as observed by **Wetlands International, Uruguay**, and the **Chair**, would still be desirable, in order to develop synergies and avoid duplication of funding, though this should be an informal process. **Iran** felt that this must not be a unilateral process.
34. Consensus was reached on requiring evaluation by an STRP member and excluding evaluation by other convention secretariats, with these various points to be included in the minutes but not in the Guidelines themselves.

- **Decision 19.4: The following amendments were approved for the relevant portions of DOC. SC19-5, which was then approved in its entirety:**

III) SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL OF PROJECTS	
A)	[no change]
B)	The Bureau shall make a technical and feasibility analysis of all projects received, on the basis of a scoring system adopted by the Subgroup on Finance with the assistance of the STRP. In this process, the Bureau will invite views from appropriate members and/or alternate members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and may seek advice of the Regional Representatives and/or Alternates of the Standing Committee. When appropriate, the Bureau may also seek the opinion of the NGO partners (BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International, and WWF International).
C)	The Bureau will submit its recommendations for funding to the consideration of the Subgroup on Finance at its regular annual meeting, which in turn shall submit its recommendations to the Standing Committee for final decision.
D)	[deleted]
E)	[no change, becomes (D)]

.....

IV. AGREEMENT TO BE CONCLUDED WITH AGENCIES RECEIVING SGF ASSISTANCE

- C) The Bureau, in agreement with the Administrative Authority of the recipient country, shall be allowed to visit the project site [no change hereafter]

Fundraising for the Small Grants Fund

The Secretary General

35. sought guidance on fundraising for the SGF. Sweden's Sida has recently donated SFR 350,000 for this year's SGF, and Switzerland has just confirmed its commitment of SFR 300,000. The news is excellent for this year, but may be exceptional. The Committee is rightly grateful for all voluntary contributions from the conservation agencies, but the real money lies with the development assistance agencies. The Bureau needs help from the Administrative Authorities in approaching the right agencies in each Party, and welcomes advice. WWF has suggested including a Ramsar "tax" (which might be the wrong word) at paid-access sites to help the SGF.

The Netherlands

36. will double its contribution as of 1997 but agreed with **Malaysia** that the Bureau could submit similar proposals packaged together for funding consideration by bilateral agencies. The Netherlands' development assistance agency can't legally donate unrestricted funds to the SGF but would welcome larger project proposals. **Australia**, too, can fund projects but can't donate unrestricted funds. The Bureau should identify projects, especially training programmes at regional and subregional levels, and present them as fundable projects. The Bureau could present them to development agencies as having already merited the Ramsar seal of approval. **Germany**, too, noted its similar situation.

The Secretary General

37. asserted that the next COP may need to study the issue of funding for the SGF. If the Convention can't identify reliable continuing sources of funding, avoiding the agony of seeking small sums and of refusing good projects every year, perhaps the SGF ought to be given up. Funding programmes should have clearly identified sources of funds.

WWF (Cassandra Phillips)

38. noted that WWF has always supported the SGF and supports the idea of a "tax" on paid-access sites. Often in developing countries there are two levels of admissions, so that locals aren't charged as much. **Uganda** cited Sheraton hotels' "green fund" and other successful fundraising ideas, and **Germany** and the **USA** suggested trying to get at courts' legal judgments or fines against conservation malefactors. In the USA, admission fees collected by the Federal Government cannot be used offsite; nonetheless, the USA pointed out that, if ever there was a year to try to build upon success, this is the year to try to make the SGF a real force, and the SC should create a group to work with the Secretary General on new ideas.

Costa Rica

39. observed that the Convention hasn't successfully sold wetlands to the public yet, and cannot yet hope for significant cooperation or donations. Ramsar must first use public awareness campaigns to raise consciousness, as is mandated in the Strategic Plan.

Panama

40. insisted that fundraising is a hard job and requires a fulltime professional. The **Chair** explained that funding for a Development Assistance Officer was not included in the Brisbane budget, thus the Secretary General's appeal for help on this issue now. **Austria** suggested contracting an outside agency to work on this for a percentage, and noted that information materials on successful past projects would be the best promotion for future ones.

- **Decision 19.5: The Subgroup on Finance was designated to work with the Secretary General on fundraising for the Small Grants Fund.**

DOC. SC19-6 on the status of other projects

41. The USA and the Netherlands commended this document as an excellent and overdue overview of Ramsar projects and invited the Bureau to continue updating it.

Update on Brisbane pledges

42. **Australia, Canada,** and the **Netherlands** contributed news of their impressive recent efforts to fulfill their Brisbane pledges. **Switzerland** noted that its first idea concerning its pledge was to put it into a special budget managed by the Standing Committee, even to replenish the SGF or to finance other activities for implementing the Strategic Plan. In principle, the payment shall be made over six years, beginning in 1997, but could be fulfilled earlier. Switzerland is prepared to agree with other rules for the 25th anniversary pledges fund. **The Chair** expressed gratitude for Switzerland's continuing generosity.

The Chair

43. stipulated that the agenda item on the **Reserve Fund** does not require action at this time; the Subgroup will stay tuned on that, and the Committee need only note the submitted paper.

Agenda Item 8 (substituted for 7)

1997 Bureau Business Plan and Budget

The Secretary General

44. explained that DOC. SC19-8 is the same as tabled in Brisbane but including only Bureau actions for 1997 instead of for the whole triennium. Person/hour costs have been omitted. The TOs have their individual work plans and are ready to consult with Regional Representatives for advice on these.

Costa Rica

45. noted that during the World Ozone Conference, to be held in San José, Costa Rica, 16-27 November, on 25 November there will be a meeting of the Central American ministers with EU ministers re: the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, and Ramsar should seek a way to participate in that ministers' meeting.

Wetlands International (R. Jaensch)

46. commended the Bureau for its emphasis on regional issues, especially concerning Small Island States in actions 3.3.3. and 1.1.1., and offered to assist on the special insert mentioned.

Uganda, Australia, and the Chair

47. found DOC. SC19-8 deficient in various ways: it includes assumptions which are not spelled out; it omits high, medium, and low prioritizations as in the past; it is generally hard to read. The **Secretary General** tried to avoid re-interpreting the Strategic Plan's mandates with a new structure, and thus included Bureau planning into the SP's own structure; all tasks cited here are the priority ones. **Australia** noted that earlier SC doubts about transparency of Bureau resource allocation no longer exist, but there is still a need to see easily what resources must be allocated to which actions, and where individual staff are being directed. **Uganda** expressed the need for a clearer and more detailed timetable as well.

Wetlands International

48. suggested using a landscape orientation which would move left-to-right from the general to the specific: objectives ê Bureau actions ê timetable ê staff responsibility ê follow-up on status.

The Chair of the STRP

49. urged a 1-2 page summary with a table of target outputs, budget figures where feasible, target dates, goals, staff assignments, and whether achieved.

The Secretary General

50. reiterated his problem with the difficulty of trying to cost indeterminate factors, like Bureau overheads on postage, photocopies, group meeting time, etc. The situation is different for projects, but this would be very difficult for core priorities.

The Chair

51. insisted that the SC needs to see specific assignments and tasks, target dates where possible, and costing where possible, though that is indeed often difficult; not requiring detail to the last penny.

Germany

52. expressed sympathy with the Secretary General's doubts. Consider the Waddensee Secretariat after six or seven years of detailed planning – the three countries ceased the exercise, because it took more work to produce the work plan than to effect it. Whatever plan the SC sees, it will only be paper; the Committee needs to be clear on staff responsibilities and major objectives, but in a small bureau there is no good purpose in niggling. Germany recommended skipping this.

The Chair

53. expressed confidence that the secretariat does what it is supposed to do and that monitoring its performance is not a problem, but insisted on requesting another paper, without budget figures, not too much work, but including more costing, staff, and timetable detail than has been presented.

Malaysia

54. urged that Wetlands International and others advise the Secretary General on an outline for a format of what the new paper will look like, for consideration before the end of this week of meetings.

BirdLife International

55. suggested that, whatever the format, the next annual report follow the same work programme format so that results can more easily be compared.

- **Decision 19.6: The Bureau should develop a new formulation of its work plan over the coming weeks, and report to the Standing Committee during this meeting on roughly what form it will take.**

Proposed Budget for 1997

The USA (Chair of the Finance Subgroup)

56. submitted the Subgroup's recommendation on the 1997 budget (DOC. SC19.9 as revised); it is the Brisbane budget, with a few modifications. The Subgroup studied IUCN's costs, generally considered fair value and less than if the Bureau were out on its own, though this will be considered in any relocation study.

- **Decision 19.7: the 1997 Budget paper, as revised, was approved (Attachment III).**

Germany

57. expressed its gratitude to the Secretary General and Bureau staff for the financial situation the Convention now has. They have done a very good job to bring the Convention to financial health, a remarkable improvement. This should be noted in the minutes.

Islamic Republic of Iran

58. proposed a motion on words of appreciation, which was adopted:

- **Decision 19.8: "Acknowledging the extensive and successful efforts made by the Bureau, and in particular the Secretary General, for bringing the Ramsar budget to a position of a surplus balance, the Standing Committee at its 19th Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Secretary General and his colleagues in the Ramsar Bureau."**

Agenda Item 9

Communications Activities: Evian Proposal

C. Lefebvre (Conservatoire du Littoral France)

59. referred to DOC. SC19-10 outlining the proposal for a feasibility study for outposted Bureau activity in Evian, France. He described the Conservatoire and outlined the history of talks with the Secretary General about this proposal. In effect, the Conservatoire proposes a 5-year experimental programme in support of the Ramsar communications component – it would put at Ramsar's disposal its lakeside building in Evian to house a programme which would coordinate publications, new communications and training tools, special training for decision-makers, support for special action in francophone countries, etc. Evian would pay to transform and outfit the building. The plan would double Ramsar's current ca.SFR 300,000 communications budget. They are now seeking private donors for another 300,000 and would come back to the Standing Committee to report.

Canada

60. noted that this would be 10% of Ramsar's budget. The **Secretary General** explained that two present staff members plus operational costs for them, plus the current budget for the *Newsletter* and publications, cover this. The assumption is that money now used here would be used there, and France would match it and therefore double it. What is sought is a green light for further discussions.
61. **Canada** was concerned about endorsing such a project before addressing the broader question of a study of Bureau relocation, a later agenda item. No relocation decision can be taken before 1999, or move before 2000; the Secretary General suggested proceeding with this project and amending later if necessary. M Lefebvre doesn't see this as tied to relocation; his group is pleased to offer a SFR 4 million house for the Convention's use and invited the Standing Committee to visit.
62. **Canada** expressed the wish to avoid assumptions that might prejudice the other agenda item and urged that the Committee not be rushed on Evian until after the relocation discussion. This is a great offer, much gratitude is in order, but the broader issue is to avoid spinning off parts of the Bureau before that agenda item comes up. It was not universally felt that the Evian proposal would move part of the Bureau to a foreign country – "From Paris, Evian is in Switzerland" – but rather that it was an outposting of some activities that would double Ramsar capacities in those areas. It would still be an integral part of the Bureau under the SG's authority.
- **Decision 19.9: With thanks to M. Lefebvre and the Conservatoire, the decision on authorizing further study of this proposal should await discussion of the agenda item on relocation of the Bureau [see Decision 19.27 below].**

Second Day, 30 October 1996

Agenda Item 9

Review of Communications Activities (continued): World Wetland Week

- Indonesia**
63. noted that it will hold **World Wetland Week** in 1997 to help the government raise awareness of the Convention. Indonesia has set up a National Committee and wishes for updates from the Bureau on similar planning elsewhere. It proposed setting up a small group to study the matter and report back. **Switzerland** suggested joining wetland awareness programmes with water quality issues, which will become more important in the next century and could be coordinated with the World Water Council, for example.
- Wetlands International (M. Moser)**
64. noted that the Week is only one tool Parties can use in the broader context of awareness raising. The small group should study the broader question as well, and Wetlands International – Asia Pacific, which has experience in this area, is ready to help.
- Papua New Guinea**
65. observed that the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has designated 1997 as the Year of the Coral Reef, promoting awareness of the wise use of coral, and will develop ideas on inland wetland areas as well.
- Malaysia**
66. distinguished between raising awareness on the national and the international levels. For the latter, he urged a Wetland Day, not a Week; all Contracting Parties would do something on one day. But within nations there are many tools. Awareness of the Convention should stand on its own and not necessarily be linked to broader water issues.
- Australia**
67. supported global Ramsar activities. Australia has already begun firm planning for that week of early February, including ministerial involvement – they hope to unveil plans, name sites, announce new projects. They could add international components as well. Australia agreed that such activities should be integrated with wider awareness raising.
- The Chair**
68. named Costa Rica, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Wetlands International to a study group to report back to the Committee.

69. **Malaysia**, later in the day, reported on that group's conclusions and made the following proposal:

- **Decision 19.10:** It was agreed that 2 February should be recognized as World Wetland Day. Contracting Parties may have week-long celebrations if they wish, but each CP is urged to celebrate 2 February as World Wetland Day, effective from 1997. The Bureau, time and resources permitting, should designate 2 February as World Wetland Day with the United Nations. The awareness materials for the above celebration should address the benefits of wetlands for the human population. Wetlands International's Specialist Group on Education and Public Awareness will take the lead (in consultation with other partners), by the end of November 1996, in advising the Bureau on potential activities that could be undertaken on 2 February 1997, and the Bureau will in turn advise the Parties. Further, in line with Resolution VI.19, Wetlands International's Specialist Group on EPA will prepare a broader paper on Education/Public Awareness needs for enhancing wetland conservation for the next Standing Committee meeting. A study group composed of Costa Rica, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Wetlands International was formed to report back to the Standing Committee.

The USA

70. noted that February is not a very good choice for many northern hemisphere nations, but **Malaysia** argued that no one date will be optimum worldwide and 2 February has the symbolic value of the Convention's first signing; Parties may also celebrate in other ways whenever they may wish to.

Agenda Item 7

Personnel and Administrative Matters

The Secretary General

71. reviewed the proposed revision of the Bureau's organization and the consolidation of two part-time posts into one full-time technical assistant or two interns for PTG support; he described the proposal for a Western European secondment, the recent staff performance evaluations, including his own, and the suggested change in the titles of the Technical Officers. He noted that he would be willing to continue his service for a renewed 1997-2000 period if wished.

The Chair

72. paid formal tribute to the loyal work of Erika Luthi and Maureen Wittig over many years. She expressed the Committee's gratitude for their service and wished them every success in their future endeavors.

Proposed Secondment of an Assistant to the Technical Officer for Europe

Germany

73. described efforts following on from the Secretary General's suggestion of **seconded assistance for the Technical Officer for Europe**, who must cover both Eastern and Western Europe. He contacted all Western European Parties and received replies from nine. All agreed that it would be helpful but all felt that some of the problems to be solved by this means are true of other regions as well and that charging this position to a project rather than the core budget might not be a good idea for the long run. If the position should be so helpful as to become necessary, it might later be proposed for core funding, and thus should be a matter for the whole COP to consider, not just the Standing Committee. The position would be highly desirable, but only if it were fully agreed to by the other regions and if there were an understanding that it would always be funded outside of the core budget. Germany inquired whether the other regions, which have so many desperate needs of their own, would feel that this arrangement would be unfair. He does not doubt the European TO's heavy burden and would like to see this solution work if possible.

The Secretary General

74. observed that help for the European region would serve other regions as well, since Western Europe has some of the world's largest development assistance mechanisms, with which the Bureau must continue to forge strong relations in order to benefit Parties in many regions. The Bureau is also increasingly sought out for advice and participation on important matters, and refusing for lack of staff resources would work against the wish to be taken seriously as a major Convention.

Hungary

75. considered that Eastern Europe could not contribute materially to this position but would support the idea in principle.

Senegal

76. doubted that this would maintain an equitable balance of Bureau resources amongst the regions, but if the Secretary General considered it necessary, Senegal would be in favor.

Uruguay

77. found the proposal to be acceptable for the Neotropical region.

The USA

78. observed that all of the Technical Officers are overworked; if a creative solution can be found to get more help for the European officer, funded from within Europe, that would be acceptable as long as it did not exclude creative solutions for the other regions, too.

Australia

79. agreed with North America and saw considerable merit in using project funding to get more productivity from the Bureau. Analogously, the Oceania and Asia regions are also combined in one TO, and thus Australia provides support for Roger Jaensch from Wetlands International to serve as Oceania's focal point for Ramsar affairs, but basing him in Oceania rather than in the Bureau itself.

Switzerland

80. wondered whether the European TO's burden comes from Western Europe (which could in principle solve its needs directly) or from Eastern Europe, and whether it is better to devote additional money for a new technical assistant or, for example, for the SGF. Concerning fundraising especially with the EU, Switzerland felt that this is primarily the task of the Secretary General (and not of the TOs). Finally, could the new technical assistant not be able to reduce the burden of the different TOs wherever the needs are greatest?

Iran

81. shared Germany's doubts that this might provoke other regions to require more help as well. Asia has as much need as Europe, thus this could be unfair. Iran urged more study and joined Malaysia in formulating a new proposal.

Iran and Malaysia, later in the day,

82. argued that the proposal as written is unfair to the other regions and suggested a reworded proposal:

- **Decision 19.11: "The Standing Committee agreed to the creation of an additional technical post for the Bureau to be funded fully through voluntary contributions from the Contracting Parties in Europe for the purpose of assisting the Bureau in meeting its increased commitments, especially in programme management and resource development, in support of the implementation of the Convention. This position will also enable the Bureau to work actively with major institutions in Europe."**

The USA

83. offered a complementary proposal to the effect that an **internship programme** be initiated with the dual purpose of providing support for the Technical Officers and providing training opportunities for bright students from the regions. This might add some supervisory and training burden to the Bureau but would be worth it for the additional support. The United States proposed that it would arrange for full funding to establish an intern position to work with the TO responsible for the Neotropical region for the next three years, and could make an additional contribution to the Bureau for at least the first year of another internship to work with Technical Officers for other regions.

84. The Neotropical intern would be selected through the existing Wetlands for the Future initiative, with funding shared by that programme and an additional voluntary contribution from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Particular priority would be given to selection of interns from Costa Rica who could assist the Neotropical Technical Officer with activities related to preparations for the next COP. The US FWS can also commit to provide additional funding of US\$ 30,000 for at least the first year of an intern selected from one of the other regions; other donors are invited to make similar contributions so that there could be an intern from each region that has a preponderance of developing countries. All US FWS contributions for these internships would be counted towards the US pledge made in Brisbane, since additional contributions to the Small Grants Fund are now of a lesser priority for the short term.

Germany

85. added the stipulation that the European secondment proposal must never be moved to core funding. He doubted whether this post could be project-funded forever, but there must be a commitment never to seek core funding to continue it. Moreover, voluntary contributions for the approved post could come not only from European Contracting Parties but from any other donor countries as well.

The Chair and the Secretary General

86. welcomed agreement on the European secondment proposal, which will be pursued further, and expressed gratitude for the USA's generous suggestion on interns. Steps will be taken to materialize both of them.

Staff Performance Evaluations

Uruguay

87. maintained that the regions should have had a role in staff performance evaluations of the regional TOs. Their main task should be to help the Parties implement the Convention, especially those that most need help. Over the past few years, the Brisbane COP workload and budget limitations have diminished the TOs' ability to be present in the region to help. Uruguay is against changing the TOs' titles. **The Chair** noted that the rules say that staff deployment and evaluation are the job of the Secretary General; the CPs have a perfect right to express their views at any time but we cannot institutionalize that. **The Secretary General** agreed with Uruguay's view that the Parties' views on staff performance should be taken into account in his evaluations and would welcome all input from the Contracting Parties. This year evaluation was done in the spring in order to include the Brisbane COP, but normally it takes place in December/January.

Panama

88. expressed concern that the Standing Committee should not take over responsibilities that should be the SG's; the Committee should determine policy, not manage the Bureau. The Bureau should have its personnel policy, hopefully including more women. Evaluations should be the SG's task, but should not consume too much time (one in May, another already in December). It should also be remembered that the TOs have other responsibilities as well as their regional ones. All the regions should be better supported, especially by the governments that have the means to do so, by secondment, project funding, etc. As in the United Nations, titles are important, and neither "Technical Officer" nor "Regional Coordinator" seems fitting; the Secretary General should look for better suggestions, more in line with what the Resolutions and Recommendations actually require from the professional staff.

The Chair

89. expressed the Committee's gratitude to Dr. Satoshi Kobayashi on his departure from the Bureau after some five years and wished him success in his future career. **The Secretary General** formally thanked him both for his great service to the Convention and for being such a good colleague to work with. He noted that the new Asian Technical Officer, Rebecca d'Cruz, is a perfect combination in being both a woman and a highly qualified candidate; she would not have been hired only because she is a woman. The Bureau does seek gender balance when possible without compromising quality; for the support position now being recruited, since all but one of the Bureau's support staff is female, male applications are being encouraged.

Uganda

90. cautioned against letting a new title obscure the technical aspect of the positions. He observed that the Regional Representatives haven't much to contribute about the TOs' overall performance across their whole workplans.

The Chair

91. urged that all of these comments should be taken into account by the Secretary General. The Regional Representatives' input in staff evaluations will be welcome but not institutionalized. The Secretary General should look into new suggestions for titles for the Technical Officers; the SG and the Officers should decide that issue amongst themselves without Standing Committee intervention.

The Secretary General

92. added that the Bureau follows IUCN staff rules and policies scrupulously, but there is one anomaly. By IUCN's position ranking system, Ramsar Technical Officers are ranked at Grade 12, but because of Ramsar budget constraints they are only remunerated at the rate of Grade 11 or lower.

- The Senior Policy Advisor, Mike Smart,**
93. informed the Committee that he will be leaving the Bureau sometime during the coming year, probably about mid-year, in order to pursue the more field-based work he has long wished to do. He expressed his intention to remain active in wetland and waterfowl conservation work and hopes to be of future service to the Convention and the Parties in various capacities that may arise. He observed that he has greatly enjoyed his work with the Convention and is proud of its achievements, and thanks his colleagues in the Bureau, the Parties, and the partner organizations for their long support.

- The Chair and the Secretary General, on behalf of the Standing Committee,**
94. noted that the Convention is where it is today in large part because of Mr Smart's work. It is hoped that in one way or another his great talents and experience will continue to benefit the Convention's work in the future.

- **Decision 19.12: The Standing Committee pays tribute to the commitment and dedication of Mike Smart throughout his long service to the Ramsar Convention. The Committee expresses its thanks and high esteem for his invaluable help and effort in the recognition of wetland values, in the development of the Convention's mechanisms, and in the enhancement of wetland conservation and wise use. The Committee wishes success and good health to Mr Smart in his future activities and urges the Bureau to find ways and means to involve him in the Convention's ongoing work.**

Report of the Closed Session on Agenda Item 7.IV (Contract of the Secretary General)

95. The USA, Australia, Costa Rica, France, Iran, Uganda, and Germany focused on the excellent task Mr Blasco has undertaken since his initiation to the post of Secretary General. They noted with praise the particular openness and transparency of the budget process, Mr Blasco's willingness to present challenging ideas and new initiatives, his capacity to adapt quickly to and absorb the many complex issues facing the Bureau, and his revitalization of Bureau operations.

- **Decision 19.13: The renewal of the contract for Mr Delmar Blasco as Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention for the period 1 August 1997 to 31 July 2000 will be recommended for approval by the IUCN Director General.**

Agenda Item 10

STRP Report and Work Plan

Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu, Chairperson of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

96. introduced the STRP's report, and expressed the STRP's gratitude to the Standing Committee chairperson, the Hungarian government, Mihaly Végh, and the Canadian government for financial support, for the 5th STRP meeting in Hungary in June 1996. The primary task was to identify and prioritize the tasks mandated by the Brisbane COP, to assign tasks to individual members, and to set timetables. The Bureau had identified ten important areas but the STRP agreed that these were too many and set new priorities (see DOC. SC19-11, ¶ 10), intending to move to other items if time permits. The work plan identifies actions and focal points for each, with targets for the next COP.

Canada

97. offered background on the Ramsar classification of wetland types, which eight years ago was intended as a glossary but evolved into a classification scheme that is misleading and should be revised. Canada offered its assistance in this task.

Australia

98. congratulated the STRP on the clarity of its work plan and recommended it as a model for the Bureau's plan. He queried item ¶ 6(e) on the Bureau preparing a list of potential Montreux Record sites, since in Resolution VI.1 Montreux Record listing is the sovereign right of the Contracting Parties and there is a danger in the Bureau's promulgating its own opinions to third parties. The **Senior Policy Advisor** agreed that this wording exceeded the intention.

99. At the Chair's request, later in the meeting **Australia**, the **Chairperson of the STRP**, and the **Senior Policy Advisor**, in order to avoid the impression that the Bureau is being asked to choose sites for Montreux Record listing, offered the following revised wording for ¶ 6(e) on page 20 of the STRP work plan: "the Bureau will prepare – for circulation to the STRP – a document, based on information from the Contracting Parties, listing the sites which are currently on the Montreux Record." The same amendment cannot be made to page 11 of the STRP minutes because the original wording records what was said there.

The Chairperson of the STRP

100. in response to questions from Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda, clarified that the STRP did not draw more upon alternate members because the COP stipulated that alternates should be invited to attend only when the members cannot, and that wise use concerns were discussed in relation to the criteria.

The UK

101. noted a wide range of opinion on the Criteria for Identification and offered the UK's help. He stressed the importance of guidelines and urged their development, especially with regional focuses. He noted that ¶ 18 on page 4, that few sites have been selected by criterion 1, is a mistake; the Ramsar Database Officer has indicated that at least 75% of Ramsar sites qualify on criterion 1a alone, let alone 1b and 1c.

WWF International

102. was pleased to be invited as an observer to STRP meetings; having been instrumental in giving the STRP such a heavy workload, WWF is glad of the opportunity to help accomplish it.

The Chairperson of the STRP

103. responding to the Committee Chair's question, explained how pleased she was with the relationship between the Secretary General and the Bureau staff during the June meeting, which contributed to getting the most productivity from all staff. Other small corrections and updates based on subsequent Standing Committee decisions were suggested by the Chair and the Senior Policy Advisor. **Papua New Guinea** welcomed the references to coral reefs to be added to the Ramsar Information Sheet.

IUCN (J.-Y. Pirot)

104. noted that the recent INTECOL meeting in Perth adopted the motion that the INTECOL Wetlands Group and IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management should work closely with the STRP and vice versa, and indicated that the new Chairperson of the Commission would soon be writing to the Secretary General to formalize these working arrangements.

Canada

105. questioned whether the STRP ought really to be considering the religious and cosmological significance of wetlands (as in cluster 3, ¶ 29) instead of just the scientific issues.

The Chairperson of the STRP

106. explained the divisions of opinion on that point within the STRP itself, some against, some for, some doubtful; the STRP asked the focal point to draft ideas just to see what they might look like and will seek further guidance from the Standing Committee at the next stage, if needed. The **SC Chair** noted that it would be helpful, in this way, to be ready, as these issues might well come up as proposed resolutions at the next COP.

Malaysia

107. inquired about the relationship between the Standing Committee and the STRP, which, the Chair explained, as a subsidiary body of the Convention is answerable to the Standing Committee.

Panama

108. alluding to concerns in the STRP minutes about toxic chemicals (p. 14, ¶ 66-67) reminded the SC of the first two sessions on the convention on commercialization of toxic chemicals and pesticides, and urged that the Bureau be present at the next session since its relevance to the protection of wetlands is vital.

109. It was felt that ¶ 6(a) of the work plan (page 19) proposing that "the Bureau will increase" STRP participation on Management Guidance Procedure missions should be altered to "the Bureau will aim to increase" in light of possible financial implications in some cases.

Malaysia

110. inquired whether the Convention is really effective in saving wetlands, as there is no sense from the STRP report of whether we are halting degradation and loss of wetlands. **The Chairperson** reported that the

STRP debated that question; there are certainly many cases in which the Convention has been instrumental. **Mr Smart** noted that loss of wetlands is not stopping, which is why we are here; the proposed global review of wetlands mandated at the Brisbane COP is intended to assess the situation in that respect, and he and the STRP alternate from Oceania are working now to take advantage of the UK's offer to contribute funding for that effort. **Wetlands International** (M. Moser) outlined its efforts and plans in that regard, especially in the former Soviet Union using GIS techniques, and pointed to the Biodiversity Conservation Information System (BCIS) consortium – WCMC, Wetlands International, BirdLife International, some IUCN Commissions, and others – which is progressing well and about which he will keep the Committee informed.

- **Decision 19.14: The draft work plan of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel was approved, with the revisions noted above (Attachment IV).**

The Chair

111. congratulated Dr Ntiama-Baidu and the Panel for their excellent work.

Agenda Item 11

Review of Conservation and Wise Use Issues

The Senior Policy Advisor

112. introduced the suggestions on the role of the Standing Committee between COPs, particularly focusing on one or more themes for each in order to keep Ramsar in the news during the triennium, and sought the Committee's thoughts on the apparent evolution in the orientation of the Convention from pure nature conservation in the direction of natural resources conservation and broader water issues.

Austria

113. expressed the view that the shift in orientation has caused confusion and feared that if the Convention moves into natural resource conservation, other bodies might downgrade Ramsar in nature conservation matters. He agreed with the suggestion of stressing one or more issues and themes at SC meetings.

The Netherlands

114. expressed the wish to keep the focus on the Convention's activities on the issues in the text of the treaty, and not to broaden it unduly. **The Chair** reminded the Committee that the operative terms would seem now to be the Mission Statement adopted by the Conference of the Parties in the Strategic Plan.

Australia

115. agreed that the Convention must move in the direction laid down by the treaty text and the Strategic Plan but cautioned against going beyond that, even when being tempted in other directions. He echoed Canada's doubts about involving the Convention in cosmological/religious issues and recommended against trying to become a "world convention on water issues". Australia expressed sympathy with the idea of focusing on issues at SC meetings and recommended starting early on preparation of the main theme of the next COP.

Wetlands International (M. Moser)

116. made a presentation on the Ramsar Database and other key activities carried out for the Convention by Wetlands International. Dr Moser urged the Committee to make decisions on three questions: 1) whether there should be a new *Overview of the World's Ramsar Sites* for the next COP, 2) whether a new hard-copy *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance* should be published, and 3) what is the desired timetable for updating data on Ramsar sites.

The Secretary General

117. recommended Dr Moser's suggestion that the *Directory* be published only on diskette and on the Worldwide Web, as it would be hard to find funding for a major hard-copy publication. **Canada** noted that it uses a DocuText method of printing covers only and binding photocopied texts only as required, with higher unit costs but no inventory and waste problems. **Australia** suggested publishing the *Directory* in looseleaf format if a hard-copy version were really required, more easily updatable, with missing Ramsar Information Sheets simply left out; the Secretary General wondered whether country-by-country sets of leaflets might not work well. All agreed that diskette and Web publication should be the primary means of making the directory data available.

Uganda

118. considered that updating the *Overview* will be necessary, however, because of all the new sites, and **Wetlands International** expressed the intention to take the *Overview* further, in that case, increasing its usefulness as an

analytical tool for monitoring the Convention's effectiveness. **The Netherlands** supported the idea of an updated *Overview* and finds the global directories very valuable.

- **Decision 19.15: There should be no “telephone book” hard-copy publication of the traditional *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance* this time, but the Directory data will be made available by more flexible means. The *Overview of the World's Ramsar Sites*, however, should be updated for the next COP. Ramsar Information Sheets should be circulated in mid-1997 for updating with a one-year timetable.**

Austria

119. took the opportunity to announce the designation of a new Ramsar site, Hörfeld, a crossborder site in the provinces of Carinthia and Styria, which is remarkable for Austria and shows exemplary cooperation. Austria has tried to meet the new standards of site documentation and timed the designation for the 25th anniversary celebration. The Standing Committee congratulated Austria on the designation of this new site.

Implementation of Article 3.2

The Senior Policy Advisor

120. introduced Agenda Item 11.II.2 and sought guidance on how the Bureau should improve implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention on notification of change in ecological character of sites and Resolution VI.17 on individual sites. He described the Bureau's present practice on these matters.

Australia

121. discouraged the Bureau from suggesting to the Administrative Authorities that sites should be listed in the Montreux Record, since outside parties might see that as a failure on the part of the Administrative Authorities.

Austria

122. agreed, as this would be a sensitive issue in Austria, but also agreed with the Secretary General that the diplomacy with which such approaches are carried out would be most important. The origin of information on potential change to sites must always be clear so that the Administrative Authorities do not become defensive. **The Chair** noted that the Technical Officers, who normally know the individuals involved within their regions, can be instrumental in avoiding clashes, but in any case there should never be any secrets about the sources of information. It's doubtful, however, whether the Standing Committee should receive reports of follow-up on Resolution VI.17 matters; **Australia** urged that the Bureau should follow up but when reporting back to the Committee should do so diplomatically.

- **Decision 19.16: The Bureau should contact Contracting Parties and follow up on steps taken to address problems of change in the ecological character of sites, and should urge further necessary action and offer its assistance.**

Implementation of the Montreux Record

The Senior Policy Advisor

123. introduced the agenda item on the **Montreux Record** and sought guidance on how to prevent the Record from being seen as implying criticism of Contracting Parties, how to make its image more positive. The best way is to solicit more best-case testimonies.

Trinidad and Tobago

124. recounted the experience of Nariva Swamp, in which the Montreux Record listing focused attention at the right level to get action taken, through the idea of an “international obligation.” Also, after listing, help poured in, from experts in and out of the region, suggestions, and a Ramsar Monitoring Procedure mission in May 1995. The pressure was thus kept up, and the situation could no longer just be left to lie there; “visibility” was the key, otherwise it would have remained merely a local issue.

Austria

125. recounted the experience of the Donau-March-Auen, where some ten years ago government police and environmentalists were lined up against one another over a proposed hydroelectric power station. The government called a moratorium on the project and sought more information. The site was put on the Montreux Record in the hope of sparking initiatives. The Monitoring Procedure had a very substantial impact on the successful outcome, when Bureau staff and experts helped a great deal to focus on the

importance of the site and point to actions to be taken. The government came to see it as a special place, and the movement towards listing it as Austria's second national park reached fruition last Sunday – there is very little likelihood of degradation of the site now. It is a “fine example of the Montreux Record having helped to secure a site and improve its status.”

The UK

126. suggested that these case studies and others like them should be included in an updated *Overview*. Wetlands International concurred.

Uganda

127. expressed doubt whether the notion of removing sites from the Ramsar List when the Bureau sees insufficient action towards remedy of Montreux Record sites might be unduly threatening and punitive, and might thus discourage Parties from utilizing the Montreux Record in the first place.

The STRP Chairperson

128. agreed and felt that, if a Party recommends a site for the Record because there is a problem that must be solved, the Convention must take action to solve the problem. The site should not be removed from the Ramsar List because nothing was done.

The Secretary General

129. agreed that the Bureau should not try to put Parties on the spot, but would merely try to draw attention to the problems of the Record site and offer to help, especially via the MGP. The Bureau intends to do this regularly, but if help is offered over 5, 10, however many years and nothing at all happens, it would seem evident that nothing ever will happen. There is no sense keeping sites on the List when nothing is being done to maintain their ecological character. **The Chair** added that Parties would be required to compensate by designating new sites for those removed; in any case, only the COP could call for removal of a site from the Ramsar List, and it is better to emphasize the positive than the threats.

- **Decision 19.17: The Standing Committee decided that the Bureau should take a proactive approach in the use of the Management Guidance Procedure.**

Trinidad and Tobago

130. further urged a regular “post-visit” following up on MGP missions, helping to sustain interest in the results of the MGP and encourage movement in the direction of carrying out the MGP’s recommendations.

Third Day, 31 October 1996

Agenda Item 11.II.7

Signs at Ramsar sites

The Senior Policy Advisor

131. reviewed the need for signs at Ramsar sites identifying the Convention and observed that many Parties have requested guidance from the Bureau on the wording and design of such signs. **Canada** provided examples of recent signs used. Earlier today, Canada announced the designation of two further sites, bringing the Convention’s total to 847. Formal certificates are being prepared dated 31 October.

Canada

132. noted that its two new sites in Ontario will be launched at an official ministerial ceremony on 19 November. Canada displayed two examples of signs for information; there is no suggestion that all Parties adopt the same signs but any states wishing to do so may feel free to. One sign is for parking lots, containing explanatory text in French and English, measuring 1 meter by 2 meters, and the other is smaller, to be used merely for marking boundaries. Canada encouraged the Parties to adopt national standards on signs within their territories.

The Secretary General

133. mentioned that the Bureau is now using “Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)” to denominate the Convention, and suggests that the Parties do so as well, using “Ramsar Convention” only when space permits an explanation of what Ramsar means, lest people be mystified. One should never use RAMSAR, which suggests an acronym.

Islamic Republic of Iran

134. agreed with the suggestion that Parties use the form “Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971).”

The Chair

135. to Austria’s suggestion that the Convention design a sign to be used universally, as is the case with some other international designations, urged instead that the Parties always use the Ramsar logo and follow the suggested text to the extent that they wish to, amending it to fit their circumstances.

Malaysia

136. approved of the principle of signs and use of the Ramsar logo, agreed with the SG on the use of Convention on Wetlands instead of Ramsar Convention, and also agreed that the proposed text could so often be inappropriate that it must remain a suggestion only.

- **Decision 19.18: The Contracting Parties should endeavor to place descriptive signs at all Ramsar sites, and these signs should include the Ramsar logo, as well as the following suggested text as amended to meet particular circumstances:**

THIS SITE, COVERING XXX HECTARES, HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT FOR INCLUSION IN THE **LIST OF WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE** ESTABLISHED UNDER THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS, THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY SIGNED IN RAMSAR (IRAN) IN 1971 TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WETLAND AREAS WORLDWIDE.

The protection and management of this site is under the responsibility of: (name and address, including telephone and fax numbers, of the appropriate agency)

Variation for states with a federal structure: ON THE PROPOSAL OF (NAME OF THE STATE/ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT), THIS SITE, COVERING XXX HECTARES, HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Mediterranean Wetlands Committee

The Senior Policy Advisor

137. supplied background on the MedWet Initiative, as outlined in DOC. SC19.12.III, and urged the Committee to endorse the Bureau’s proposal that the projected **Mediterranean Wetlands Committee** be administered by the Bureau (with no implications for the core budget), so as to give the Committee the necessary legitimacy. Greece and France have offered funding support, and the Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre and the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat will play major roles in day-to-day work. The Bureau presently contributes: the Senior Policy Advisor (though much less than formerly); the Technical Officer for Europe for day-to-day activities; the MedWet Secretary providing support in a 75% project-funded position; and Thymio Papayannis as LIFE Project coordinator, the latter two funded through an EU contract. The Bureau’s role in Gland would remain supervisory but staff would also facilitate contact with Ramsar CPs and some non-members poised for accession, in four Ramsar regions.

France

138. added its voice in favor of this proposal, since the MedWet partners would benefit from the Bureau’s political coordination, as they need an international organization to provide “neutral” leadership. Ramsar gives a good name, a legitimacy, to the Committee’s action, and costs very little.

Costa Rica

139. cautioned against opening the door to a flood of other regional initiatives. Meso-America would very much like to have a similar regional initiative. **The Chair** noted that MedWet has been in progress over several years, and is supported by many Conference decisions. The structure and membership of the Committee is not for us to decide, however.

Islamic Republic of Iran

140. expressed concern that the proposal might have administrative implications and urged a change in the wording of the Action requested in SC19-12 (page 9) from “that the Committee be administered by the

Bureau” to “that the Committee be assisted by the Bureau”, and suggested that the Standing Committee be charged with reviewing this matter at its next meeting. These amendments were accepted.

Senegal

141. expressed concern that European matters seem to be coming up quite often, and wondered whether these initiatives benefit the whole Convention. **The Secretary General** noted that the Mediterranean proposal benefits the Eastern and Western European, Asian, and African regions, thus benefitting non-European member states as well. Ramsar is the key to cooperation here, seen as a neutral entity, an excellent role to be able to fulfill, with minimal costs.

- **Decisions 19.19: The Standing Committee endorsed the statement on the Bureau’s association with the proposed Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, including Iran’s amendments.**

<p style="text-align: center;">Proposal for a MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS COMMITTEE (under the aegis of the Ramsar Convention Bureau)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Character</p> <p>Advisory/Consultative, but action-oriented Non-exclusive, open to Governments, NGOs, the private sector and technical/scientific institutes Endorsed by Ramsar Standing Committee Operate through flexible project groups, established as the need arises Criteria should be established to ensure a practical and pragmatic approach to Committee membership (number and representation) and frequency of meetings.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Objective and Functions</p> <p><u>To provide guidance</u> to all interested parties, and in particular to the Ramsar Bureau and the MedWet Coordinator and Secretariat, on practical measures and actions for implementation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy, by:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">proposing international actions on Mediterranean wetland issues; providing endorsement and support, as requested, for national wetland initiatives; promoting increased financial support for the conservation and sustainable use of Mediterranean wetlands.</p>

Regional Meetings 1997-1999

The Senior Policy Advisor

142. reminded the Parties to the effect that **regional meetings** are generally considered to have been very effective in preparing for the 6th COP, but cost much time and money and made an enormous drain on Bureau resources coming one hard upon another in the run-up to Brisbane. He asked the Regional Representatives to advise the Bureau on the number, location, and timing of regional meetings desired for the present triennium, and requested that the Committee members coordinate their planning with one another and with the partner organizations in order to harmonize the scheduling.

Senegal

143. noted that Africa had only one meeting to prepare for the 6th COP and would like to be better prepared. He suggested having two meetings following three themes: 1) better preparation on project design for SGF grants; 2) more attention to special technical assistance; and 3) improved promotion of the Convention in Africa, where fewer than half of the nations are Contracting Parties. Senegal recommended that there be two meetings: one in South Africa or Zambia and another in Dakar, in early 1998, to prepare for the 7th COP and send draft recommendations to the Bureau in advance. Planning is already underway. **The Secretary General** expressed gratitude for this early planning and hoped that donor countries would assist in these activities.

Uruguay

144. reported that the 1995 regional meeting in Panama was a success, the Neotropics' first chance to prepare unified, thoughtful positions for the COP. He urged convoking one meeting for Central America and the Caribbean and another for South America, since their concerns are not the same, and perhaps a third for the entire region, and hoped that friendly countries would once again assist in funding these.

Malaysia

145. will consult with other states in the region, but tentatively suggests two meetings, one mid-triennium to assess progress in implementation of the Strategic Plan and another to prepare for the 7th COP.

The Senior Policy Advisor

146. informed the Committee of news that China has indicated a willingness to host a Northeast Asia sub-regional meeting in spring 1997, with funding support from the Environment Agency of Japan. The Bureau will be happy to assist and participate if an official invitation is received from China.

Germany

147. expressed the need for further consultations in the region, but tentatively stated a preference for another pan-European meeting before the next COP, but with a focus on problems within the region rather than aimed specifically at COP preparation. He promised to consult within the region and inform the Bureau of planning needs in good time.

Papua New Guinea

148. noted that the Port Moresby meeting in 1994 opened up the region and showed that the Convention had relevance for the Small Island States. He would like to see another like that, either a regional workshop or one devoted to technical assistance. Papua New Guinea will consult within the region and inform the Bureau.

Hungary

149. indicated Eastern Europe's preference for a pan-European meeting and agreed with Germany's focus on regional issues, but would like to see time devoted to draft resolutions for the 7th COP. As **the Chair**, she urged the Regional Representatives to coordinate planning for regional meetings within their regions and with the Bureau, and with the partner NGOs as well, and harmonize their dates.

Cooperation with the World Water Council and Global Water Partnership

The Senior Policy Advisor

150. provided background to the Bureau's request to obtain membership in the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership as part of its mandated efforts to have a voice in global water issues. The membership fee for the WWC seems to be US\$ 1000 per annum, and it seems that if the Convention wants a voice in these bodies the Bureau will have to become a member.
151. A good deal of concern was expressed about the precedent established by the Bureau joining up as a member of some other body. **Hungary** noted that "developing relationships", as mandated, is different from "becoming members", and **Switzerland** felt the WWC ought really to feel honored to be able to interact with a global treaty organization on at least an equal footing. **Iran** feared that the Secretary General, as part of his participation as a member, might have to accept obligations that the Contracting Parties could not accept.

WWF International

152. though in favor of Ramsar participation in the WWC, wondered whether the WWC is an NGO, which (if so) would open the door for other NGOs to insist upon Ramsar membership before cooperation could ensue, and if it is not an NGO, then why is joining necessary? **Austria** wondered what "active role" the Bureau intends to play and how much staff time would be required. The **Secretary General** considered the role to be simply to bring wetland conservation concerns to the WWC's thinking, with a minimum of staff time involved, perhaps a couple of meetings per year.

Uruguay

153. reported that there was not much enthusiasm for this idea in the Neotropical region and it is not supported. He expressed concern that the Convention might end up as a member of a body that some of its Contracting Parties did not want to participate in. **The Chair** noted that RES. VI.23 asks the Parties to be an audible

voice in the WWC, not just the Bureau, and said that membership does not imply an equal relationship in any case. RES. VI.23 does not mention the GWP, but does mention ICRI.

The Secretary General

154. reported that the ICRI is a loose association without any membership structure. The Bureau has talked with ICRI but hasn't had time to do much more than promise mutual cooperation. The SG has also talked with the Inter-American Water Dialogue in Washington, DC, but that group seems to see Ramsar as global and not a natural partner within its mandate.

- **Decision 19.20: There is no support for Bureau membership in the World Water Council and Global Water Partnership and the Bureau is urged to pursue some different kind of relationship besides membership and report to the next meeting of the Standing Committee on further talks with these groups.**

Fourth Day, 1 November 1996

Australia

155. remarked that the revised **Bureau Work Plan** tabled in replacement of DOC. SC19-8 (Decision 19.6 above) is much clearer than its predecessor, but still shows too little information, especially as regards individual staff assignments. He noted that Action 3.3.5 on Communications Strategy is missing.

The Secretary General

156. noted that the new draft is only intended to gain approval on the form the plan will take, and that missing data and assignments will be finalized soon. Action 3.3.5 is absent from the 1997 plan because no work is intended on it until 1998. Australia suggested that a working group be set up to assist with that.

- **Decision 19.21: The revised Bureau Work Plan for 1997 should be completed by the Bureau and approved by the Chair on the Standing Committee's behalf.**

Proposed Additional Partner Organizations

The Secretary General

157. tabled a letter from Friends of the Earth International suggesting that FOE become one of the recognized partner organizations to the Convention.

Canada

158. cautioned that there was not much information to base a decision upon: FOE has a varied record on the country level, and its programmes are not on the level of the other Ramsar partners. He suggested deferring a decision at this time and considering the request at a later date.

Wetlands International

159. noted that the partner organizations would be happy to see increased participation from other NGOs, but the Committee should first develop criteria for involving new formal partners; for example, the Committee knows nothing at this time about FOE's statutes or objectives.

- **Decision 19.22: The Bureau should inquire further into FOE's request and obtain more information about FOE itself for the Committee's examination at its next meeting. It should also investigate other potential partners and bring a list of such possibilities to the next meeting for consideration.**

Agenda Item 12

The 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties: Lessons Learnt and Follow-Up

The Secretary General

160. introduced the "lessons learnt" papers, one based upon input from all the Bureau staff, the other from Dr Phillips (Australia).

Australia

161. provided broad outlines to the paper tabled and emphasized Australia's willingness to assist Costa Rica in its preparations. Though some of the paper's conclusions may seem heretical, the stakes are high with a meeting on such a scale, and it is time to "shift the paradigm" and rethink some of the basic assumptions. He agreed with the SG that there should be more focus on technical issues. Overall costs must be reduced, especially if the meetings are to be held in developing countries as would be ideal. The best lesson learnt was the value of early involvement of the NGO community. This greatly offset total costs, with over 200 people working free at Brisbane, and also helped to increase the involvement of NGOs in the Convention's work in general, always one of Ramsar's special hallmarks. International volunteers might also be mobilized, such as EarthWatch, which is active in the region. The Technical Sessions are not working effectively and should be modified or abolished.

WWF International

162. reported that the contact groups during the recent IUCN Congress, convened to develop resolutions, were often very productive; the process of drafting resolutions was extremely valuable in itself.

BirdLife International

163. described both "lessons learnt" papers as very helpful. Adverting to ¶ 15 of SC19-13 on following up on implementation of the Strategic Plan, there should also be an effort to assess the implementation of Conference decisions. Without spending more time looking backward than forward, there should be more evaluation of the success of past decisions, and the lack of this in Brisbane was disappointing.

Trinidad and Tobago

164. noted that working out the tough decisions at the regional meetings helped to limit repetitive discussions in the COP's plenary sessions, as consensus had often nearly been reached already. She agreed with the SG that the "host country day" is not working; the poor attendance was almost embarrassing. The Technical Sessions were good for preparing recommendations for plenary, thus saving time. The atmosphere of the COPs are formidably stuffy, making one almost afraid to speak out because of too much formality.

The Senior Policy Advisor

165. urged the Parties to give due weight to the importance of the **National Reports**; Brisbane had the best response ever. These are important documents and allow analysis of progress. The openness of reporting progress and problems has always been one of Ramsar's strengths. The question of integrating Ramsar reporting with reporting for other Conventions should be studied, but the special importance of Ramsar's triennial National Reports should not be lost.

WWF International

166. underscored the value of National Reports and expressed the wish for a COP document showing a brief "scorecard" of progress over the triennium.

Follow-up to Resolution VI.14: implementation of the Strategic Plan

The Senior Policy Advisor

167. described the Bureau's efforts to follow up on the Parties' implementation of the Strategic Plan, and reported 20 responses, summarized in an addendum to document SC19-13. He urged that the Parties submit more detailed evaluations for the next SC meeting. **The Chair** requested that the Bureau follow up on those Parties that have not yet responded and urged the Regional Representatives and Alternates to encourage responses in their regions.

Follow-up to Resolution VI.9: Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity

The Secretary General

168. reported that he and the SC Chair will attend the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP next week. There will be a special agenda item on Ramsar, with an official conference paper on our cooperation in all the UN languages. With funding from WWF International, the Bureau has produced a paper on biodiversity vis-à-vis wetlands and 1200 copies of the Ramsar Strategic Plan are being distributed under a cover note from the CBD Executive Secretary. Also, India has been supporting the publication of a Ramsar book on wetland biodiversity and will bring copies to the CBD COP if it is ready in time. He invited SC members to contact their colleagues who are going to Buenos Aires and ask them to support Ramsar issues there.

Islamic Republic of Iran

169. applauded efforts for cooperation with the CBD and urged that the Standing Committee review the results of this cooperation in two or three years and amend the MoU if necessary.

Wetlands International (R. Jaensch)

170. commended the Bureau's cooperation with other conventions, particularly because it helps the Small Island States cope with convention overload. It would be helpful if the Bureau would produce documentation on how joining the Ramsar Convention can lead to complementary benefits in this way.

Follow-up to Resolution VI.10: Cooperation with the GEF and its implementing agencies

The Secretary General

171. summarized efforts on cooperation with the GEF, the World Bank, etc. The World Bank is about to publish, with Bureau assistance, an update on wetlands for incorporation into its Environmental Assessment source book, mainly for its professional staff, on wetlands; a final draft for checking has just been received. With interns in place, the Bureau might be better poised to work with development assistance agencies. As the 6th COP did not authorize budgeting for a Development Assistance Officer, he asked guidance on whether the Bureau should seek project funding for such a post.

The Chair

172. saw no problem with encouraging a search for project funding for the Development Assistance Officer position for a trial period, as long as it would have no later core budget implications. Later, that Officer might be able to earn his or her own salary by fundraising.

The Rio+5 Process

Switzerland

173. noted the importance of the Rio+5 process and urged that the Convention make significant input to the Commission on Sustainable Development. This would be hard without sufficient personnel but is a priority action. The Standing Committee may need to help as well.

The Secretary General

174. expressed the view that the Convention lost an opportunity to make its views heard at Rio in 1992 and wished to take advantage of Rio+5's new opportunity. He asked the Administrative Authorities to make input within their governments.

Indonesia

175. called attention to the planned UN special session on review of Agenda 21 in June 1997 and recommended that the Convention get involved so that the importance of wetlands becomes better known. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** also urged the Bureau to pursue its input in this review process.

- **Decision 19.23: The Bureau is requested to contact the Administrative Authorities and formally ask them to approach their governments' authorities dealing with the evaluation of the implementation of Agenda 21 and other decisions of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), and call attention to Ramsar achievements, encouraging them to make the Convention's voice heard, particularly in view of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly to be devoted to this issue (June 1997).**

Follow-up to Resolution VI.11: consolidation of Conference decisions

The Secretary General

176. broached the matter of consolidation of Conference decisions and asked whether the Parties wanted a compendium or collection of past resolutions or a more useful but more ambitious synthesis, which might require consultant funding and would certainly require COP approval of the result.

Hungary

177. as cosponsor of Resolution VI.11, felt that a handy synthetic document would be welcome and hinted that the projected budget surplus could be used to engage a legal consultant to work on this.

Canada

178. on the other hand, whilst expressing mild dismay at the 131 recommendations and resolutions emanating from the six COPs, preferred something quick and easy, and less expensive: basically, an organized compilation in one set of covers, a wordprocessing job, packaged consistent with the Proceedings. **Malaysia**, too, recommending sticking to option 1, a simpler job that can be done within the Bureau.

Trinidad and Tobago

179. however, agreed with Hungary that many Recommendations and Resolutions, though they are historically important, have become obsolete and superseded and can be removed in a new synthesis. A review of the whole set could be undertaken at the same time.

Australia

180. favored a simple compendium but questioned whether the organizing themes outlined in RES. VI.11 are preferable to grouping the decisions by the Strategic Plan's General Objectives. He too would like to see such a document published consistent with the format of the Strategic Plan and Proceedings.

Germany

181. concurred and observed that a more complex synthetic job would create new debates to be resolved by the Conference of the Parties all over again.

- **Decision 19.24: The Bureau should begin work on a compendium or compilation of all decisions taken at the six meetings of the Conference of the Parties held so far, organized by the themes of the Strategic Plan.**

Follow-up to Resolution VI.18: Wetland Conservation Award

The Secretary General

182. raised a number of questions about the Wetland Conservation Award, brought forward two nominations, and invited clarification on the nature of the award and its terms of reference.

Canada

183. cautioned that awards are a surprisingly tricky business. The Committee should come up with clear terms of reference first. North America has many award programmes at all levels; none involve cash prizes, usually nice momentos. There shouldn't be nominations before terms of reference have been established: what types of contributions should be recognized (general science, saving individual sites, etc.). Canada offered to draft ideas for circulation soon, and might recommend that each COP make a few (inexpensive) awards at global and regional levels, and devise general recommendations for national Ramsar awards as well. **Malaysia** suggested that the Standing Committee consider these draft TOR at the next meeting.

- **Decision 19.25: Terms of reference for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award will be prepared for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 1997 meeting.**

Follow-up to Resolution VI.22: Cost-reduction and possible relocation of the Bureau

The Secretary General

184. posed a number of questions concerning Resolution VI.22: what kind of cost-reduction was intended, what sort of study of possible Bureau relocation was hoped for. IUCN and Switzerland have made their positions clear in the tabled documents. IUCN argues that as long as the Convention text remains unamended, IUCN hosts the Bureau, and it must be in a place where IUCN already has the installed capacity to do so. Switzerland's letter outlined general and particular reasons for remaining in Switzerland. The Secretary General clarified one statement in that letter, however: the Ramsar Convention benefits significantly from the Swiss "fiscal exemptions," but Bureau staff do not benefit personally – non-Swiss Bureau personnel pay the equivalent of full Swiss taxes, but that money goes to Ramsar instead of the Swiss government.

Malaysia

185. questioned whether the Convention text really limits the range of choices, since it says that IUCN will host the Bureau until such time as another organization or government is appointed by a majority of two-thirds of the Contracting Parties (thus formal amendment might not be necessary). The Resolution called for a general cost reduction study, which is ongoing and has been well demonstrated this year. Relocation is a separate question. Malaysia proposed a study of the location process used for the CBD. The **Secretary General** noted that the CBD secretariat had competing bids but Ramsar does not, so any study must be hypothetical. **Senegal** suggested that all conventions have financial problems: relocating the Bureau might merely be a distraction from the work of conservation.

Trinidad and Tobago

186. supported the creation of a subgroup to study the matter. The Swiss letter is objective and provides guidance for the study.

The USA

187. felt that this analysis would be a lot of work, which would be wasted in the absence of a pledge from a specific country. The offered benefits in a concrete bid would change everything. The first step is to get a real offer and compare it to the present situation.

Canada

188. proposed creation of a subgroup to study the question whether it makes sense to discuss relocation of the Bureau. The analysis might benefit from independent “referees”. The Subgroup on Possible Relocation would report back to the SC next year. There is no urgency. Canada’s proposed terms of reference for the Subgroup (incorporating some amendments from Malaysia) are:

1. Examine all relevant advice from IUCN, CPs, the Swiss government, the Bureau
2. Analyze the economic/budget benefits and disadvantages
3. Document staff and programme benefits and disadvantages
4. Identify political and legal implications
5. Address IUCN’s suggestions regarding limitation to locations with existing IUCN presence
6. Study the processes by which Wetlands International and the Desertification secretariat relocated and CBD and FCCC chose locations
7. Seek independent advice to craft recommendations for the SC
8. Make recommendations about the process for carry the matter forward, if appropriate

The first issue is: does relocation make sense? If the SC says yes, then study how and where, though a negative decision on actually relocating could still be made after study; if no, put the question behind us and carry on with conservation of wetlands.

Malaysia

189. said that the question is painful since Switzerland has been such a good host. He asserted that Malaysia has no intention to bid to host the Bureau.

France

190. wished to find a way to avoid wild competition among bidding Parties. What is required is a clear IUCN/Bureau audit on how to achieve savings, with no underground comparisons amongst potential host countries.

Uganda

191. wondered why the relocation question has come up; he supported creation of a subgroup but urged a sense of perspective.

Iran

192. proposed a two-step process. Step 1: the Subgroup on Relocation would study whether the Bureau should relocate, as no one seems so far to be convinced that this would be a good idea. Step 2: If yes, the Bureau should develop criteria for selection of a new location to be considered by the Standing Committee at its 20th or 21st meetings.

- **Decision 19.26: The Standing Committee decided to establish a Subgroup on Possible Relocation, composed of Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand if agreeable, Panama, Switzerland, and IUCN, to work by correspondence and study the question as outlined in Canada’s proposed process (paragraph 188) and report to the next Standing Committee meeting.**
- **Decision 19.27: The Conservatoire du Littoral (France) was invited to continue the development of their feasibility study for the Evian initiative, and to report to the next Standing Committee meeting [see paragraphs 59-62 above].**

Follow-up on Recommendation 6.16: OECD Guidelines

- **Decisions 19.28: The Contracting Parties should be asked to share their comments to the Bureau concerning the OECD Guidelines for aid agencies for improved conservation and sustainable use of tropical and subtropical wetlands by 30 April 1997.**

Approval of the Minutes

- **Decision 19.29:** The minutes of the first three days of the 19th Meeting of the Standing Committee have been approved, subject to editorial changes to be communicated to the secretariat. The minutes of the fourth day will be approved by the Chair on behalf of the entire Standing Committee.

Agenda Item 13

7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Costa Rica

193. conveyed a welcome to the Parties and vowed to make everyone feel at home during the 7th COP. A description was given of the physical circumstances in the San José region, the hotel facilities, and the structure of responsibilities for COP preparations. A proposed logo and a larger graphic for posters were demonstrated, both of them incorporating artistic symbolism from indigenous people: the origins of life and water, feathered snakes, wetlands and crocodiles, and mangroves.

Senegal, Malaysia, and the Secretary General

194. whilst appreciating these proposals, felt that the smaller logo lacked vitality and suggested that the larger one become the only logo to be used, that a brief explanation of the rich symbolism be incorporated lest the point be missed, and that sustainable use and human uses of wetlands be symbolically built into this image.
195. An excellent background video was shown to present Costa Rica and its lively, peaceful, democratic cultural traditions.
- **Decision 19.30:** The 7th COP will take place in May 1999; it is agreed to leave the exact dates to Costa Rica and the Bureau to determine. The length of the COP should be the same as at Brisbane: eight working days over nine. A Subgroup on COP Preparations was established to assist Costa Rica, consisting of Costa Rica, Australia, Iran, the Netherlands (if agreeable), Senegal, and the USA.
 - **Decision 19.31:** The general theme for the 7th COP should be centered around the concept of “Wetlands and People”, including local community empowerment, training, education and public awareness themes. The Subgroup on the COP will refine this theme by January and circulate proposals to the SC members for adoption, so that promotional activities can get underway.

Agenda Item 14

Next Meeting of the Standing Committee

196. A suggestion was made that the next Standing Committee meeting be expanded in some newsworthy way so as to bridge the public-awareness chasm between triennial COPs, and a number of possibilities were suggested. Australia expressed misgivings about hosting a concurrent expert scientific meeting, since Ramsar has its own STRP, but urged convening other Subgroups a day earlier along with the Subgroup on Finance. Switzerland wished to remain modest, with no special participation, but endorsed the idea of emphasizing one of the Big Themes that would be prominent in Costa Rica. Malaysia agreed that the next SC workload will already be too heavy for further burdens, and an earlier day for subgroups would be helpful. **The Chair** noted that the proposed regional meetings could address many of these suggested special themes. Several Parties recommended that the other newly-created subgroups convene a day earlier, as the Subgroup on Finance does.
- **Decision 19.32:** The 20th Standing Committee meeting should be held in Gland during the week of 29 September to 2 October, with the first day reserved for the meetings of the Subgroup on Finance and any other subgroups as appropriate.

Agenda Item 15

Any Other Business

Australia

197. noted that the blue paper used in Bureau documentation does not photocopy or fax and hoped for some lighter color. Some agenda items seemed not to have been fully researched, so that the papers weren't fully helpful. DOCs. SC19-11 and 19-12 were too disparate and unfocused. The Bureau was asked to prepare papers and the agenda more carefully. Australia also expressed sadness that there has been a movement away from involving the Bureau's Technical Officers in the workings of the meetings. The agenda introductions by the Secretary General and Senior Policy Advisor were much appreciated, but he urged involving the TOs more closely, perhaps seating them with their regions, and introducing the papers that most concern their day-to-day work. The TOs are the Convention's staff and shouldn't be seated on the peripheries.

The Secretary General and the Chair

198. noted the need for more expeditious agenda-setting and document preparation, and explained that the seating arrangements were logistical, because of the number of participants present, but vowed that next time the Technical Officers will have a much more prominent role in the proceedings.

Agenda Item 16

Closing Remarks

199. **Wetlands International (M. Moser)**, on behalf of the four partner organizations, offered sincere thanks to the Chairperson and the new Standing Committee members for their warm reception to the NGOs' input. He thanked the Secretary General and the Bureau staff for their support and cooperation throughout the past few months; and he especially thanked the departing colleagues, Satoshi Kobayashi, Erika Luthi, and Maureen Wittig, and paid special tribute to Mike Smart. The partners thanked him sincerely in detail for his long service, and wish him well. **The Chair** echoed those sentiments.

The Secretary General

200. thanked the Standing Committee for their confidence in him and vowed to continue his undiminished enthusiasm and commitment. He acknowledged some SC concerns about his management style and promised to make improvements in that area.

The Chair

201. thanked the participants for a frank and open meeting, and once again praised the members for continuing the Ramsar spirit of consensus rather than voting. She paid tribute to the colleagues who were leaving this year: Satoshi Kobayashi, Erika Luthi, and Maureen Wittig. The Chair also thanked all the Bureau staff for their support during the meeting, and in particular the Technical Officers, and Mr Blasco and Mr Smart for their help at the head table.

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