

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

20th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 29 September - 3 October 1997

Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee

First Day, 30 September 1997

Agenda Item 1

Opening and welcoming remarks

Hungary (the Chair)

1. welcomed the participants and noted that the growing number of Observer States shows healthy interest. The Chair thanked the partner organizations, and especially the Director General of IUCN, for attending; welcomed Bill Phillips to the Bureau; and thanked the Bureau for its work in presenting the meeting's documentation. She noted that with only three Standing Committee (SC) meetings between Conferences of the Parties, the SC must be particularly energetic and responsible. The larger number of participants also demands more discipline, conciseness, and focus on the part of speakers.

The Director General of IUCN (D. McDowell),

2. welcomed participants to the shared facilities, welcomed Bill Phillips to the Bureau, and bade an appreciative farewell to Mike Smart. He observed that the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee (SC20) will also influence the work of the Bureau and its technical partners in the time leading up to the 7th Conference of the Parties (COP7). The Director General stressed their shared responsibility of convincing the world of the importance of water issues and noted that integrated management of water resources (vs. the old "engineering" bias) is the only tool for ensuring that vital life systems are not deprived of water. The world needs practical guidelines on how properly to allocate water to all users, including the environment, and depends to a large extent upon Ramsar and its partners to provide them.
3. The **Director General of IUCN** also noted the importance of forming partnerships, in particular those between Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Ramsar and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD); Ramsar and its partners need new emphases on the widest partnership networks possible, as evidenced in the run-up to SBSITTA3, where a large number of partners worked together preparing input to the meeting. IUCN expects the Bureau to draw upon the partner organizations for technical components of COP7 and would like IUCN to lead a Technical Session on water issues, as prefigured in Resolution VI.23. Likewise, the IUCN Social Policy Group is currently coordinating the implementation of Recommendation 6.3 on community involvement, and he hoped that this group will provide worthwhile assistance to the organization of a workshop on the subject in Costa Rica. A review of the MOU between Ramsar and IUCN is coming up, and the Director General of IUCN looks forward to another 25 years of even closer cooperation.

Agenda Item 2

Adoption of the agenda

Hungary (the Chair)

4. proposed to drop the introduction of participants from the agenda, brought Item 13 forward to accommodate the Ambassador of Panama, and added Item 16.7 on conference decisions. The revised agenda was adopted by consensus.

Agenda Item 3

Admission of observers

5. The Observer States and the partner organizations with observer status do not need admission; the other observers were admitted by consensus.

Agenda Item 4

Statements by the partner organizations

BirdLife International (J. O'Sullivan)

6. surveyed BirdLife activities in support of the Convention since SC19. Work on Important Bird Areas in Africa has been going well, and a publication on Ethiopia has just been completed, other countries to follow. An overall publication on Important Bird Areas is planned for Africa, and one for Europe will be ready in time for COP7. BirdLife's UK member, RSPB, has passed 1,000,000 members, a sign of public commitment to environmental causes. The Important Bird Area work assesses many wetlands according to Ramsar criteria. K. Rosewarne of BirdLife is moving forward with preparations for World Wetlands Day, and D. Pritchard is undertaking a project on national policy implementation based on his forthcoming work in Trinidad and Tobago. BirdLife helped the Bureau in assessing SGF proposals, assisted at the STRP meeting, and will contribute to COP7, especially on wise use issues in the development of EU legislation. BirdLife believes that more time in COP7 should be devoted to particular sites, and BirdLife will be ready to assist. More emphasis on Management Guidance Procedure missions (MGPs) and follow-ups is also to be urged. BirdLife offered special thanks to Mike Smart and vowed readiness to continue working with him, and welcomed Bill Phillips to the Bureau.

Wetlands International (M. Moser)

7. expressed satisfaction at the progress the Convention has achieved over the past 12 months; commended the Regional Coordinators (RCs) for their work with new Contracting Parties; and commended the Ramsar Web site, a model site for other conventions. He suggested that the next two years will be critical for the Convention. UNGASS chose fresh water as a key theme, and CBD is focusing on inland water systems; these open significant doors and it is important that Ramsar be there at the table. For Wetlands International, the past year has been one of consolidation, following reorganization and relocation of its office from Slimbridge (UK) to Wageningen (Netherlands). The new decentralized structure can help the Contracting Parties (CPs) in new ways, and the April MOU between Wetlands International and Ramsar identified common mechanisms for support.

8. **Wetlands International** emphasized five key areas where progress had been made in global support for the Convention: 1) its traditional work with data on Ramsar sites, the Ramsar Database, and support for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP); 2) support for the CBD initiative on inland water systems, for example, the IUCN/Ramsar/Wetlands International workshop in Wageningen in preparation for SBSTTA3, and the staff member in Montreal who could assist Ramsar as a liaison point with the CBD; 3) its workshop in Montreal on Partnership for Integrating Wetland and Water Resource Management to capitalize on SBSTTA3 and water sector meetings; 4) in global wetland assessment, there will be significant progress before COP7 through its project with the Bureau (with UK support) on global review of wetlands and, with RIZA (Netherlands) support, on Europe; 5) support to World Wetlands Day and Education and Public Awareness work. Wetlands International is also working closely with the RCs on regional meetings and regional technical programmes. There has been an intensification of cooperation with individual Parties, for example, through assistance with Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects. Wetlands International announced its November 1998 Board Meeting and associated technical workshop, which would take place in Senegal, and welcomed all SC participants to attend. Wetlands International extended special thanks to Mike Smart and looked forward to continuing work with him, and welcomed Bill Phillips to the Bureau.

WWF – the World Wide Fund for Nature (C. Phillips)

9. seconded the congratulations to the Bureau for its work over the past year and noted that WWF, with 2,700 professional staff in 53 countries, many involved in wetlands projects and policy, is well suited to assist in the work of the Convention. As an NGO, WWF sees one of its roles as monitoring the CPs' contributions, for example in fulfilling the Strategic Plan 1997-2002, and, though sometimes critical, intends always to be helpful. WWF has been trying to fulfill the Strategic Plan as much as possible and has been glad to help the STRP, especially in regard to toxic chemicals. WWF contributed to the Small Grants Fund and extends its appreciation to those countries which contributed so significantly to the Fund. WWF provided a key paper on CBD/Ramsar cooperation for the CBD COP3 and contributed to the SBSTTA inputs, for WWF wishes to help Ramsar fulfill its lead partner role. WWF is also involved in the Recommendation 6.3 joint project with IUCN and other NGOs.
10. The WWF funding situation looks more hopeful, and Ms Phillips foresees renewed wetland work worldwide. WWF is already preparing for COP7, and the WWF National Organizations, who contributed so much to COP6, hope to do as much for San José. WWF extended its thanks to Mike Smart and welcomed his attendance, as a Ramsar consultant, at the WWF Madagascar wetland meeting next week.

Hungary (the Chair)

11. voiced the Contracting Parties' appreciation for WWF's and other NGOs' valuable function as a monitor of the Parties' progress in implementing the Convention.

Agenda Item 5

Matters arising from the minutes of the 19th Standing Committee meeting

Hungary (the Chair)

12. noted that the SC19 minutes, paragraph 21, concerning unpaid dues, has not been studied by the Subgroup on Finance during the past year. The Secretary General said that only a few CPs have regularly failed to pay their dues and that the COP should work out a way of dealing with the issue of longstanding unpaid dues.

Decision 20.1: The Subgroup on Finance was asked to discuss the issue of Contracting Parties' unpaid dues and propose a solution for the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

Agenda Item 6

Report of the Secretary General

The Secretary General

13. observed that the report is the work of the entire Bureau. Rather than go through it in detail, he urged SC members to read it carefully and asked his colleagues in the Bureau to highlight key themes. The Secretary General welcomed the meeting's participants and expressed special satisfaction that so many CPs have attended as observers. He also expressed satisfaction with the fact that 6 CPs and one NGO are represented by women, a better gender balance than at the Brisbane Conference.

The Senior Policy Advisor

14. emphasized five points in the Bureau's report: 1) in the past year there has been greater emphasis on national wetland policies, not just on sites; 2) the role and value of the STRP has been growing; 3) the SBSTTA meeting opened huge opportunities for Ramsar and will be one of the most important areas of activity over the next year; 4) a great deal of work has been done on water issues, with the Global Water Partnership, etc.; and 5) the Bureau has undergone a revolution in the way it works, because of new communications techniques like e-mail and Web sites, but must strive not to lose contact with developing countries which cannot presently benefit from these tools.

The Regional Coordinator for Africa

15. highlighted February's Africa Desk Officers Meeting, which sought synergy among the secretariats on how to ensure the conservation of African wetlands while maximizing the role of wetlands in food security and water supply, the key issue for all African countries. The role of the partner organizations is one of the keys to success in this respect. Ramsar must engage other players as well, such as FAO and the UNDP. Africa has three new CPs and two more have signed but not yet designated a site. Many Ramsar and non-Ramsar sites are threatened but are not yet on the Montreux Record (MR); the partners should help to convince governments to list these sites on the MR in order to facilitate the use of the Management Guidance Procedure to help them. Many sites have inadequate management because of insufficient resources, and partner organizations can help governments achieve the basic means to do management on a daily basis. There is growing capacity on the African continent, but also a real need to bring together African resources in synergies; presently they are scattered, and in this area Ramsar and the partners can provide assistance.

The Regional Coordinator for Asia

16. noted considerable progress in promoting Ramsar membership but stressed the work still needed, as well as the continuing need to identify new Ramsar sites, which the Bureau is addressing. It is important to raise the Convention's profile, not so much at the national as at the regional level; Ramsar should be seen in the context of the rapid development now taking place, and should have a role in regional organizations. The forest fires in Southeast Asia, while a tragedy, present opportunities for Ramsar to contribute to national management planning. Population pressures and historical links between people and wetlands must be translated into practical projects on the ground. The cooperation of partner organizations and the Standing Committee will be essential.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe

17. observed that there are 39 CPs in the 2 European regions, with more than 600 sites; the particular challenge to the Bureau, the CPs, and the partners concerns setting conservation priorities with so many sites to consider. There is scope for more new sites, especially given recent progress with East European inventories identifying potential new sites. There is less scope for new Parties, but Monaco has just joined and several others are poised to do so. There has been progress with National Wetland Policies (NWP), and intern Maryse Mahy's

study of NWP processes will yield important information when it is completed next year. The role of the EU is crucial, especially its proposed framework directive on water policy, and the partners are playing a vital role in ensuring that wetland conservation is included in the directive. The Estonia workshop revealed how, with Eastern European countries poised to join the EC, some EU activities can have a significant and potentially negative impact on wetlands in potential EU member states. The Pan-European Biodiversity and Landscape Diversity Strategy, in which the Bureau is playing an active role, is the only nature conservation initiative approved at the ministerial level in Europe. SC19 established the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, and the MedWet coordinator will report on that later. There has also been increasing cooperation with the states of the former Soviet Union, and the Secretary General will be attending an important conference in Moldova next month. The Pan-European Ramsar meeting scheduled for Latvia in June 1998, and the CBD's COP4 in Bratislava in May 1998, will provide important preparation for COP7.

The Regional Coordinator for the Neotropical Region

18. said that several new Contracting Parties should have joined before COP7. The Caribbean region is the greatest gap and there are hopes that COP7 will help to promote accession there. She will be working toward strong COP participation from the Caribbean, and emphasis on coastal sites (mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass beds) can be expected. All Montreux Record sites will have benefited from Management Guidance Procedure (MGP) missions after Palo Verde (Costa Rica) at the end of the year, and she hoped that all four will have been removed from the MR by COP7. It is hoped that these successful MGPs will help to convince CPs of the value of MR listing for threatened sites. National Wetland Policies have been a big issue in the region; many CPs have developed NWPs and the Bureau will continue to assist. Several Caribbean states are showing an interest as well. A lot of Ramsar's work has been facilitated in the region by e-mail, the Web site, and the Ramsar Forum, as officials in the Neotropics have good access to the Internet. The word about Ramsar has spread widely, particularly as a result of the Wetlands for the Future initiative financed by the US Government, and she hoped that the US would continue the programme for the next three years so that the run-up to COP7 will benefit from it as well. Efforts are under way to hold a regional meeting, perhaps in Costa Rica in June 1998, hopefully for all the Americas.

The Deputy Secretary General

19. thanked everyone for help in settling into his new role with the Bureau. He reported that in the Oceania region the emphasis has been on expanding Ramsar membership. New Zealand has realigned local government structures with drainage basins, an innovative approach to environmental management. Australia has a federal wetlands policy and now a provincial one for Western Australia as well; all eight states will follow in the next 2-3 years. Wetlands International is playing a vital role; through Environment Australia's partnership with Wetlands International-Oceania, Roger Jaensch is promoting membership and spreading wise use principles throughout the South Pacific. The Flyway Initiative inaugurated at Brisbane COP6 is doing well. Despite the Brisbane COP, there is still skepticism about the value of Ramsar for the Pacific Islands, and the Convention needs to strengthen its tools on coastal zones, mangroves, and coral reefs. There is a sense of convention burn-out, as many small island states have too few resources to keep up with several conventions; aligning Ramsar with the CBD can assist with that. He highlighted the significant work that has been done in Papua New Guinea.

The Secretary General

20. reported that, though there is no RC for North America, there has been a very active relationship. Dr Carbonell has worked closely with Mexico, and the Secretary General has been working with both the USA and Canada. He has been amazed at the amount of grassroots wetland activities all over the US. He paid tribute to the special help the Convention has received from the all-NGO US National Ramsar Committee, which has been very supportive, most especially in its efforts in promoting the Convention in the US congressional budget process.

The MedWet Coordinator (T. Papayannis)

21. explained that MedWet is a regional collaboration of NGOs and governments in the framework of Ramsar. He noted that Mike Smart was instrumental in the founding and development of MedWet, and the Steering Committee formally acknowledged his contributions. The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, a consultative body, has been approved and is operational with 11 government members (6 others interested), the EC, the Bern and Barcelona Conventions, and 6 large NGOs. The MedWet coordinating team consists of the Coordinator, the Greek Biotope/Wetlands Center, and the Tour du Valat. MedWet's first phase (1993-1996) accomplished important work, for example on inventories, management, public awareness, and training, produced the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy, and established networks of cooperation. MedWet's second phase extends to five countries (Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Morocco, and Tunisia), a partnership between MedWet and the EU, and there has been progress despite internal problems in Albania and Algeria. A national seminar was held in Morocco last week. A third project has been approved by the GEF and will be managed by the Tour du Valat.

- The Wetlands International Ramsar/Wetland Sites Officer (S. Frazier)**
22. traced the history of efforts to remedy the gaps in Ramsar Database information and noted that prospects for continued improvement are high. Wetlands International has been preparing certain Ramsar Information Sheets for those missing and, through the Bureau, seeking approval for them. Improving the map base is more difficult, and advice is sought. He is participating in the STRP's evaluation of the usefulness of the RIS. Upgrading Database software has been a priority, but less so than upgrading the data itself. Now, with improved data, attention can be turned in that direction. Special priorities include the establishment of a presence on the Web, first with static, up-to-date reports, then with dynamic searching capabilities of the Database itself and enhancement of conventional database software. Partial funding assistance for Web development has been secured.
- The Secretary General,**
23. summarizing his highlights of the Bureau's work since SC19, reported on Bureau staffing news, most notably the new prominence of a system of four interns, two paid from Bureau consolidation of two part-time posts, two financed by the USA. He introduced three of the four interns (R. Sigüenza, A. Traore, and M. Mahy, with J. Kazi to arrive in November), as well as S. Niederberger, new assistant to Dr Phillips. He observed that the Near East, the Pacific islands, and the Caribbean are the Convention's weak links and require special efforts. Of 77 new sites in 10 months, the majority are from Europe, and some regions had no new sites; a renewed emphasis is required on more site designations as the essential first step towards sound management. MGP requests have not been overwhelming, and help is needed in encouraging CPs to call for the MGP more often. Likewise with National Wetland Policies; the Bureau has not been able to pay sufficient attention to promoting NWP, perhaps our most significant tool, and must give this a greater priority.
24. The **Secretary General** expressed satisfaction with improved data in the Ramsar Database. The Bureau has achieved concrete steps towards developing a Wetland Experts Database and hopes to continue developing it. The Bureau is pleased with progress in cooperation with other conventions; work with the CBD on inland water systems has a very high priority, and similar synergy with the Convention to Combat Desertification is an important goal. A paper on Ramsar and the CCD has been prepared by a Bureau consultant, and the Secretary General's personal assistant is attending the CCD COP1 in Rome with a special display on Ramsar. The Secretary General, while not implying any criticism whatever of the STRP's work, questioned whether seven experts around the world are sufficient to answering all the questions; he hoped that issue could be addressed. He noted the success story of this year's Small Grants Fund allocations but expressed concern about funding levels in future years; he called for discussion of a more solid basis for financing the Fund. He expressed his satisfaction with Wetlands for the Future and hoped it would become a model for other Contracting Parties' funding assistance and other regions.
25. The **Secretary General** noted that he has put a lot of his time into the Bureau's communications efforts and extended appreciation to D. Peck for help especially with electronic communications tools. The Convention's finances are healthy and no requests for budget increases will be necessary for COP7, unless the COP decides to increase SGF funding in the core budget or add support for the triennial COP to the core budget in order to facilitate holding the COP in developing countries. The Convention is at a good moment in its history, and feedback shows greater prominence, which is also a challenge, especially if the wider implications of the "Ramsar and water" theme require a shift in the way we've been working. Expanded partnerships will be needed.
- Hungary (the Chair)**
26. thanked the Bureau for its full report. She reminded the Bureau that at SC19, the UK urged the Bureau to collect success stories on the Montreux Record to be included in the *Overview* (paragraph 126). She also reminded the Subgroup on Finance that Decision SC19.5 called for the Subgroup to work with the Secretary General on fundraising for the Small Grants Fund; the Chair asked the Subgroup chair to assist the Secretary General in formulating a fundraising action for the SGF. She noted that discussion of the composition of the STRP can be addressed during later consideration of the process of nominating new STRP members.
- Austria**
27. congratulated the Secretary General on the Bureau's readable and concise report and requested clarification of paragraph 192 on suggested amendments to the treaty text or change of its title.
- The Secretary General**
28. noted that, in his personal view only, the Convention's title is misleading, given the present expansion of priorities from the early focus on waterfowl to the present emphasis upon all aspects of wetland resources management, and requires too much explanation to overcome skepticism, especially in the developing world.

He understands that the idea of amending the text, potentially a Pandora's box, makes some people nervous, and advice from C. de Klemm indicates that any process to amend the Convention, even if begun now, could not be completed, with required ratification of changes at COP8 by a certain number of CPs, before about 2005.

Uruguay

29. congratulated the Bureau on its report of its work and acknowledged the special contributions of Mike Smart. With 3 Secretaries General in the past 4-5 years and despite other changes, the Convention has been growing in quantity and quality, with credit due to the Bureau, the Parties, and the partner organizations, on the basis of the lessons learnt from M. Smart on the use of persuasion as a critical element for improving the effectiveness of the everyday work. He noted that the Neotropical Region especially acknowledges the assistance of Dr Carbonell.

Wetlands International

30. conveyed the concerns of the Wetlands International offices in Malaysia and Indonesia about the wetland fires now burning in that region, which include peat swamp forests of particular importance to Ramsar. He asked whether Ramsar was reacting to this situation, since the Convention could be helpful in assessing damage, marshalling international assistance, and contributing to prevention guidelines.

The Secretary General

31. responded that the RC for Asia has prepared a draft response, now being vetted, and everyone is invited to join a lunch meeting with Canada's delegate, C. Rubec, our best peatland expert present, to seek something beyond just a statement. He hoped that the SC would endorse the resulting effort.

BirdLife International

32. pointed out that the Bureau's report for each region mentioned site issues except that for North America, to which the **Secretary General** noted that the Bureau has not worked with the US or Canadian governments on any site issues over the past year and has no involvement to report.

Senegal

33. took the opportunity to emphasize, on behalf of all African CPs, the effective role of the RC for Africa, T. Kabii, over the past three years, as he completes his assignment at the end of the year.

Hungary (the Chair)

34. seconded this acknowledgement of the contribution Mr Kabii has made to the work of the Convention.

Zambia

35. expressed gratitude for assistance in attending and appreciation for the Ramsar Exchange. Her organization is not yet able to access the Ramsar Web site but hopes to gain access in the near future, and she thanked the Secretary General and RC for Africa for their visit to her country.

France

36. offered to assist the Bureau with its work in the Caribbean region, in particular in helping to inform countries about the benefits of membership. He suggested the possibility of setting up a meeting in the region for this purpose, perhaps in cooperation with Trinidad and Tobago.

Austria

37. pointed to paragraph 3 of DOC. SC20-2 and asked what "global issues" refers to. He asked to which RC the CPs should address themselves in cases of site twinning. The **Secretary General** explained that global issues refer to those not specifically regional, e.g., synergy with CCD. The RCs could not bear two work loads at the same time, so (though their input is always sought) their responsibilities are focused more on their regional duties, and larger issues fall to the SG and the Senior Policy Advisor. In cases of twinning, both RCs would be involved.

Islamic Republic of Iran

38. offered thanks to the Secretary General for his report and appreciation for the work of the RCs. He questioned why the Bureau had not made greater efforts toward synergy with the Framework Convention on Climate Change, as SC19 had called for cooperation with FCCC, and why there had been no Bureau presence at the UNGASS. He noted that amendment of the Convention is a difficult issue, and Iran is against it, as with the idea of changing the name of the Convention, lest recognition be lost. Concerning new CPs, he expressed great concern and objection to the categorization of Israel as an Asian country in the Bureau's documentation for the

Standing Committee meeting. He emphasized that many Asian countries believe that Israel is not Asian but European. In view of this, he objected that the Bureau's report is the first mention of this categorization, before the Asian Parties had any opportunity to discuss the issue to see whether there is a consensus to accept or reject that category. Iran asked the SC to discuss the procedure for regional categorization and expressed the view that only the COP itself, not the SC or the Subgroup on Finance, is competent to decide on regional categorization of new Contracting Parties, based on recommendations by relevant regions. He strongly urged that Convention documentation and minutes should carry no mention of Israel as an Asian Contracting Party until a decision is taken by the COP on its regional categorization.

The Secretary General

39. regretted that the Bureau's limited financial and human resources prevented participation at the same level of cooperation with all the conventions; a decision had to be made whether to participate in all superficially or in the most promising ones to a greater degree. The FCCC and Ramsar have not yet found common issues for cooperation, mainly because of current FCCC focuses. He also regretted that the Bureau had insufficient staff to attend the UNGASS but noted that, without involvement in the CSD preparations for the meeting, attendance at the UNGASS would have been pointless in any case. Concerning amending the Convention's title, he noted that no radical changes were being suggested, merely removal of the words "especially as waterfowl habitat".

Hungary (the Chair)

40. also regretted the lack of participation in the UNGASS but noted that the Ramsar achievement at the CBD COP3 was considerably more important. Ramsar *per se* was not on the UNGASS agenda. The Hungarian delegate is personally opposed to amending the Convention or its title and sees no consensus for pursuing that issue; she would rather emphasize new directions for the Convention than devote tedious work on amending the text.

Panama

41. thanked the Secretary General for his full report and the RC for the Neotropics for her excellent work. The Bureau's great support for the region and help with SGF project proposals is valued and hopefully will continue. STRP6 devoted time to the issue of toxic chemicals, and Panama hopes that Ramsar will make some input to the new convention on toxic chemicals now in negotiation. The Panama delegate will attend the 1st COP of the Convention to Combat Desertification later in the week and offers her delegation's assistance in framing a resolution for the CCD calling for an MOU with Ramsar to strengthen the mutual relationship.

Decision 20.2: The Standing Committee gratefully accepted Panama's offer to seek a resolution by the 1st COP of the Convention to Combat Desertification on cooperation with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The Secretary General will assist with desired wording.

Jordan

42. supported Iran's protest against considering Israel as part of Asia and feared that some Muslim countries might not join the Convention or Contracting Parties might withdraw if this were to go forward. He noted that some SGF proposals from veteran CPs have been turned down, whilst some from newer CPs have been approved.

Hungary (the Chair)

43. suggested that the procedure for listing Contracting Parties by region may have to be reviewed entirely. The SGF is a separate agenda item, but she noted that the SGF guidelines do not include any preference for older CPs as against newer ones; approval is to be based strictly on the technical merits of the proposals. Hungary echoed the various expressions of thanks to Bureau personnel for the Secretary General's report.

Agenda Item 7

Convention finances

The Secretary General

44. reported that the bottom line on items 7.1-7.3 is that the Convention is in healthy financial shape. The Reserve Fund is presently at SFR 137,000 and, if the SC agrees with the proposal for 1997 expenditures, could surpass 200,000 in its first year.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

45. reported that the Subgroup met yesterday and recommends that the SC endorse the Auditor's Report (item 7.1) with no changes. The Subgroup also recommends approval of the proposal for 1997 core income and expenditure (item 7.2), as well as the proposed action regarding the Reserve Fund.

Decision 20.3: The Standing Committee accepted the Bureau's reports on the 1996 auditor's report, 1997 core income and expenditure forecasts, and the Reserve Fund.

Hungary (the Chair)

46. expressed appreciation to the Bureau for its careful management of the budget.

Agenda Item 13

Proposal of the Government of Panama to establish a Ramsar Regional Center

Panama

47. regretted that the Ambassador of Panama was unable to attend after all. Panama intends to convert all military installations freed by the reversion of the Panama Canal Zone from the US to Panamanian control into a "City of Knowledge," a high quality educational center for research on important issues, especially environmental issues, and especially wetlands, to be administered through a foundation. Panama hopes to establish a center for the study of issues related to Ramsar, especially but not only within the Neotropical Region, and to hold a series of workshops as an exchange of information and public awareness about the Convention. A specialized library to support universities in the region is also foreseen. A proposal will be submitted to the Neotropical regional meeting set for May in San José and presented to SC21 in October, for consideration by COP7. Panama expressed hope for support from all the Contracting Parties.

Hungary (the Chair)

48. welcomed this initiative from Panama and looked forward to further developments.

Uruguay

49. congratulated Panama on this initiative and expressed support for the idea, looking forward to learning more about it.

The Secretary General

50. expressed particular enthusiasm for this initiative and considered it important, not only for the Western Hemisphere, but as a model or cornerstone for initiatives in other regions.

Agenda Item 7.4.1

Small Grants Fund allocations for 1997

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

51. reported that the Subgroup had reviewed the SGF proposals and endorsed the list of projects recommended by the Bureau for approval, with the condition that the list of approved projects should be presented alphabetically by country rather than by region. The Subgroup further recommended that the Bureau take an active role in working with Jordan in preparing its proposal for consideration in the next approval cycle. The Subgroup noted that the issue of regional categorization is not within the Subgroup's brief and recommended that a Subgroup should be established to study how regional representations should be assigned. **Hungary (the Chair)** noted that this could be discussed under Agenda Item 15 on regional representation within the Standing Committee.

Islamic Republic of Iran

52. supported the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance on the alphabetical listing of the SGF proposals and appreciation of the recommendation concerning Jordan's project. Iran will have comments to make during later discussions of the regional categorization issue. Iran proposed that no reference to Israel as part of the Asian region should appear in Bureau documentation and requested that future proposals be presented in alphabetical order.

Hungary (the Chair)

53. pointed to the problem of previously approved project proposals for which the Contracting Parties have still not signed contracts.

Uruguay

54. wished to hear the Bureau's assessment of the suitability of the SGF proposal evaluation form and the process for recommending proposals for approval.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

55. noted that the Subgroup had discussed this question and found that simple ranking by score would be inadequate by itself, without qualitative comment and discussion. The revised list of proposals presented differs from the list included with SC documentation only on Brazil's primary project.

Hungary (the Chair)

56. encouraged the Subgroup on Finance to study the fundraising issue further, lest future years attract as many worthy proposals but less funding assistance. She expressed special gratitude to the Contracting Parties which contributed so generously to this year's SGF.

Decision 20.4: The Standing Committee approved the alphabetical list of 1997 SGF proposals as presented in the revised Bureau document (Attachment 1).

Decision 20.5: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to work with Contracting Parties with outstanding project proposals, especially Jordan, to prepare them for resubmission in the next project cycle.

Agenda Item 7.4.2

Status of other projects

Hungary (the Chair)

57. expressed the Committee's gratitude to all the countries and institutions that have provided funding and asked to the Bureau to continue careful administration of these projects.

Trinidad and Tobago

58. noted that many officials at the national level do not realize how many other mechanisms are available and requested that the Wetlands for the Future be promoted more widely. Those involved with Ramsar and other conventions may not realize the extent to which other officials are not aware of these opportunities, and the Convention should make special efforts to reach out to them.

Austria

59. noted that a new project regarding twinning of sites between Austria and Contracting Parties in Africa has newly been established and is not yet present in the Bureau's list.

Agenda 7.5

1998 core income and expenditure, and invoices for 1998 dues

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

60. reported that the Subgroup on Finance has endorsed the proposed budget as presented, but recommended that invoices for 1998 should include a note advising of possible changes in assessments following publication of the new UN scale of dues, with a subsequent diplomatic note informing Parties of any changes in dues assessments caused by the new UN scale. The USA expressed appreciation to the Bureau for its well-prepared budget and for staying within it.

Islamic Republic of Iran

61. supported the Subgroup's recommendation and urged that the dues notification should include the words "subject to revision of the UN scale of assessments."

The Secretary General,

62. answering a request for clarification from Hungary, mentioned that IUCN has informed the Bureau of a potential rise in fees for computer services. The Secretary General has replied that the 3-year budget was approved in 1996 based on written IUCN proposals and cannot be reopened, and the matter has not resurfaced since. If it should, the Secretary General will renegotiate the matter as well as possible.

Decision 20.6: The Standing Committee accepted the proposed budget for 1998 and approved the Subgroup's recommendation to invoice Parties in November 1997 for the 1998 dues with notice of possible changes subject to revisions in the UN scale of assessments.

Agenda Item 8

Bureau Work Programme for 1998

The Secretary General

63. referred to the Work Programme for 1997, with its provisionally completed “status of work” column, and invited comments. He inquired whether the SC wishes an update of this document as of the end of 1997. He argued that is difficult to make a work plan for 1998 in mid-July 1997, for several reasons, and proposed that the Standing Committee empower the Chair to approve a completed 1998 work plan in early December 1997, which would then be communicated to the SC members in early January 1998.

BirdLife International

64. questioned how the Work Plan 1997 action 8.1.11 concerning evaluation of Ramsar institutions will be addressed at this meeting. **Bill Phillips**, speaking as a former member of the Strategic Plan Drafting Group, felt that, in terms of the intent of the Strategic Plan, evaluation of the Standing Committee, the STRP, and the COP will be covered here under various agenda items, and BirdLife emphasized the importance of this SP action.

The USA

65. pointed out that it would be worth exploring how other Contracting Parties and groups can play a more active role in recruiting new CPs, as in action 1.1.1, rather than having to rely strictly upon efforts from the Bureau.

Islamic Republic of Iran

66. wondered whether there were separate work plans for individual Regional Coordinators, since they do not seem to appear frequently in the Bureau’s plan, and asked that these be shared with SC members in advance of future SC meetings. The **Secretary General** replied that this could be done, if required, but reminded the SC that individual RCs appear in the Bureau plan under the sign “RCs”, under “PTG”, and under their own initials (MOC, RDC, TAJ, TMK).

Papua New Guinea

67. noted, in regard to action 1.1.2, that the Oceania subregional meeting essentially refers to the Pacific Islands, and the Secretary General applauded Papua New Guinea’s invitation to host that meeting.

Hungary (the Chair)

68. noted that the Strategic Plan organization of the work programme leaves no room for the work of other staff besides the PTG and requested an appendix show the contributions of the support staff that don’t fit into the SP structure.

Decision 20.7: The Standing Committee requested that the Bureau update its 1997 work programme at the end of the year and communicate it to all SC participants, including explanation of any actions not carried out. The Chair is empowered to approve the 1998 work programme in early December, and the work programme will be sent to all SC members in early January.

Second Day, 1 October 1997

The Regional Coordinator for Asia

69. summarized the lunch meeting concerning the forest fires in Indonesia, noting that a draft statement would be put before the SC at this meeting.

Agenda Item 9.1

Communications activities: electronic communications

The Secretary General

70. summarized three main areas of Bureau innovation: 1) the Ramsar Web site, 2) the Ramsar Forum, an open e-mail discussion group (unmoderated but monitored), and 3) the Ramsar Exchange, a restricted e-mail list for CPs and partners, intended for official communications and feedback, with separate sections for English, French, and Spanish. The Bureau is conducting a survey of electronic communications capabilities of the Contracting Parties (computer, e-mail, Web, CD-ROM, etc.) and hopes to find a way of assisting those Parties not yet equipped. He hoped that eventually all Convention communications would be electronic (except for the diplomatic channel), because of speed and the enormous savings already seen in telephone and fax expenses, but during the transition period e-mail remains supplementary and unwired Parties will not be ignored.

Senegal

71. applauded progress in taking advantage of e-mail but hoped the Bureau would continue using the fax for Africa, where getting connected for e-mail is going slower. **The Chair** assured Senegal that the Convention will continue using traditional methods until they are no longer necessary.

France

72. inquired about e-mail access among Ramsar site managers, and the **Secretary General** pointed out that it is very difficult to get answers to that from 103 national authorities, impossible for 900 sites. He expressed appreciation for IUCN's hardware and software infrastructure, which is efficient and very inexpensive for the Bureau.

Papua New Guinea

73. congratulated the Bureau on progress in electronic communications and noted that Papua New Guinea would appreciate such assistance to participate.

The Secretary General

74. noted that the Bureau's ability to assist would depend upon the problems encountered. If national telecommunications infrastructure were lacking, the Bureau could do little to help, but if the problem were the lack of local hardware, software, or training, the Bureau could seek sponsorship to solve that. He could not promise a solution but could promise to try.

The USA

75. added that Wetlands for the Future has supported projects in the Neotropics to assist with small amounts for telecommunications equipment and continues to do so. In Argentina, WFF funded microwave relay equipment where no telephone lines existed.

Hungary (the Chair)

76. noted for the record that the Bureau's electronic communications efforts are most welcome, and that the Bureau should be urged to complete its e-mail survey of the CPs and try to help achieve Internet access for those CPs without that capability.

Agenda Item 9.2

Ramsar publications

The Secretary General

77. mentioned the recent *Economic Valuation of Wetlands*, published in book form and made available for electronic download, and promised French and Spanish printed versions in about a month's time. The new info pack has been prepared in English, French, and Spanish, and in Russian as well, and the Bureau intends to produce it in Arabic and Chinese, too, if possible, since it presents the important basic information on the Convention in the official UN languages. The *Ramsar Newsletter* will be tried in a slimmer version intended for publication every two months, to reach readers more frequently. It is hoped that this schedule will be feasible because the material will be taken from the news columns of the Ramsar Web site which are updated almost daily. To economize, it will be posted folded rather than in an envelope. The *Newsletter* is meant for news, not for substantial analyses of issues, but CP and partner contributions are nonetheless welcome; it is too time-consuming to solicit such contributions, but good relevant material will be used in one way or another. Long contributions can go on the Web cheaply or as inserts to the *Newsletter*. The target audience is anyone who requests it, now some 3500 people and institutions. The Bureau has also published the *Ramsar Manual* in an updated English edition, to join updated French and Spanish editions, and there is a German version of the first edition. The Bureau is also trying to establish a central database for all Bureau contacts, but staffing constraints have slowed progress on that.

Hungary (the Chair)

78. suggested that the Ramsar introductory "blurb" be included somewhere in the *Newsletter* for people who may not be acquainted with the Convention, and the **Secretary General** applauded that idea. Austria suggested a tick-off coupon for new subscribers.

Hungary

79. urged the SC members and alternates to contact the CPs to solicit a flow of news of wetland activities for the Bureau. She also recommended that they encourage the CPs to arrange translation of the *Ramsar Manual* into local languages.

Islamic Republic of Iran

80. questioned whether the title is *Ramsar Newsletter*, as formerly, or *Convention on Wetlands*. If the former, it should be in bigger type than the latter, the title bar is presently confusing.

Uganda

81. supported the view that the type should be larger for the present title, but wondered whether an entirely new title might create a distinctive identity for the newsletter.

Uruguay

82. observed that Iran's suggestion was interesting but is not a substantial issue for SC consideration. He expressed the view that, when speaking with smaller island states, "of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat" reduces the scope of the Convention, and the short title expresses better the aim of the Convention.

Iran, Uganda, the Secretary General, Costa Rica, and Jordan

83. spoke further to the question of the name by which the Convention is known, whether Convention on Wetlands is more meaningful for newcomers to whom "Ramsar" might be opaque, or whether shifting from the traditional title *Ramsar Newsletter* to a new short title for the Convention might not require official approval to change the name. **The Chair** urged that the questions of title and type size be left to an expert consultant, in line with Agenda Item 9.10 on communications strategy.

Agenda Item 9.3

Education and Public Awareness

WWT/Wetlands International EPA Group (D. Hulyer)

84. reported on the special study group session attended by Costa Rica, the UK, the Republic of Korea, Wetlands International, BirdLife International, and WWF. The discussion focused on Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan, in particular 3.1 on global planning and 3.2 on national programmes. Though EPA is really effective only at local level, global and national planning and coordination is required. The Brisbane COP was unable to provide the funding necessary for the 10-point action plan proposed at that time. In follow-up, the partners met on 21 May 1997 to focus the plan in response to that, and at this study group meeting three priorities were identified at international level:

- a) Development of a coordinating network; WWT's Wetland Link International was proposed as already in place (with 1000 members in more than 90 countries) and free to act as a "network of networks", identifying and encouraging participation by individuals and organizations, using a range of electronic and paper-based media.
- b) Materials development; information materials that are easily adaptable throughout the world, with final products to be developed by EPA professionals nationally and locally.
- c) World Wetlands Day, which has captured the imagination of many, but not to be a one-off but rather as a lever for the development of a range of intensive activities worldwide, including such other high-profile opportunities as the Sydney Olympic Games.

85. Turning to the national level, **Mr Hulyer** described the National Reports as a useful mechanism for coordinating contacts and creating a cross-sectoral focus on EPA in agencies and governments, and the meeting recommended that there be a prominent part of the NR format devoted to EPA, with guidance from the Bureau, and a diplomatic note to CPs asking for a review of EPA activities for wetlands before COP7. He urged that the Bureau take the lead in producing guidance on Operational Objective 3.2, generic and/or with regional versions, presumably necessitating reliance upon established expertise among the partners. He recommended development of WWD as a springboard for year-round activities, and an identification of key lead organizations would facilitate the dissemination of materials and coordination of activities.

86. **Mr Hulyer** noted that funding remains a critical issue and expressed the view that the time for "lip service" had passed. He urged direct support from the Parties at both the international and national levels as well as exploration of grants and sponsorships. He inquired whether the Bureau might investigate if some elements of the Danone Group's "Outreach" sponsorship might be used to support some of the activities outlined in points a) and b) above. He looked forward to being able to present a more optimistic report on progress in implementation of Resolution VI.9 to the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

Hungary (the Chair)

87. expressed the Committee's appreciation to the EPA Study Group and to the partners who have taken their time to contribute.

The Deputy Secretary General

88. noted that the draft National Reports format to be considered later does include an EPA component. He said that the Bureau supports both the proposal to send a diplomatic note requesting a review of current and future

EPA activities and the proposal for the preparation of an EPA how-to booklet, global and perhaps regionalizable. He agreed that WWD has captured imaginations and applauded the many successes of WWD 97 despite so little time for preparation, and he also agreed that, rather than a one-day affair, WWD should highlight the launchings and culminations of longer-term projects. He seconded the Study Group's call for funding and called the amounts in question very modest, and said that the Bureau would support the proposals in any way possible.

Decision 20.8: The Standing Committee expressed its appreciation of the work of the EPA Study Group, endorsed the proposed actions, and urged the group to continue its work.

Agenda Item 9.4 **World Wetlands Day**

The Secretary General

89. noted the Bureau is trying to promote WWD in publications and news media, and has created a brochure and a poster.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (D. Hulyer)

90. recalled the 21 May meeting at the Bureau and emphasized the importance of substantive materials for various target groups. The "speakers/journalists guide" would be a facts-and-figures guide to wetland issues, featuring Ramsar but not duplicating the info pack.

Uganda

91. explained its success with WWD 1997, including participation at the ministerial level, on the theme of "wetlands and the community". He suggested that each WWD should have a theme to help focus the efforts. **The Secretary General** noted that "Wetlands and Water" is being urged as a theme for 1998, and "People and Wetlands" (like COP7) for 1999, but it was made plain by several speakers that CPs and local groups are free to adapt those themes in any ways that suit local conditions or do something entirely different if they wish to.

The Secretary General

92. appealed to the CPs to inform the Bureau in advance of all their planned WWD activities, so that momentum can be created by example in the Bureau's publicity.

WWT (D. Hulyer)

93. emphasized the importance of 3-year planning cycles and noted that "biodiversity" has been identified for 2000, broad enough that CPs can do anything they like with it.

Senegal and Zambia

94. emphasized the importance of small scale themes that local communities can relate to, using ideas and materials appropriate to local people perhaps removed from the ministerial activities in the capitals.

Islamic Republic of Iran

95. informed the meeting of activities in that country for WWD 1997 and supported the "wetlands and water" theme for next year.

Trinidad and Tobago

96. noted that lectures are always more effective with audio-visual components and urged that the journalists guide be designed for easy transfer to slides and transparencies or produced with slides included. **WWT** concurred entirely but doubted whether that could be accomplished in time for WWD 1998; slides are still a very adaptable tool.

Hungary (the Chair)

97. strongly urged the Standing Committee to promote World Wetlands Day and encourage the Contracting Parties to treat it as an important priority.

Agenda Item 9.5 **Wetland Conservation Award**

The Secretary General

98. introduced the draft material he developed with help from background material provided by Canada.

Discussion of the eligibility of deceased persons

99. **Canada**, the **UK**, the **Secretary General**, the **Senior Policy Advisor**, and the **Chair** discussed various aspects of the issue of whether deceased persons should be eligible for the Award, concluding with Canada's suggestion that the Bureau be given discretion to honor deceased persons when appropriate but that that should be kept separate from the Wetland Conservation Award *per se*.

Discussion of the nomination process

100. The **Russian Federation** warned that, because too many nominations might be received if the process were open, it would be better to stipulate that nominations should be "introduced by the relevant administrative authority", and **Hungary**, **Uganda**, and **Senegal**, also fearing that the Bureau would be overwhelmed by applications, urged nomination by the CPs. The **Secretary General** expressed a strong preference for open nominations and urged trying that for the first cycle, cutting back if there were in fact too many nominations, and noted that nomination by CPs would exclude non-CPs. The WCA was meant primarily to be a promotional activity, drawing attention to the Convention and its work; it would be advertised by the Convention's normal channels, not by ads in the newspapers. As with SGF proposals, the Bureau would filter incoming nominations and make recommendations to the SC.

Canada

101. suggested that, while nominations should not be confined to Administrative Authorities (AAs), the AAs should be called upon to offer friendly advice concerning the nominations from their countries, and it was further agreed that AAs should immediately be informed of winners from their countries.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance),

102. with the concurrence of other members of the Subgroup, offered the Finance Subgroup's services in narrowing the Bureau's list of nominations to a short list for Standing Committee consideration.

Discussion of Wetland Conservation Award eligibility

103. **Iran** suggested expanding the WCA to 7 awards, one for each region, but it was felt that that would be unwieldy and outside the mandate of Resolution VI.18. **Australia** suggested awarding 1 individual, 1 group, and 1 government agency, which **Bulgaria** and the **USA** amended to 1 individual, 1 organization (government or NGO), and 1 Ramsar site.

Hungary, Austria, and Uganda

104. were concerned that it is difficult to specify what sort of documentation should accompany nominations without having a draft nomination form to consider, but agreed that the impact and merit of the nominee is in the end more important than required documentation.

Discussion of whether to include a cash prize with the Award

105. **The Chair** noted the Danone Group's offer to provide US\$ 10,000 for each of three awards for the first year, but wondered whether that would put the Convention in an awkward position in subsequent years if no cash were donated. She wished it to be very clear that no financial implications to the Convention's budget were to be considered here. **Austria** and **Costa Rica** suggested creation of a fund to collect money from other parties but noted the need for a policy for dealing with shortfalls, lest embarrassment ensue. The **Secretary General** said that he considers the Danone offer as a considerable public relations benefit for the Convention, and as a window to attract other corporate donors by the example, and he argued against rejecting this offer just because cash might not be available on future occasions; **Hungary (the Chair)** noted the need, in that case, for absolute clarity on the nomination forms that cash might be part of the award but might not. The **USA** wondered whether part of the Danone gift might be used in 1999 and the rest kept in reserve, and **France** offered to sound Danone out on that, but it was felt that this might discourage future contributions. **Canada** urged accepting the Danone offer.

Discussion of associating a piece of art with the Award

106. **The Chair** suggested adding a small, inexpensive piece of art with the certificate or diploma, and **WWT** related its excellent results with an inexpensive piece of symbolic sculpture, to the extent that **WWT** felt that cash would not be necessary, though **Senegal** pointed out that, whilst cash might not always be necessary, in many cases it could prove to be very useful to local groups.

Decision 20.9: The Standing Committee delegated the Subgroup on Finance to serve as a jury for the Wetland Conservation Award, screening the Bureau's list of nominations and recommendations and presenting a short list for the Standing

Committee's decision. The Bureau should include that preparatory work in its work programme.

Decision 20.10: The Standing Committee approved the Criteria and Procedure for the Wetland Conservation Award (Attachment 2), as well as the proposed nomination form. The deadline for nominations will be 31 July 1998. It was agreed to accept the generous offer from the Danone Group to provide US\$ 10,000 for each of three Wetland Conservation Awards for COP7 in 1999. The Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to look into associating some inexpensive piece of art with the Wetland Conservation Award.

Agenda Item 9.6

The Jewels in the Crown initiative

The Secretary General

107. outlined the plan for a public relations exercise centered upon a presentation book of beautiful photographs of Ramsar sites in all CPs, and described efforts to locate a donor, as for example a Swiss bank, which would take all content and production costs in hand. It would probably be entitled *People and Wetlands: the Vital Link* and would be ready in time for COP7. To Uganda's question about how this initiative fits into the still-undefined communications strategy, he observed that the Convention cannot suspend all efforts until after the strategy is approved at COP7, and in any case there can be no harm in it since there would be no cost to the Convention.

Uruguay, Bulgaria, Wetlands International, and WWF

108. strongly supported the initiative as an excellent "door-opening" device for presentation to corporations and as a way to draw attention to the positive aspects of Ramsar sites. The Netherlands consented to the proposal but wished ironically to see another book devoted to the 800-odd forgotten jewels in the crown which would not be on the list of famous, highlighted sites.

Canada

109. commented that the project is valuable but the target audience should include potential new corporate partners rather than only the Contracting Parties' authorities at COP7, who already know the value of wetlands.

The UK

110. suggested that the focus on key sites be expanded to include photos of successful SGF projects as well, hopefully to bring in more donations to the SGF.

Decision 20.11: The Standing Committee endorsed the "jewels in the crown" initiative of a presentation book of photographs of outstanding Ramsar sites, as long as it is realized by outside financial sources and an outside consultant.

Agenda Item 9.7

Virtual Ramsar Site

The Deputy Secretary General

111. provided background on this project to develop an entertaining and educational Web site associated with the Bicentennial Park in Sydney Harbor, a permanent, high quality site emphasizing management planning, part of a range of other community-based activities around Sydney Harbor focused on the 2000 Olympics. It will profile Ramsar on the world stage, using the spotlight of Sydney's "Green Olympics", and the Bureau has offered SFR 15,000 for its part in a larger package of funding, subject to the project gaining the additional funds needed and support from the Australian Government.

Australia

112. foresaw far-reaching benefits, particularly as an educational tool, with an emphasis on the steps needed to work through the management planning process. People could access the site over the Internet as well. Like the Olympic flame, it could symbolize the hand-off of Ramsar COPs from Australia to Costa Rica by possibly being launched in conjunction with the COP7. Australia supports the initiative in principle, though there are still details to be clarified, and recommended that the SC consider it favorably.

Decision 20.12: The Standing Committee endorsed the Virtual Ramsar Site initiative and expressed its thanks to the Bicentennial Park authorities and consultants, as well as to the Australian colleagues involved, and it encouraged the Australian authorities to continue developing the issue.

The Senior Policy Advisor

113. recalled the Winter Olympics in Norway, where exemplary precautions were taken for the nearby Ramsar site, and suggested that Ramsar strive to find ways to turn this association between Ramsar and the Olympics into a continuing tradition.

Agenda Item 9.8

The Evian Initiative

The Conservatoire du Littoral (C. Lefebvre)

114. updated the Committee on the revised proposal, which no longer requires outposting of Bureau staff and is now hopefully to be supported by the Danone Group and the French GEF, with three main objectives: promotion of expertise and its transfer, promotion of awareness in decision-makers, and fostering communication activities. The proposal to the Danone Group would include support for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award, three biogeographical networks of twinned Ramsar sites, and research fellowships; several sessions raising awareness among decision-makers for South America, West Africa, and Asia; and some additional resources for communications activities. The SC has received a detailed, updated version of the report, as mandated by SC19.

Questions arising from the English translation of the proposal

115. **Hungary** questioned the proposal's expected redefinition of Bureau communications activities, especially human resources, and learned that the French original makes it clear that this is only in order to find ways to absorb the additional funding. The experts' and consultants' fees to be covered by the Bureau (p. 28) is a misleading translation. The stipulation that the Danone logo would appear on Ramsar publications was actually inserted by the Conservatoire with a view to involving Danone in future identification with Ramsar support and would only apply to publications specifically supported by Danone. The Danone logo on the Ramsar Web site would naturally be captioned to indicate the level and kind of support. These details are still under discussion with Danone. **Islamic Republic of Iran** questioned the relegation of Asia to third in line for workshops, and Mr **Lefebvre** noted that this schedule is still flexible and can be amended according to Convention priorities and according to the additional fund of the French GEF which affords the means for further sessions.

Decision 20.13: The Standing Committee endorsed the Evian initiative and urged the Bureau to continue negotiations on the matter; it extended its appreciation to the Conservatoire du Littoral, and its thanks to the Danone Group for its environmental sensitivity. The Committee will expect to receive a progress report at SC21 on activities that will have begun in January 1997.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

116. reported that the Subgroup, once it had understood that there would be no financial implications for the Convention in this proposal, felt that no recommendation was required.

Hungary (the Chair)

117. led the Committee in requesting the Bureau and the Conservatoire to find a shorter, clearer, and somewhat more elegant title for the Evian project.

Agenda Item 9.9

Ramsar logo and graphical identity

The Secretary General

118. explained his perception that the recent evolution of the Convention, with new emphases on fish and on human issues like wise use and community participation, requires new imagery, just as the Brisbane COP logo incorporated these elements. The info pack "masthead" adds coral and human dimensions, but it's a harder job with a logo. It is understood that the objective is to modify the present logo and not create an entirely new one, in order not to lose its recognition value.

The Senior Policy Advisor

119. provided background on the present logo: the logo for the Groningen COP in 1984 was amended for Regina 1987, and one of the first SC meetings adopted a form of that ornithologically inaccurate bird as the Convention's symbol.

Wetlands International

120. learned that wetlands are difficult to convey in a logo and opted for using its name. There was a broad consultation exercise but it is difficult to find consensus on logos. Everyone should comment but a small group should decide. The actual change to a new logo, once decided upon, was easy.

BirdLife International

121. had a similar experience and decided it was best to let the designers make the final decision.

Senegal, the USA, Austria, and Hungary (the Chair)

122. supported the notion of exploring additions to the present well-known logo with as little modification of it as possible, partially as a reminder of the history and development of the Convention from its ornithological origins.

Decision 20.14: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's further exploration of new ideas for a logo, modifying but not losing the recognizable present logo, and invited the Bureau to report on this issue to the next Standing Committee.

Agenda Item 9.10

Communications strategy

The Secretary General

123. noted that the Strategic Plan calls for submission of a communications strategy to COP7, but the Bureau has insufficient expertise or manpower to accomplish that and recommends hiring a consultant, in order to send a draft to the SC for comments and bring a revised draft to SC21.

Decision 20.15: The Standing Committee authorized the Bureau to engage a professional expert to develop a draft communications strategy.

Agenda Item 10

Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

Mihaly Végh, vice-Chair of the STRP

124. commended the Bureau's report on STRP activities based on the minutes of the 6th STRP meeting (DOC SC20-10) and noted that his present update on that is available from the Bureau. He noted the STRP's decision to reorganize the existing Criteria into two broad groups (uniqueness/ representativeness and biodiversity), without altering the Criteria themselves.

The Senior Policy Advisor

125. explained the draft reorganization of criteria and noted that the important work would come in revising the Guidelines, if the Standing Committee should approve of this approach.

Mr Végh

126. explained STRP work on the ecological character of wetlands, mentioning various tests now in progress at different sites, measuring the suitability of the RIS for providing information and testing the definitions of ecological character and change in ecological character, especially with Dr Finlayson's tests in Australia. Tests in Hungary revealed difficulty in using the definitions and found that the Classification System requires work, as some wetland types are not represented. He explained recent work on Early Warning Systems, Ecological Risk Assessment, and Thresholds of Change, and cited efforts to organize a workshop in Hungary, of 15-25 persons, with funding still being sought. Mr Végh noted that STRP would like to be more involved in MGP missions in their regions. Concerning restoration and rehabilitation, which is no longer intended as the subject of a COP7 Technical Session, he suggested that it might form the basis of a project, similar to that on Wise Use (1990-93). Many individuals have provided information since the last STRP on methodologies and case studies, and Mr Végh would like to solicit Standing Committee leads to other individuals or institutions who have done restoration and rehabilitation theoretical work.

127. **Mihaly Végh** described the questionnaire report on management planning conducted by STRP members Drs Komoda and Schlatter, and noted the search for PhD students to check out the Ramsar guidelines on management planning. He expressed his own opinion that the Ramsar guidelines make a very good basis but could use improvements, though since they have already been accepted they should be maintained. On the economic valuation of wetlands, Mr Végh has had no feedback on establishing a group but noted that the Ramsar book has been published and that other work continues in other organizations, with a conference planned for the Netherlands in 1998. The STRP was glad to have had the opportunity to advise the Bureau on the SGF proposals and that their opinions appeared in the assessments.

The UK

128. offered its assistance in redrafting guidelines for the revised Ramsar Criteria, and this was gratefully accepted.

The Senior Policy Advisor

129. clarified Austria's question about the word regions (meaning biogeographical and not Ramsar regions) and "near-natural wetlands" (now assumed in the title).

Decision 20.16: The Standing Committee accepted the STRP's report, tendered its thanks for the STRP's work, and expressed encouragement for completing its tasks.

The Secretary General

130. referred to the timetable recommended for nominations of STRP members for the next triennium, that the diplomatic notes should be sent no later than April 1998 with a deadline of 31 August so that the Bureau can process nominations in time for presentation to SC21 in October. He recommended that the Bureau should include in the diplomatic note some indication of what's involved in STRP participation. Any change in the STRP composition or nomination process would have to go to COP7 for approval, so for the moment nominations for the same kind of STRP are in order.

The Senior Policy Advisor

131. reminded the Committee that STRP members are elected in their individual capacity for their expertise; it is important to have people of outstanding expertise. The SC should be looking for people with great expertise in technical and scientific subjects. He was concerned that the STRP might not have done enough to develop contacts with other experts in network fashion.

Decision 20.17: The Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to proceed with the call for nominations to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel as scheduled and to take care in formulating the wording in order to show what kinds of expertise are required.

Agenda Item 11.1

Conservation and wise use issues: cooperation with the CBD

The Senior Policy Advisor

132. summarized the recent preparatory workshops leading up to the 3rd meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and noted particular cooperation with Wetlands International and IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management. He drew the SC's attention to the different terms used: "wetlands" in the broad Ramsar definition and "inland water systems" in the CBD, which distinguishes these from coastal water systems. He noted that the term "wetland" was sometimes interpreted in a restrictive sense and stressed the importance of continuing efforts to persuade others of the value of the Ramsar definition in order to retain Ramsar's broad constituency. He rehearsed the SBSTTA recommendations prepared for the CBD COP4 which called for cooperation with Ramsar and a joint work plan, noted the Ramsar experts database, and called for work on many areas in which Ramsar already has agreed documents. The SPA foresaw enormous opportunities for Ramsar to make its presence felt in these matters and urged that working with the CBD should be a matter of the highest priority for Ramsar in order to ensure continued momentum over the coming months.

The USA

133. agreed with the SPA's assessment of the opportunities and endorsed very close interaction with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Secretary General,

134. responding to **Canada's** question, informed the Committee about discussions recently had with Wetlands International about options for participating jointly in maintaining a representative in Montreal to represent Ramsar and Wetlands International in relations with the CBD secretariat on a shared time basis. The person in question is Ken Lum, already well known to the Bureau.

The Senior Policy Advisor

135. emphasized again the importance of increased cooperation in implementation of the two conventions at national level and urged the SC to encourage this amongst the CPs. He noted that IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management and its Biodiversity Group were particularly instrumental in preparing for the Wageningen workshop and the 8th Global Biodiversity Forum, which was also intended to prepare the way for longer-term CEM work with Ramsar and the CBD.

Islamic Republic of Iran

136. supported closer Ramsar cooperation with the CBD and thanked the Secretary General and the Chairperson for their work at COP3, with the hope that Ramsar would be similarly well served at the COP4. He reminded the Committee that Iran had proposed at SC19 that there should be a review made of existing MOUs and he hoped that the next SC meeting would carry that out in order to see what benefits had been achieved from the experience.

Hungary (the Chair)

137. agreed in principle with making a similar effort in Bratislava and complimented the Iranian delegate for his work in COP3 as well. She asked the Bureau to investigate making an assessment of the benefits of cooperation with the other secretariats.

IUCN (Jean-Yves Piot)

138. observed that the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) wants to provide technical input to the CBD on inland water ecosystems and noted that CEM's project with Ramsar and other partners spans over 18 months. Also, the CBD has asked CEM to assist on ecosystem management and restoration issues, and Ramsar could be involved in these activities as well, if it so wishes.

Decision 20.18: The Standing Committee welcomed the recommendations of SBSTTA3 on continuing cooperation between the CBD and Ramsar, endorsed the Bureau's proposals for increased collaboration between the secretariats in preparing documentation on inland water ecosystems for CBD's COP4, and expressed its support for increased cooperation at national level in the implementation of the two conventions.

Agenda Items 11.2 and 11.3

Review of the status of Ramsar List, the Montreux Record, and the Management Guidance Procedure

The Secretary General

139. reported that despite 77 new Ramsar sites since SC19, the designation of new sites, as the essential first step in their conservation and wise use, needs priority attention. Several partner organizations have expressed the same urgency, and the Bureau must reassess the ways in which it encourages and assists Parties in designations. Where the obstacles are political the Bureau may or may not be able to assist, but where they are technical, the Bureau should be able to do much more, especially for key important sites still missing from the Ramsar List.

The Senior Policy Advisor

140. noted that the CBD is asking its CPs to draw up indicative lists and Ramsar should be able to assist with that and perhaps gain some new Ramsar sites in the process. He clarified an error in the SC documentation concerning the deadlines for updating Ramsar Database information. These deadlines are as follows: Ramsar Information Sheets for sites in the List for which datasheets are still missing: 31 December 1997; revised Information Sheets (if required) for sites that were listed before 31 December 1990: 30 June 1998.

Wetlands International (M. Moser)

141. agreed that whilst the partners, the Bureau, and the Parties have naturally focused on the "emerging issues", they may have neglected some of the Convention's basic tools, particularly the designation of new sites. He felt that the low rate of site designation in some regions is worthy of review and said that the partners were ready to help, suggesting that perhaps a plenary slot at COP7 could be devoted to the designation issue and site-related legal mechanisms.

Decision 20.19: The Standing Committee urged the Bureau to take further steps to call the Contracting Parties' attention to the desirability of designating new sites and to assist in the process wherever appropriate, especially in helping with the compilation of indicative lists for the CBD.

The Secretary General

142. reported that the Bureau is in discussions with the IUCN Environmental Law Center about a small project concerning Ramsar in national legislation. In some countries, Ramsar obligations are not embedded in national legislation and there is a legal vacuum. The ELC shares this feeling and wishes to study the matter more closely. The project would include a legal workshop and prepare a draft resolution for the SC to endorse or for introduction to COP7 by a Contracting Party. It is hoped that the Swiss Government will permit part of its 25th Anniversary pledge to be used for that project; the proposal will be finalized and submitted to the Swiss Government.

Hungary (the Chair)

143. suggested that the project might also study the question of the legal strength of Conference resolutions, as they frequently seem to be far from becoming part of national legislation.

Canada

144. raised the question of seeking a larger vision for the Convention's future after the Strategic Plan. What do we want in the long term from a global network of identified sites? Where will Ramsar lead the world? Canada would like to see the Ramsar network be defensible as central to all wetland conservation efforts and estimated that Ramsar may now cover close to 10% of the world's wetland resources. The Convention should work at supplying a vision for future progress.

Wetlands International

145. noted that the regional directories now provide a good basis for moving forward strategically. Operational Objective 6.1.3 calls for utilizing information from inventories and directories to make a global assessment, the STRP has provided terms of reference, and the UK has provided funding; Wetlands International has prepared a project, and the first step is to review what is known on the subject, which will be reported to COP7. Wetlands International is also collaborating with the RIZA Institute of the Netherlands to undertake a pilot study towards the establishment of a pan-European wetland inventory. The Biodiversity Conservation Information System, involving most of the partner organizations, is preparing a proposal based upon the first two steps which intends to begin a global wetland assessment.

The USA

146. reiterated its position that the USA does not believe that listing sites is the most important thing the Convention can do. Site-specific issues are not as urgent as larger issues such as buffer zones and watershed management. The big challenge is to move away from designating individual sites towards the broader, harder issues.

Hungary (the Chair)

147. noted that it is good to be reminded that we already have guidelines on some of these issues, like buffer zones, integrated catchment management, and so on.

The Deputy Secretary General

148. strongly supported Canada's view and perceived a regrettable slowdown in designations. There is a need to find a vision for where the Convention is going. In Australia, progress has been ad hoc, reacting to political opportunities. There should be more systematic ways to move towards a more representative network of sites and fill gaps in the inventory data sets. There is a science to site selection, and he supports Wetlands International's work on this. One key is community; the NGO shadow lists may fill a purpose, but some governments oppose shadow lists ipso facto. It is often better to focus on the local communities and encourage them to prepare RISs and send them to the Administrative Authorities.

The Senior Policy Advisor

149. agreed with Wetlands International that the time is right to pursue a global assessment, as he saw in Montreal that several other groups, including FAO and UNEP, are interested in a global review; there is a good opportunity for creating the scientific baseline for a strategic vision.

The Secretary General

150. observed that listing continues to be a good tool for pressure for, for example, better watershed management; the increased status of Ramsar listing can help. The encouragement to wise use principles that comes with Ramsar listing can also help unprotected areas.

Australia

151. congratulated the Bureau on its initiative with the Environmental Law Center on national legislation for meeting Ramsar obligations. The Secretary General is correct about the benefits of Ramsar listing by itself, but it is also vitally important that national legislation adequately reflect Ramsar obligations. In Australia, the Federal Government is presently reviewing all federal environmental legislation and the Bureau project will be of interest in this regard.

The Regional Coordinator for Africa

152. reported that Africa has a number of sites on the Montreux Record and more that should be. Many factors influence the ability to carry out Management Guidance Procedures. The partner organizations can help influence African governments to see the value of the MGP.

Senegal

153. noted that West Africa has a network of experts, with partner organizations based there and National Ramsar/Wetland Committees, which could help with MGP missions and save the Convention time and money.

Uganda

154. observed that the MGP raises fundamental issues about listing sites and wise use. Despite insecurity in the Great Lakes Region, every effort is being made to facilitate an MGP mission for Lake George. Designations may sometimes be put on hold because of foreseen changes in the ecological character of the sites, and governments should be convinced that such sites should still be listed. The purpose of Montreux Record listing is to bring some support, but now the focus seems to be shifting to getting back off the Record. There is a need for local participation in working to remove sites from the Record and for building the capacity that will bring long-term solutions as well. Uganda urged that further thought be given to how sites get onto the Montreux Record and how they are removed.

The Regional Coordinator for Asia

155. reported on one MGP mission to Iran, with another planned for Jordan in 1998 and possibly another to India. Many more sites should be on the Montreux Record, but the advantages of Montreux listing are still unclear in the region, as it's sometimes thought to be a sort of black list. The terms of reference for the mission to Iran were changed from focus on MR sites to the broader questions of the implementation of the Convention in the whole country.

Islamic Republic of Iran

156. expressed appreciation to Ms D'Cruz and Mr Smart for their mission to Iran and noted that the change of the terms of reference permitted the mission to study overall implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan, which resulted in agreement on long-term management efforts with an effective role played by UNDP and the World Bank.

Hungary (the Chair)

157. noted that the black list problem has always been there. She suggested that the Standing Committee should urge the Bureau and the RCs to explain the purpose of the Montreux Record more fully to the Contracting Parties, and the Standing Committee should do the same. She also recalled that SC19 had decided that good examples of positive outcomes from MGP missions would be highlighted within the next global *Overview* of Ramsar sites. This publication could help to raise the profile of the benefits that can flow from Montreux Record listing.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe

158. pointed out that with 34 Montreux Record sites in 13 European Parties, 50% of the whole Record, there is a particular challenge. The COP6 National Reports show the potential for many more additions to the Montreux Record. The challenge is finding a way to get positive action eventually to remove the sites from the Record, requiring active cooperation between the CPs and the Bureau and great willingness on the part of the CPs to move forward. Greece and Italy are particularly important because between them they account for 16 MR sites; talks are progressing with Italy at this time. Further attention is needed to Resolution VI.1 on addition to and removal from the Record; on the whole, European CPs have not responded well, but there have been some notable success stories, as for example at Ringkøbing Fjord in Denmark.

159. **Mr Jones** observed that the application of the MGP is much more elaborate and serious than it may have been years ago, requiring much more work for each one. The Convention may need a new mechanism, perhaps with greater involvement of the partner organizations.

Greece

160. stated that substantial steps have been taken since 1990 in order to preserve the ecological character and promote the management of Greek Ramsar sites. This has been the result of political will and social awareness, investment in human capital (including the Greek Biotope/Wetland Center and increased number of skilled personnel in NGOs and local and central government), financial support from the Greek Government and the European Union, and progress in legal status at national level. All Greek Ramsar sites have now been legally delimited, with greatly increased total surface area, and presidential decrees for the establishment of protected areas cover all but one of them; the last, a new one for Lake Mikri Prespa, will follow in 1998. There have been significant management actions as well, including Information Centers and other infrastructure at all sites, and preliminary management plans are presently being tested at all sites, open to participation by NGOs as appropriate.
161. **Greece** has contributed to the work of the Convention by participating in the MedWet initiative and hosting the first meeting of the Mediterranean Wetland Committee in March 1998, elaborating a National Strategic Plan (part of the National Strategy for Biological Diversity) based on Ramsar's Plan and due for completion by the end of 1998, and making a voluntary contribution to Ramsar beyond its annual dues. Greek authorities would like to meet with Bureau staff to discuss the measures recently taken and explore the possibility of removing sites from the Montreux Record.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe

162. explained that a Greek NGO had sent information to the Bureau, and the Bureau had sought clarification from the NGO, which has recently been received. The definitive boundary maps for the Greek sites was a big step forward.

The Secretary General

163. took the opportunity to offer the Convention's appreciation for Greece's support, especially for the MedWet Initiative and the Biotope/Wetland Center.

The Regional Coordinator for the Neotropics

164. confirmed the problem of the negative image of the Montreux Record, noting that though 7 sites in the Neotropics and Mexico were added to the Record 1990-93, none have been added since. Three sites have been removed and work is progressing well on the other four. She noted that MGP missions are very time-consuming for the national authorities as well.

The Senior Policy Advisor

165. summarized by noting four main points:
- a) The Convention must "decriminalize" the Montreux Record and emphasize the assistance it can bring, the appreciative judgements of CPs and success stories (e.g., Srebarna, Donau-March-Auen, Nariva, Ringkøbing, Dee Estuary). He suggested that the Bureau should produce a publication on the Montreux Record including the favorable testimonies and showing its value. He welcomed the Bureau's opportunity to study removal of the Greek sites, now that maps have been provided.
 - b) The Management Guidance Procedure has indeed become more complicated and time-consuming but should remain a very high Bureau priority.
 - c) MGP mission reports, once accepted by the Contracting Parties, are public documents.
 - d) There is a need for action on MGP recommendations and, since the reports are public documents, it is fitting that interested bodies should consult the reports and help to act upon the recommendations.

Hungary (the Chair)

166. remarked that the next edition of the Overview should have a section on successful Montreux Record cases.

The Secretary General

167. reviewed the present state of funding for the Management Guidance Procedure, which is running low, and urged past donors to come forward once again to assist in this important tool of the Convention.

Trinidad and Tobago

168. stressed the need for follow-up on MGP recommendations and suggested that "before" stories be noted prior to MGP missions, in order to allow "before and after" case studies afterward.

Agenda Item 11.4

Review of the Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance

The Secretary General

169. referred to the background found in SC documentation and explained the mandate to STRP found in Resolution VI.3. The STRP found the Criteria to be basically sound but recommended reorganization into two categories. STRP members did not consider cultural values and benefits or hydrological values as scientific elements that should be included in the Criteria and urged that these be left out of the Criteria and included in the Explanatory Notes and Guidelines. The Secretary General is not persuaded that leaving these two issues out is a good idea. The argument that human-related issues are not scientific presupposes that the natural sciences are more “scientific” than the social sciences.

The Senior Policy Advisor

170. cautioned against attaching too much importance to the Criteria per se, which are intentionally very broad. Historically there has been long discussion of the wise use questions and it has always been difficult to pin down a criterion based on that, and so wise use principles have been expanded into extremely valuable guidelines on their own. He noted, too, that hydrological values really are present in existing Criterion 1(c) and in the proposed redraft, to be expanded in the Guidelines.

The Secretary General

171. recommended that, if this issue were to be discussed again, a better mix of natural and social sciences be included in the STRP deliberations.

Mihaly Végh (STRP Vice-Chair)

172. noted that STRP had not been comfortable dealing with this question, though the willingness is still there. The Chair suggested that the STRP co-opt a social science expert for its next STRP discussion and come back to the next SC meeting.

The Deputy Secretary General

173. illustrated the situation by describing Australia’s case, where in the creation of two directories of wetlands of national importance, sites were recognized on the basis of socio-economic and cultural values. He had been skeptical, but experience has shown no abuses; very few sites were nominated solely on those values, nearly all qualified on ecological grounds as well. Governments can be relied upon to be responsible in designating sites in any case. He too urged including one or more social scientists to ensure a broad-based discussion.

Decision 20.20: The Standing Committee approved the reorganization of existing Criteria into two groups based on representativeness/uniqueness and biodiversity, requested the Bureau to proceed with the elaboration of Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for these Criteria, and asked the STRP to investigate the Criteria further, especially in regard to criteria based on cultural values and benefits, and provide a rationale for why they should or should not be included in the Criteria.

Day Three, 2 October

Agenda Item 11.5

Implementation of Recommendation 6.3 on involving local and indigenous people in wetland management

IUCN (A. de Sherbinin)

174. described the Recommendation 6.3 project and outlined the steps taken so far: in April a wide call was made for case studies in how local involvement in wetland management has led to sustainable use and benefit-sharing; some 60 proposals were received, a list of possibilities was compiled and reviewed by the Steering Group, and 24 sites were short-listed. The list that has been distributed is more or less final and presents an array of ecosystem types and types of involvement in both the developing and the developed worlds. Guidelines for the authors have been carefully crafted in order to elicit the kinds of information that could be used to produce guidelines for future action. Authors are to send texts by late November, which will be finalized through to January, when results and draft guidelines will go out to experts in advance of two workshops scheduled for March and May 1998. The products will be criteria and guidelines, lessons learned, and a draft resolution for COP7, resulting in a document hopefully as valuable as the document produced by the Wise Use Working Group.

IUCN (G. Borrini-Feyerabend)

175. elaborated further by stressing six points in particular about the project: a) the product will be action-oriented in order to be useful for managers; b) there may well be lessons of failures as well as successes; c) the project is undertaken with an open mind, with no conclusions in advance; d) cases are included from both North and South; e) there will be a very participatory process in this product; and f) the Social Policy Group profits from synergies from other concurrent activities, e.g., its development of a Web site and Resource Center on community participation in natural resources management.

The Netherlands

176. noted the absence of any case studies from the Arctic region, where indigenous people have a strong dependence on natural resources. **Mr de Sherbinin** replied that no proposals received from NGOs or CPs involved the Arctic region, but **Ms Borrini-Feyerabend** pointed out that because the SPG's Resource Center does include examples from the Arctic, particularly in Canada, the conclusions will draw upon that experience as well; in any case, input on any particular Arctic sites will be incorporated if forthcoming.

IUCN (A. de Sherbinin)

177. noted further that the project will hopefully culminate in fruitful discussion in a COP7 Technical Session, and indicated that the project coordinators are still seeking financial assistance for carrying the project to its conclusion.

Decision 20.21: The Standing Committee endorsed the work of the project on Recommendation 6.3 under the IUCN Social Policy Group's leadership and looks forward to seeing the product, expressed thanks to the donors, and urged the researchers to continue their efforts. The SC members were urged to bring the need for further financial assistance to the attention of Contracting Parties in their regions.

Agenda Item 11.5

Recommendation 6.9 on a framework for National Wetland Policies

Canada

178. reported that there had not been much opportunity for progress over the past year, but Uganda and Canada would remain for several days after the present meeting to draft a report on the fundamental steps and considerations in developing a range of wetland policies or strategies at national level. They will draw upon examples of kinds of stakeholders, geographic range of wetlands being considered, and major components of a policy document. The paper will provide guidelines in drafting policy consultation and workshop materials and in constructing the policy itself. The authors also hope to include examples of implementation procedures in different States. The paper will complement other efforts under way to document wetland policy initiatives, such as that on European nations being conducted by M. Mahy of the Bureau. A draft report will be completed by May 1998 to permit completion and tabling at SC21 in October. If approved, it would be published for the next COP. Canada hopes to be able to fund the full cost of English and French language production of the report but is looking for partners in this effort, especially for a Spanish version.

Decision 20.22: The Standing Committee expressed appreciation to Canada and Uganda for their work and urged them to continue in their efforts to develop a draft framework for National Wetland Policies.

Agenda Item 11.5

Recommendation 6.13 on the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines

The Senior Policy Advisor

179. described the questionnaire for Contracting Parties undertaken by Drs Komoda and Schlatter of the STRP concerning the effectiveness and implementation of the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines. An interim report has been distributed; at present some 50-60 responses have been received, and a definitive report will be made to the next STRP meeting. In general, the study is revealing that the respondents find the Ramsar Guidelines relevant but sometimes too detailed. They are quite widely used, and no need for fundamental changes has been observed, though there may be a need to simplify them and assist Parties in applying them.

Decision 20.23: The Standing Committee expressed appreciation to Drs Roberto Schlatter and Makoto Komoda and the STRP for their work related to Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines and encouraged them to continue.

Agenda Item 11.5

Recommendation 6.14 on toxic chemicals

The Secretary General

180. reported that the STRP and experts from WWF worked out wording on toxic chemicals which has been added to the RIS Guidelines, and the Bureau is waiting to learn whether WWF will be able to produce the paper it has offered to send to the Contracting Parties in fulfillment of Recommendation 6.14.

WWF International (C. Phillips)

181. reported that it does have the matter in hand and will contribute to the National Reports discussion as well. The Chair expressed the Committee's appreciation.

IUCN (J.-Y. Pirot)

182. observed, concerning Recommendation 6.16 on conservation of wetlands and bi- and multilateral programmes, that the OECD Guidelines for Tropical and Semi-Tropical Wetlands tabled in French and English at COP6 have since been produced in Spanish by IUCN's means and offered copies to Spanish-speaking members of the Committee. He said that IUCN understood that COP6 had asked the SC to survey the Parties and decide whether the OECD Guidelines would be officially recognized for use by Ramsar. IUCN has funds remaining from a Finnish grant for testing the effectiveness of the Guidelines in two IUCN regions (Africa, Latin America) and would like to invite Ramsar to join that project.

The Secretary General

183. responded that the Bureau would be very interested in participating in that, but reported that it has been tardy in seeking opinions of the Guidelines from the Parties but will do so soon. The Chair expressed appreciation to IUCN for producing the Spanish version.

Decision 20.24: The Standing Committee expressed its appreciation to IUCN for having produced a Spanish version of the OECD "Guidelines for Aid Agencies for Improved Conservation and Sustainable Use of Tropical and Sub-Tropical Wetlands" and requested the Bureau to participate with IUCN in its distribution.

Agenda Item 12

Regional meetings

The Regional Coordinator for Africa

184. reported on the West African Subregional Meeting in Dakar and noted plans for a southern African subregional meeting in South Africa, 2-5 February 1998 to coincide with World Wetlands Day, with support from Switzerland and the USA, and for a North Africa subregional meeting under the MedWet banner. A Pan-African meeting is envisaged for Uganda for mid-1998 in order to identify issues for consideration at COP7, with some 30-32 Parties and 5 observer states expected. The Bureau will be seeking financial support for that important meeting.

Senegal

185. voiced appreciation for the subregional meetings because many people and opinion-makers involved in Ramsar issues could not participate in meetings held farther off. Local authorities are becoming much more involved. He urged the Committee to encourage such meetings.

The Regional Coordinator for Asia

186. reported that the Pan-Asian workshop in Kuala Lumpur has been postponed because of the fires in Southeast Asia and will be held 25-29 November, with 80-100 participants expected; they will examine national actions on the Strategic Plan and construct a regional action plan. The Swiss Government, via the 25th Anniversary Fund, is supporting the meeting, but further financial support is needed. A Central Asian subregional meeting is slated for Kazakhstan chiefly in order to promote membership in the Convention.

Islamic Republic of Iran

187. thanked Ms D'Cruz for her preparations for the Kuala Lumpur meeting and raised the problem of the Asian Parties' concern about Israel being invited, which Iran feels is an issue to be decided by the COP and not by the Bureau, the Standing Committee, or the Subgroup on Finance. Iran inquired whether Israel had already been

invited and, if so, wondered why that should have been done before the Asian Parties had had a chance to consult and before the COP has made a decision on the issue. Iran suggested that Mr Danabalan of Malaysia had been consulted, and Iran recommended the following decision: “In view of the fact that no decision has yet been taken at the COP level on the categorization of Israel, the Standing Committee requests the Bureau to reconsider its invitation to Israel to attend the next regional meeting in Kuala Lumpur.”

The Secretary General

188. insisted that the Bureau’s instructions from the Committee must be clear. Israel has in fact been invited after the necessary consultations on the matter, and he does not know what “reconsider” means. Would the Committee require that the invitation be withdrawn?

Hungary (the Chair)

189. pointed out that if the SC should accept this recommendation, it would in fact be deciding on the categorization of a new CP, for which the Committee has no mandate. Withdrawing an invitation is beyond the mandate of the Standing Committee. The Chair urged the Parties of the Asian Region to consider the matter, get all opinions, and report back. The Bureau’s invitation was issued after consultations with the organizers of the meeting.

Jordan

190. supported Iran’s view that the invitation to Israel should at least be delayed, or else some other Contracting Parties might not attend this important meeting, which would be a pity.

Malaysia

191. welcomed all participants in this meeting, but noted that, with no prior consultation on categorizing Israel as part of the Asian Region, that matter should be resolved first. He urged that the Committee reconsider Israeli participation as an Asian member.

Hungary (the Chair)

192. observed that Ramsar is a convention without strict procedures for everything, as was shown in the transition to a new Secretary General. There is no procedure on how to “categorize” new Parties in a region; it has usually been obvious and never contested. The present case is sensitive, delicate, and highly political – Ramsar, on the other hand, has always been a convention devoted to wetland conservation and not to political positioning. Hungary feels that regional meetings should concentrate on wetland problems and believes that all Ramsar Contracting Parties should have the same rights. Hungary proposed that the Asian Region decide by itself how to resolve this issue.

Canada

193. noted people’s fixation with lines on maps and recommended that the Committee consider the views of Israel in this matter. Similar situations occur in the Caribbean, and possibly Parties there should be allowed to choose whether to be included in the North American region or the Neotropics. A more flexible approach to defining Ramsar regions was recommended.

The USA

194. cogently noted that there are two different issues: 1) the larger issue of a procedure for assigning CPs to regions, which has been an informal process until now; since it has created difficulties, it should be put to the COP to determine a procedure. The USA urged creation of a Subgroup to study the issue and propose a procedure to the COP. 2) the second issue involves retracting an invitation made in furtherance of wetland conservation and this the United States finds totally unacceptable for whatever reason.

Islamic Republic of Iran

195. disagreed with asking Israel its preference and understood Hungary’s remarks to be personal and not from the Chair. He noted that it is unacceptable that an invitation should have been sent to Israel with no prior consultation with the Alternate Representative for Asia. He speculated that the Convention faces the possibility that Asian Parties will not attend the Kuala Lumpur meeting. The issue must be taken up at the COP level and not here. Since Israel is an exceptional case, it should be deferred, and Iran urged agreement on its draft recommendation. Iran suggested that the Asian regional meeting be postponed until the level of participation could be assured and the question of Israel discussed by the Parties of the Asian region.

Costa Rica

196. wondered whether the act of excluding Israel would be a dangerous step, to be regretted later. Costa Rica noted that political causes have no place in environmental questions and no place in our Convention.

Malaysia

197. felt that postponement of the KL meeting, with so much effort already having gone into it, would be out of the question and invited everyone to participate equally. Malaysia suggested that Israel should be welcomed to the meeting but perhaps not identified as a member of the Asian group.

Hungary (the Chair)

198. expressed appreciation for Malaysia's flexible and constructive approach.

Senegal

199. noted that our Convention has not been faced with this problem in the past and feared that next year Trinidad and Tobago will wish to be part of Africa. The problem should be resolved before the COP lest even bigger problems should pop up there.

Islamic Republic of Iran

200. noted that the suggested wording he tabled was arrived at in consultation with Mr Danabalan. He felt that Malaysia, Iran, and Jordan would like to consult further and the resolution should be deferred.

Decision 20.25: Taking into account the concerns raised about the participation of new Contracting Parties in regional groupings under Ramsar, the Standing Committee agreed to establish immediately a Subgroup to review existing regional categorization procedures and suggest revisions or a new process, for consideration and possible approval at COP7. The members of the Subgroup will be Canada, Senegal, Uruguay, Islamic Rep. of Iran, Papua New Guinea, and Hungary as the Chair.

The Secretary General

201. expressed his appreciation to Switzerland for its financial support, via its 25th Anniversary contribution, for both the Kuala Lumpur and the South African meetings. He also thanked the USA for its contribution to the South African subregional meeting.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe

202. looked forward to the Pan-European meeting in Latvia, June 1998, and noted that Latvia will require more financial support; expressions of interest to contribute to the meeting's success have been received so far from France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and more contributors would be welcomed.

The Regional Coordinator for the Neotropics

203. recounted plans for a regional, hopefully hemispheric, meeting in May-June 1998 and observed that whilst Costa Rica will provide the infrastructure, with participation from the Regional Representative, further support would be welcomed. A non-CP subregional meeting will be held in the Caribbean, with assistance from France, Canada, and the United States, mainly to promote membership and prepare for COP7.

The United States

204. explained that the annual "Trilateral Committee", involving Mexico, Canada, and the USA, is set for Vancouver in March 1998 and would in effect be the North American regional meeting since Ramsar issues will be included in the agenda.

Canada

205. added that on 6-12 August 2000 there will be a major conference, "Wetlands at the Millennium" in Quebec City, Canada, on wetland science, policy, and management, anticipating some 1500 participants, to be held jointly with INTECOL, the Society of Wetland Scientists, and the International Peat Society, with Wetlands International partnership in the planning. Ramsar participation would be welcomed.

Papua New Guinea

206. reported on the increasingly sound foundation being built for international cooperation in the Pacific region and suggested that encouragement, and particularly financial support, would be welcomed. The proposed regional meeting will discuss implementation of the Strategic Plan and progress in recruiting new members in the subregion. Papua New Guinea sought the Committee's approval and financial assistance for the meeting.

Hungary (the Chair)

207. expressed appreciation for Papua New Guinea's initiative and looked forward to hearing the results of the meeting at the next SC meeting, and hoped to learn of the accession of new Contracting Parties from the subregion as well.

Australia

208. commended the work of Wetlands International – Oceania in promoting accession and noted that the SGF grant had facilitated that. So that the region will be well prepared for COP7 and its Technical Sessions, Australia endorses the Oceania meeting proposal.

The Secretary General

209. said that the Bureau sees regional meetings as very important and is pleased to see that there will be meetings in all regions. He urged the SC members and alternates to assist actively in the planning. Before COP6 the Bureau took the burden of organizing regional meetings, which proved a heavy burden, but now host countries are taking over the logistical planning, to everyone's benefit, e.g., as Malaysia has arranged with Wetlands International–AP in the organization for the KL meeting. The Bureau and the RCs can help with the meetings' content but have inadequate resources to make the logistical arrangements.

Hungary (the Chair)

210. recommended that organizers of regional meetings pay particular attention to the Standing Committee's present decisions regarding the COP agenda and Technical Sessions topics.

Agenda Item 14

Resolution VI.22 on cost reduction and possible relocation of the Bureau

Canada

211. presented the lengthy report of the Subgroup on Resolution VI.22 and explained the history of the issue. The Subgroup's conclusions were that 1) the huge savings in salary costs that some had hoped for from relocating the Bureau probably do not exist, because salary costs for international staff within the IUCN system will always be relatively high; 2) new costs would likely be incurred, as for example in requiring additional staff for relatively small IUCN stations elsewhere; and 3) the risk of possible unemployment liabilities for present staff might be ruinous.
212. The Subgroup's recommendation is that there is not much to be saved, and any savings would be offset by additional costs and risks, so that the Bureau ought to be left exactly where it is now. The Subgroup's report noted areas where further analysis could be made but concluded that further study would not be worth the time and money required to pursue it. The savings would not be much and would not get better over the next 5-10 years, and it would be better to devote that energy to conserving wetlands.

IUCN (H. Berggren)

213. listed a number of small amendments to the Subgroup's report and will convey them to the rapporteur.

Malaysia

214. apologized for the absence of Mr Danabalan, detained because of the forest fires, and commended the efforts of the Subgroup. Malaysia noted that one must be certain that the study has been exhaustive and complete, as the Terms of Reference called for independent review by an outside group. Malaysia expressed unwillingness to approve the Subgroup report before that had been done and proposed that the Subgroup be allowed to continue its research into the issue and bring its results to COP7, deferring any conclusions at this time. This is important for developing countries that have to finance an expensive secretariat.

The USA

215. commended the Subgroup for its comprehensive data set and agreed with its focus on salary costs, but wondered if there were a threshold that the Subgroup considered significant for savings.

Canada

216. reiterated that the maximum projected savings would be nearly offset by new costs, especially in new staffing requirements and longterm infrastructure, plus potentially huge unemployment liabilities. Canada's expectations of big savings were not borne out. Canada doubted that the factors cited by Malaysia would make any difference and, considering the time and energy to be absorbed by the bidding process, decisions in 2002 and the 5-6 year horizon, recommended dropping the issue now.

Hungary (the Chair)

217. reminded the Committee that the original motion has arisen from unhappiness with the large percentage increases in the Convention budget in 1993 and 1996, but the Bureau responsibilities and therefore staffing were greatly increased from a very small initial budget. The percentage increases are therefore misleading; the Ramsar budget, in absolute terms, is very low indeed; contrast the Desertification Interim Secretariat which has 37 people on its staff.

The Netherlands,

218. having been involved in negotiations for the relocation of Wetlands International and others, endorsed the Subgroup's conclusion but noted that the report doesn't count the possible structural benefits of the bidding process.

Wetlands International

219. expressed appreciation for the rapidity of the Subgroup's report. One seeks a balance between financial issues and the working environment; this report has focused on the financial, but perhaps it should include environmental factors as well. Gland is a remarkable place, considering the proximity of IUCN and Geneva institutions. These issues are very important: what are the chances that this working environment could be better elsewhere? The stress of uncertainty should also be factored in, as well as the potential loss of institutional memory. He urged revision of the draft report to include these considerations.

The Russian Federation

220. congratulated the Subgroup on its report and noted the advantage of being close to international environmental organizations.

The Senior Policy Advisor

221. summarized the Subgroup's report as follows: 1) cash savings on salaries in any relocation would be minimal; 2) enormous intangible benefits would be lost; and 3) a huge amount of time and energy would be lost by prolonging the issue. The time can be better used.

Malaysia

222. suggested a need for more exhaustive study, especially by outside groups. It would be better to defer a decision at this time and allow the Subgroup to complete its work and report to the next COP.

Canada

223. acknowledged that the Subgroup did not exhaust the SC's terms of reference, although it did fulfill the terms of Resolution VI.22. It was felt that, without a substantial savings on salaries, all other factors would end up being less relevant. The Subgroup was reluctant to spend more time and energy on the issue. Canada noted that it is not willing to participate in any further study of this issue if there is no apparent hope of a different conclusion.

Islamic Republic of Iran and France

224. agreed with the Subgroup's recommendation that the matter be dropped.

Decision 20.26: The Standing Committee accepted the report of the Subgroup on Resolution VI.22 and approved its primary recommendation that the issue of possible Bureau relocation should be dropped from further consideration. It was agreed that anticipated significant cost savings in staff salaries would not result from Bureau relocation.

Switzerland (A. Bauty)

225. extended thanks to Canada for its considerable work in such a short time, making so many complex factors intelligible in its report of the Subgroup's conclusions. Switzerland believes that the host country should be discreet, but is nevertheless pleased to learn that, after analysis of the alternatives, the Parties agree that Switzerland is not so bad. The building has been given to IUCN, thus reducing Ramsar costs. Switzerland expressed the hope that, even if there should be budget problems at the national level, it can continue to be a generous voluntary contributor to the Convention.

Uganda

226. also thanked Canada and the Subgroup for its work and agreed with its recommendation. Uganda inquired how the cost reduction question will be reported to the COP. The Chair indicated that the Standing Committee will report to COP7 on all its activities and this procedure will be included in that report.

Agenda Item 15

Role of the Standing Committee

Hungary (the Chair)

227. reviewed DOC. SC20.15 with its suggestions for study of the role of Standing Committee responsibilities, and recommended that the newly created Subgroup on Categorization should also study:
- 1) regional categorization of Contracting Parties
 - 2) Standing Committee questions in DOC. SC20.15
 - 3) The Ramsar logo
 - 4) the composition of the STRP

Decision 20.27: The Standing Committee called on the newly created Subgroup on Regional Categorization to study 1) regional categorization of Contracting Parties 2) Standing Committee questions in DOC. SC20.15; 3) the Ramsar logo; and 4) the composition of the STRP. The Subgroup should report to the next Standing Committee meeting.

Agenda Item 16

The 7th Conference of the Parties

Costa Rica

228. introduced two videos concerning protected areas in Costa Rica and the conference facilities to be used for COP7.

The Deputy Secretary General

229. summarized the “lessons learned” exercises following COP5 and COP6 and introduced the report of the Subgroup on COP7 which met earlier this week.

Agenda Item 16.2

Agenda and Programme of COP7

Discussion of the incorporation of new items in the COP7 agenda

230. **Iran** suggested that the matters charged to the new Subgroup on Categorization should be itemized in the draft agenda. Other speakers felt that the agenda items concerning the Standing Committee report and further issues would be the place to consider these and any other issues that might arise between now and the COP; that the agenda should not be burdened with detailed mention of all of the many matters to be taken up. It would not be practicable to defer publication of the agenda until after the next SC meeting, because it will be sent out with the formal invitations well before SC21. All Subgroups’ work will be considered at the COP. All documentation for the COP will be circulated well in advance for comments. The next SC meeting will consider all of the COP documentation.

Decision 20.28: The Standing Committee accepted the draft Agenda and Programme for COP7 (Attachment 3).

Agenda Item 16.3

Technical Sessions: themes and modus operandi

The Deputy Secretary General

231. surveyed the questions that were considered in the proposed arrangement of the Technical Sessions into plenary panel presentations followed by breakout groups organized by regions, partially in order to permit regional focus on the issues and also to avoid the prohibitive costs of simultaneous interpretation for many groups. Evenings and other free periods will be available for discussion of issues not included among the Technical Session topics. Chairs and rapporteurs from all the regional breakout sessions will meet to produce a group report to plenary for each Technical Session.

Decision 20.29: The Standing Committee approved the proposed five Technical Session topics and the proposed modus operandi, and instructed the Bureau to include a clear explanation of the organization of these sessions with the COP documentation. The five Technical Sessions topics are:

- Ramsar and water;
- National planning for wetland conservation and wise use;
- Involving people at all levels in the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
- Tools for assessing and recognizing wetland values;
- The framework for regional and international cooperation regarding wetlands

Agenda Item 16.4

Format for National Reports

The Deputy Secretary General

232. explained that the Bureau has brought the format for National Reports into line with the Strategic Plan. The Subgroup recommended approval of the proposal format, but with further elaboration; with an added section profiling NGO activities which should be optional, and with guidelines to assist the Parties in completing the reports.

The Netherlands

233. referred to WCMC's work in harmonizing reporting requirements, and the **Secretary General** briefed the Committee on the WCMC project, to which Ramsar and the other conventions are contributing financially, which is intended to compare all conventions' reporting requirements and recommends ways to harmonize them. This project will not be completed for some time to come.

BirdLife International

234. expressed support for restructuring the National Reports to reflect the Strategic Plan and particularly supported the presence of objectives 2.6 on EIAs, 6.5 on proposed new sites, and 8.1 on National Ramsar Committees. BirdLife recommended that the phrase "or are there likely to be" be added to point 5.1 concerning changes in ecological character, in order to reflect correctly the fact that the Montreux Record aims to cater for potential changes.

Austria and the Deputy Secretary General

235. drew attention to the particular reporting problems of Parties with federal structures and agreed to consult further on this matter.

WWF International

236. wondered about reporting on matters in the COP6 Resolutions and Recommendations that are not specifically mentioned in the Strategic Plan, as for example toxic chemicals. The **Secretary General** responded that, apart from toxic chemicals, nearly everything is included in the Plan and toxic chemicals will require a special place in the National Reports.

The UK

237. welcomed the idea of structuring the National Reports on the Strategic Plan and noted the UK's work on a strategy for taking the Strategic Plan forward, hopefully to be announced on World Wetland Day 1998. The UK would like to see item 5.1 amended to leave room for citing positive changes in ecological character.

Mihaly Végh (STRP)

238. requested that the draft National Report format be circulated to the STRP for comment and it was agreed that that would be done by e-mail with a very short time for responses.

Hungary (the Chair)

239. urged that National Report questions be carefully worded so as to avoid yes and no questions.

Decision 20.30: The Standing Committee approved the Subgroup's recommendation on the format for National Reports and agreed to have further work approved by the Chair in the Committee's name.

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Austria,

240. referring to point 59 above concerning Austria's project on twinning with Ramsar sites in Africa, apologized that due to a misunderstanding the funds have not yet been processed and forwarded to the Bureau, but would be soon.

The Senior Policy Advisor

241. expressed his appreciation to the participants for their presence at the commemorative dinner the preceding evening and especially to the Bureau Administrator, J. Tucker, for having compiled a book of photographs for the occasion.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

242. introduced a proposal for amendment of the Small Grants Fund project review process.

Decision 20.31: The Standing Committee determined to amend the review process for Small Grants Fund proposals so that the Regional Representatives and Alternates will receive the Bureau's recommendations for SGF projects to be funded at least two weeks before the Standing Committee papers are distributed, so that they will have the opportunity to record any remarks in the meeting documentation.

The SGF project review process should be as follows:

1. The Bureau will review proposals to identify those of highest priority, which it endorses for funding, as per the Operational Guidelines approved for the current triennium.
2. The Secretariat also will produce a list of additional projects which technically merit funding, but for which funds are not available.
3. The Secretariat should provide the above two lists to the Regional Representatives and Alternates at least two weeks in advance of dispatching the Standing Committee meeting documentation. The views of the Regional Representatives, which may incorporate those, if any, of the Alternate Representatives, will be included in the Subgroup on Finance document.
4. The Regional Representatives and Alternates, as appropriate, will meet with their respective Regional Coordinators on the morning of the Subgroup on Finance meeting to resolve any proposed revisions in the funding package.
5. The Subgroup on Finance will convene later that day to address any items unresolved by the Regional Representatives, Alternates, and Regional Coordinators.

Agenda Item 16.5

Preparation of Regional Overviews and their presentation

The Deputy Secretary General

243. pointed out that the COP7 draft programme leaves more time for regional overviews than in the past, and they should be more challenging and analytical rather than merely a list of activities. The Subgroup on COP7's recommendation would permit the RCs to begin work on the overviews soon with input from the regional meetings. The Subgroup endorsed these ideas: more time for overviews at the COP, a change of emphasis, and discussion of draft overviews at the regional meetings. He suggested that the way in which the overviews would be presented should be discussed at SC21.

Islamic Republic of Iran

244. urged that the Regional Coordinators should present the regional overviews, assisted by the Regional Representatives.

Uruguay

245. urged that the overviews should be presented by the Representatives as part of their mandate. The Regional Reps will be involved in regional meetings beforehand and will be able to consult with all of the Contracting Parties. In addition, some of the regions do not have RCs.

Senegal

246. suggested that the Regional Coordinators and Regional Representatives should work together in developing the regional overview but that the Representatives should present them, as it is their mandate.

Hungary (the Chair)

247. noted that no decision was required at this time and the discussion will be resumed at the next SC meeting.

Agenda Item 16.6

Conference budget and fundraising

Costa Rica

248. outlined preparations made so far. Very briefly, Stage One has involved an Executive Decree which declared the COP to be an event of national interest, thus obliging all branches of government to cooperate in the preparations, and established two commissions, one at the ministerial level and a second of technical personnel from the ministries, as well as an organizing committee and a trust fund. The Organizing Committee, within the Ministry of Environment and Energy, is now functioning and has established a “service corridor” from the city to the airport. He demonstrated the ample facilities at the Herradura Hotel and others nearby. An international strategy and search for funding assistance will begin now, and the public relations and publicity committee will get under way. An architect is now planning the necessary infrastructure. Distribution of material will hopefully begin by the end of this year. Costa Rica noted that the USA and the Netherlands have already offered financial assistance for COP7 and other countries will be approached in the near future.

The Deputy Secretary General

249. detailed the budget projections considered by the Subgroup on COP7 and explained the two proposed options on the question of a US\$ 100 registration fee for COP participants: option 1, a flat fee for everyone, and option 2, the first two delegates from each Party free, with fees only for larger delegations. The Subgroup on COP7 recommended Option 1, and the Subgroup on Finance recommended that the question of charging a fee or not be left to the host country in consultation with the Subgroup on COP7 and the Secretary General.

The Secretary General

250. summarized the budget as follows: Costa Rica foresees about \$800,000 in total costs for itself and the Subgroup has endorsed that budget. The Bureau estimates costs of about \$400,000 for its own expenses outside the core budget, which were formerly covered by the host country; many of these costs cover Bureau activities on site during the COP (translation, interpretation, etc.). Bureau costs cover 1) documentation, 2) travel to Costa Rica with IUCN per diems, 3) translation and interpretation on site, and 4) publication of Proceedings. A total of \$1,200,000 is thus needed, of which Costa Rica is able to contribute about \$300,000. The suggested registration fee would yield about \$110,000, so about \$800,000 must be raised elsewhere. In addition, approximately \$700,000 (as was raised for Brisbane) will be needed for sponsoring delegates from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Sponsorships are intended for two delegates from Contracting Parties and one from Observer States and are estimated at \$3,500 each for air ticket, 11 days’ per diem, and registration fee). These budgets are much lower than for the Brisbane COP and cannot be reduced much further.

WWF International

251. inquired how the Bureau was able to reach a budget of \$400,000 when SFR 900,000 was required for Bureau costs for COP6. The **Secretary General** explained that much less has been set aside for documentation because the Bureau intends to produce and translate fewer documents and will conserve paper and mailing by utilizing electronic communications to the extent possible. He also envisaged that airfares and per diem would be less expensive for COP7.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

252. reiterated that, whilst the Subgroup on COP7 favored levying the registration fee, the Subgroup on Finance favored waiving the fee for 2 delegates from each Party, but only if the host country and the Bureau should feel that that option would be feasible; they should have the option of levying the fee to everyone if developing budgetary considerations make that necessary.

Discussion of the suggested registration fee for COP7

253. The **Russian Federation** felt that a fee would be in effect additional dues for the CPs and preferred to have the same amount added to the Bureau’s budget, though as **the Chair** pointed out the Bureau’s budget was fixed by COP6. If the decision on whether to charge a fee were to be postponed until SC21, the invitations, which must go out a year before the COP, would have to include a clear warning that fees might be charged. It is possible that the requirement of a fee would show potential donors that the Parties are committed, but the chief benefit of a fee would be to help with the overall revenue. It was noted that other conventions have charged registration fees, at least for some categories of participants, but the Convention should be careful not to do anything that might limit attendance by delegates from developing countries. The **USA** suggested that Parties be requested to contribute the registration fee but that it would be optional.

Senegal and the United States

254. noted that if the fee were to be made optional, the invitation would have to be clearly worded. The USA observed that for agency personnel, if the expectation that the fee should be paid were not clear, the fee might

not be approved; Senegal highlighted the contrary problem, that for some CPs to get approval to attend at all, the invitation must show clearly that there would be no cost involved.

The Deputy Secretary General

255. reported that the Subgroup on COP7 had voted to express appreciation to the Government of the USA for its support already shown for the COP.

Agenda Item 16.7

Conference decisions

The Deputy Secretary General

256. reported that the Subgroup on COP7 had noted persistent confusion about the difference between Resolutions and Recommendations and suggested referring to all COP decisions as “decisions” in future. It was noted that some countries have expressed dissatisfaction with the sheer number of decisions, and the Subgroup recommended care in admitting drafts and amalgamating them where possible, without restricting initiatives from the floor.

Discussion of the Resolutions and Recommendations for COP7

257. **Uruguay** noted that the distinction between Resolutions and Recommendations is a Ramsar tradition, as with some other conventions, and as such only the COP should alter it because of its juridical implications and possible retroactive effect on decisions from past COPs. **Canada** felt that the mechanism of recommendations, as distinct from strong decisions, is useful especially in scientific matters. The **Senior Policy Advisor** explained the history of Ramsar’s use of the terminology and argued that the word “decisions” would be workable if the wording then made the required distinction, e.g., “The COP decides to recommend....” It was shown that recent COP decisions do not carefully preserve the distinction that was voiced at COP6: that Resolutions are what the Contracting Parties commit themselves to do, and Recommendations are what they urge others to do. It was noted that Article 7.2 of the Convention speaks of “recommendations, resolutions and decisions being adopted by a simple majority.”

Uruguay, Russia, and Uganda

258. offered the solution that the distinction between Resolutions and Recommendations should be better explained and a clear format developed for each. Uganda noted that there have been too many COP decisions and some are not followed up, and wondered whether there needed to be a draft decision from every Technical Session rather than just a conclusion where appropriate.

Argentina and Canada

259. suggested that legal advice should be sought on the question.

Decision 20.32: The Standing Committee determined to defer its decision on whether Resolutions and Recommendations of the Conferences of the Parties should be grouped together as “decisions”. The Bureau was instructed to seek legal advice on the matter, survey the practice of other relevant conventions, and spell out the definitions of the terms clearly for consideration at the next SC meeting.

Discussion of the deadline for submitting draft resolutions and recommendations

260. It was noted that the Rules of Procedure stipulate that drafts should be submitted at least 60 days before the COP, so that the Bureau has time to translate and distribute them before the meeting, but that the “presiding officer” can permit later submissions on urgent issues. There is no presiding officer, however, until the COP has begun. In the past there have been quite a few late submissions, some not very urgent, leaving no time for adequate consideration. At the same time, it was felt that the possibility of late submissions should not be removed and that discretion is important.

Decision 20.33: The Standing Committee urged everyone to submit draft Resolutions and Recommendations for COP7 before the 60-day deadline stipulated in the Rules of Procedure. Late submissions can be accepted for urgently important issues.

Decision 20.34: The Committee, noting that Resolution VI.15 instructed the Standing Committee to conduct a thorough review of the Rules of Procedure, requested the Bureau to produce an analysis of the rules of procedure of other relevant conventions for the next SC meeting, so that the Committee can propose amendments for COP7 if necessary.

The Global Biodiversity Forum

IUCN (J.-Y. Pirot)

261. explained that the purpose of the Global Biodiversity Forum is to discuss biodiversity issues with perspectives from all sectors and suggested the desirability of scheduling a GBF meeting in coordination with the 7th Conference of the Parties.

Decision 20.35: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposal for organizing a Global Biodiversity Forum meeting in association with and immediately before the 7th COP and urged the Bureau to cooperate with IUCN and the authorities in Costa Rica in the preparations.

Subgroups of the Standing Committee

Hungary (the Chair)

262. pointed out several overlaps in Subgroup assignments and proposed some substitutions, subject to agreement by the Parties not present. With these changes, the Subgroup of Finance would consist of Australia, Germany, Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia, Uganda, Uruguay, and the USA (chair). The Subgroup on COP7 would consist of Costa Rica (chair), Malaysia, the Netherlands, Senegal, and the USA with the understanding that the Deputy Secretary General will assist the Subgroup with his experience in organizing COP6 in Australia. The Subgroup on Regional Categorization and the Standing Committee would consist of Canada, Hungary (the Chair), Islamic Republic of Iran, Papua New Guinea, and Uruguay.

Discussion of the organization of Subgroup meetings

263. There was general agreement that thorough Subgroup discussion of issues in advance is extremely beneficial to the efficient work of the Standing Committee, and thought was given to how Subgroup sessions should be scheduled during the SC's week for best advantage. Several detailed issues dealt with exhaustively in the SC20 meetings might better have been prepared by Subgroups first.

Decision 20.36: The Standing Committee decided that at least one day should be allocated to Subgroup meetings prior to the Standing Committee meetings and that Subgroups should be given time to reconvene during the week as necessary. No further Subgroups will be created at this time, but the Secretary General may use his discretion to invite Standing Committee members to form Subgroups to give advice as necessary. It was agreed that a decision on the number of days scheduled for the Standing Committee should be left until the agenda begins to develop over the course of the year. The Bureau was instructed to prepare agendas for the Subgroup meetings just as for the Standing Committee itself.

Agenda Item 17

The Bureau's Work Programme for 1998

264. This issue was already determined in Decision 20.7 under Agenda Item 8.

Agenda Item 19

Next meeting of the Standing Committee

Decision 20.37: The Committee decided that the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee will be scheduled for the week of 19-24 October 1998 at the Bureau's offices in Gland, Switzerland.

Agenda Item 20

Any other business

The Regional Coordinator for Asia

265. explained the Wetlands on Fire statement and sought input. Canada, the USA, and Trinidad and Tobago had improvements to suggest.

Decision 20.38: In order to express its concern about the fires presently burning in Southeast Asia, the Standing Committee approved the text of the Wetlands on Fire statement, with the amendments proposed, and it will be included as an attachment to the minutes and issued as a press release immediately (Attachment 4).

Discussion of the addition of new “partner organizations”

266. The **Secretary General** reminded the Committee that the Bureau had been asked to procure additional documentation from Friends of the Earth International concerning its request to be formally considered as a Ramsar partner organization, and to compile a list of other possible candidates for that status. The material from FOE has been received and circulated. **Canada** introduced a draft set of criteria that could be used to consider any future requests for partner status. **Uruguay** welcomed the draft criteria for further study and suggested that the SC should make a recommendation on the matter to the COP but not decide the matter itself. The **Netherlands** reminded the SC that, in addition to assuring the fitness of a candidate NGO, the SC should ask whether any real added advantage would be brought to the work of the Convention.

Decision 20.39: The Standing Committee expressed its thanks to Friends of the Earth International for the information supplied, but determined to defer a decision until after further discussion of the draft criteria and procedure for admission of NGO partners. The next SC meeting will study the draft criteria and decide whether future applications for partner status will be approved by the Standing Committee or, since any new partners should be acceptable to all Contracting Parties, this would require a decision by the COP.

Agenda Item 18

Approval of the SC20 minutes for days 1, 2, and 3

Decision 20.40: The Standing Committee approved the minutes of the first three days of the 20th meeting, subject to editorial amendments given to the rapporteur and editorial polishing by the Bureau. The minutes of the fourth day will be approved by Hungary, the Chair, before distribution of the minutes (in English only) and the Summary of Decisions (in English, French, and Spanish). The rapporteur was thanked for overnight preparation of each day’s minutes.

Agenda Item 21

Closing remarks

Hungary (the Chair)

267. recalled the Director General of IUCN’s remark on the importance of this SC meeting for charting the course towards the 7th COP and expressed the view that a lot of important decisions had been made. She felt that the success of the meeting was chiefly due to 1) good documentation in advance, 2) good work by the Subgroups in preparation for plenary sessions, and 3) a common willingness to achieve consensus. She thanked the Subgroup members for all their work and hoped that they would be able to find the time to continue. The Chair thanked the partner organizations for their contributions and thanked the Bureau staff for their efficient work in preparation for and during the meetings. The Chair seconded all the comments made at the evening dinner party about Michael Smart’s contributions to the Convention and in welcome of Bill Phillips, and she expressed her thanks to Tom Kabii, the Regional Representative for Africa for the past three years, whose work has been so appreciated by the African Parties.