

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

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

Summary of the Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee, including all decisions taken at the meeting

Matters arising from previous decisions

- **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.
- **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.

Convention finances

The Secretary General reported that the Convention is in a healthy financial situation. Fiscal year 1996 was closed with a surplus of SFR 136,153 (including an exchange-rate gain due to the depreciation of the Swiss franc versus the US dollar amounting to SFR 105,839). The projection to the end of 1997 also indicates that the year will be closed with a small surplus, and the proposed budget for 1998 is also a balanced budget. The Reserve Fund established in 1996 has accumulated more than SFR 200,000.

- **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.

Small Grants Fund allocations for 1997

The Bureau presented the results of its review of 83 projects received for consideration for funding under the Small Grants Fund in 1997. Of these, 55 projects were considered suitable for funding. Available resources in 1997 were sufficient to underwrite 29 projects in an equal number of countries, for a total amount of SFR 1,104,840.

- **Decision 20.4:** The Standing Committee approved the alphabetical list of 29 SGF proposals for 1997 funding support, as presented in the revised Bureau document.

(The list of approved projects is available on the Ramsar Web site (<http://iucn.org/themes/ramsar/>) and on request from the Ramsar Bureau.)

- **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.

1998 core income and expenditure, and invoices for 1998 dues

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

Bureau Work Programme for 1998

- **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 an explanation of any actions not carried out. The Chair was empowered to approve the 1998 work programme in early December 1997, and the work programme will be sent to all SC members in early January 1998.

Education and Public Awareness (EPA)

A special study group, which met under the leadership of D. Hulyer, recommended that: a) at the international level, a coordinating network on EPA matters be developed; easily adaptable information materials be produced; and the Contracting Parties seize upon World Wetlands Day as a springboard for continuing activities; b) and at national level, reporting on EPA activities be given a prominent place in the format for National Reports; and the Bureau urge the Parties to review their EPA activities prior to the 7th COP. The group urged the Bureau to take the lead in producing guidance on Operational Objective 3.2 of the Strategic Plan, in cooperation with the partner organizations.

- **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.

World Wetlands Day

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

Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Award

- **Decision 20.9:** The Standing Committee delegated the Subgroup on Finance to serve as a jury for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award established by Resolution VI.18 of the 6th Ramsar COP, 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 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award, 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.

(The Criteria and Procedure for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award are available on the Ramsar Web Site and can also be obtained from the Ramsar Bureau.)

The Jewels in the Crown initiative

- **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.

The Virtual Ramsar Site

The Virtual Ramsar Site is envisaged to be an Internet-based site which would focus on the wetlands of Bicentennial Park in Sydney and their management, and would have an explicit link to the work of the Ramsar Convention and its role in international wetlands conservation. The concept has been developed to date through discussions between Bicentennial Park authorities and Manidis Roberts International (a firm of environmental management consultants based in Sydney), with input from a group of specialist advisors in environmental management.

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

The Evian Initiative

At its 1996 meeting, the Standing Committee invited the Conservatoire du Littoral (a French government agency devoted to purchasing land for conservation purposes) to continue the development of their feasibility study for an initiative to support Ramsar work and be based in Evian (France). Major funding support was to be provided by the Danone Group of food-producing enterprises, including the Evian bottled water firm, and the French Global Environment Facility. A revised study was presented to the present meeting which includes activities in the areas of training, twining of Ramsar sites, and communications outreach. The initiative should generate some half million dollars of additional resources for Ramsar work over a three-year period.

- **Decision 20.13: The Standing Committee endorsed the Evian initiative to establish a Ramsar Outreach effort 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.**

Ramsar logo and graphical identity

The Secretary General submitted to the consideration of the Standing Committee the results of the efforts being made to develop a new graphic identity for the Convention, including a new logo, that will portray more accurately the new concerns and approaches of the Convention, for example the inclusion of the fish criteria for identification of Ramsar sites and the concepts of wise use and community participation in wetland management.

- **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.**

Communications strategy

While the Bureau has made considerable progress in its communications activities, in particular in the area of electronic communications, the Bureau still lacks professional expertise to cover all aspects of a communications strategy. Consequently, the Secretary General sought advice on hiring a consultant to develop a draft strategy by April 1998, one which would include different scenarios, from the bare minimum to the ideal, according to different levels of expenditure. The draft would be circulated to Standing Committee members and NGO partners for comment and finalized for submission to the 1998 meeting of the Standing Committee.

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

Scientific and Technical Review Panel

- **Decision 20.16: The Standing Committee accepted the STRP's report on its activities in the past year, tendered its thanks for the STRP's work, and expressed encouragement for completing its tasks.**

In order for the SC to agree upon recommendations concerning new members of the STRP for the approval of COP7, diplomatic notes calling for nominations should be sent to the Contracting Parties no later than April 1998 with a deadline of 31 August 1998. Because STRP members are elected, not to represent their countries, but in their individual capacities for their outstanding technical and scientific expertise; the diplomatic notes should explain clearly what kinds of expertise are required on the Panel, for the guidance of authorities seeking to making nominations.

- **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.**

Cooperation with the CBD

- **Decision 20.18: The Standing Committee welcomed the recommendations of the 3rd meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) on continuing cooperation between the CBD and the Ramsar Convention, 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.

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

- **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.

Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance

The STRP, having been charged with a review of the Criteria, found the present Criteria to be basically sound but recommended that they be reorganized into two broad categories, with corresponding changes to be made in the Explanatory Notes and Guidelines that accompany the Criteria. The STRP, at its last meeting, did not consider it advisable to prepare new criteria based upon cultural values and benefits, and the Standing Committee felt that this matter warrants further study.

- **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.

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

A number of NGOs have joined forces, spearheaded by the IUCN Social Policy Group, to implement Recommendation 6.3 on involving local and indigenous people in wetland management by carrying out a project for assembling case studies covering a global array of ecosystem types and types of involvement and developing criteria and guidelines from them. The Social Policy Group reported to the SC on the progress of the project and described the finished products that are expected to result from it.

- **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.

Recommendation 6.9 on a framework for National Wetland Policies

Canada and Uganda reported on their progress in drafting a report on the fundamental considerations in developing a range of wetland policies at national level. The report will draw upon examples of kinds of stakeholders, geographic range of wetlands being considered, and major components of a policy document, and will provide guidelines in drafting policy consultation and workshop materials and in constructing the policy itself. A draft report will be completed by May 1998 to permit completion and tabling at SC21 in October.

- 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.

Recommendation 6.13 on the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines

The STRP has undertaken a survey of the Contracting Parties on the effectiveness and implementation of the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines, as called for by Recommendation 6.13. An interim report has been distributed, and a definitive report will be made to the next STRP meeting.

- 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.

OECD "Guidelines for Aid Agencies for Improved Conservation and Sustainable Use of Tropical and Sub-Tropical Wetlands" in Spanish

- 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.

Regional groupings under the Ramsar Convention

The Islamic Republic of Iran, Alternate Representative for Asia, raised the question of Israel being considered as an Asian country within the Ramsar regional groupings, including the fact that the Bureau had extended an invitation to Israel to participate in the Ramsar Asian Regional meeting to be held in Malaysia later in the year. After considerable discussion, a consensus was reached on the following decision:

- 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.**

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

The Subgroup on Resolution VI.22, which was established by the Standing Committee at its 1996 meeting to analyze the question of possible cost reductions through relocation of the secretariat, studied the documents prepared on this matter, including an analysis of salary costs in different locations in all continents, and submitted a 30-page report for the consideration of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee decided to accept the recommendation of the Subgroup as follows:

- 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.**

(The Subgroup’s report to the Committee and the minutes of its meeting are available, in English only, from the Ramsar Bureau).

Standing Committee matters

The Standing Committee discussed a document prepared by its Chairperson in response to Action 8.1.3 of the Strategic Plan: “Review and, if necessary, redefine the roles, responsibilities and possible financial needs of the Standing Committee, prior to the 7th COP (1999)”. The document presented a number of proposals and alternatives for action, and it was decided these should be analyzed by a Subgroup of the Standing Committee.

- 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.**

Note: The discussion of the composition of the STRP (Scientific and Technical Review Panel) arose from consideration of a section in the report of the Secretary General in which he raised questions about the limited number of members of the Panel.

Agenda and Programme of the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties

The draft agenda was developed by the Bureau in consultation with Costa Rica and the Subgroup on COP7 in such a way as to benefit from the “lessons learned” from the Brisbane COP6 and address some of the issues relative to the technical facilities in San José and size of the expected participation.

- Decision 20.28: The Standing Committee accepted the draft Agenda and Programme for COP7.**

Note: the agenda and programme for COP7 will be formally distributed to all Contracting Parties in the near future. In the meantime, it can be consulted in the Ramsar Web site or a copy requested from the Ramsar Bureau.

Technical Sessions: themes and modus operandi

In preparation for the meeting, the Bureau surveyed the administrative authorities in all Contracting Parties requesting views on the subjects to be treated in Technical Sessions at COP7, and based on the responses and other considerations proposed a list of five topics. Because the previous organization of Technical Sessions into groups of approximately half the delegates would make impossible demands on the seating and interpreting capacities of the facilities in Costa Rica, it was proposed instead that the five Technical Sessions begin with panel presentations in plenary and then break out into seven regional discussion groups, with the results of these to be compiled by the rapporteurs of the groups into a single report to the COP for each Technical Session.

- Decision 20.29: The Standing Committee approved the proposed five Technical Session topics for COP7, as well as 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**

Format for National Reports

In response to Strategic Plan Action 8.1.11 and Resolution VI.21 calling for review of the format for National Reports required of all Contracting Parties prior to each COP, the Bureau proposed a tentative revised format intended to emphasize the structure and concerns of the Strategic Plan, and the Subgroup on COP7 urged the Committee to approve the direction in which the format is developing.

- Decision 20.30: the Standing Committee approved the Subgroup on COP7's recommendation on the format for National Reports and agreed to have further work approved by the Chair in the Committee's name.**

Small Grants Fund 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.

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| <p>5. The Subgroup on Finance will convene later that day to address any items unresolved by the Regional Representatives, Alternates, and Regional Coordinators.</p> |
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Conference decisions

In order to avoid the confusion that may have been created in the past between “recommendations” and “resolutions” adopted by the Conference of the Parties, the Secretary General had proposed that beginning with the next meeting of the Conference they should all be referred to as “decisions”. In fact, the text of the Convention (Article 7.2) speaks of “recommendations, resolutions and decisions”.

- 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.
- 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.

COP Rules of Procedure

- Decision 20.34: The Committee, noting that Resolution VI.15 instructed the Standing Committee to conduct a thorough review of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties, 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 Rules of Procedure of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties, in their present form, are available on the Ramsar Web site.)

The Global Biodiversity Forum

- 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

- 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.

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.

Wetlands on Fire statement

- 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.

(The “Wetlands on Fire” statement of the Standing Committee is available on the Ramsar Web site and in hard copy upon request to the Ramsar Bureau.)

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

Panama reported to the Standing Committee on its plans to create a “City of Knowledge” on vacated military premises and suggested the establishment there of a Ramsar Regional Center, a center for the study of issues related to Ramsar, especially but not only within the Neotropical Region. Panama expressed the intention of submitting a more developed draft proposal for discussion at the Ramsar regional meeting planned for May 1998, with a view to presentation to the Standing Committee in October 1998.

The consensus of the meeting was to congratulate the Government of Panama on its planning for the establishment of a Ramsar Regional Center and encourage Panama to continue the development of its proposal for consideration by the Standing Committee at its next meeting.

Admission of new NGO partners

In response to a request from Friends of the Earth International for admission as a formal Ramsar partner organization, the 19th Standing Committee meeting instructed the Bureau to request further information from FOE about its objectives and activities, which FOE has since provided.

- 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.**

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 the Minutes (in English, French, and Spanish). The rapporteur (Dwight Peck, Ramsar staff) was thanked for overnight preparation of each day’s minutes.**