

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

21st Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 19-24 October 1998

Minutes of the 21st Meeting of the Standing Committee

First Day, 21 October 1998

Agenda item 1: Welcoming remarks

Hungary (the Chairperson)

1. welcomed the large gathering and noted that all nine Standing Committee (SC) regional representatives were present, as well as almost all the alternate members. She was pleased that so many Observer States were present, which showed increased interest in the Convention. She noted that, because this was the last regular SC meeting before the 7th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7), it was an especially important one. She greeted the Partner Organizations and expressed confidence in benefiting from their expertise during the meeting. She acknowledged the hard work of the Bureau in preparing the documentation received by the delegates.
2. The Chair noted that the four SC Subgroups met over the previous two days to prepare the way for the SC's decision-making. She stressed the need for the participants to bear in mind, throughout its debates, the Convention's mission: "the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world".

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

3. The proposed agenda was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

4. It was noted that the Observer States are entitled to attend and do not need admission. The formality of admitting the observer organizations was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 4: Statements by the Partner Organizations

Mr David McDowell, Director General of IUCN - The World Conservation Union

5. welcomed the delegates and said that IUCN was privileged to host one of the most dynamic of the environmental treaties. He noted that IUCN will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in Fontainebleau in two weeks' time, and celebrating partnerships like this one. He confirmed the importance of this last SC meeting before COP7, which will chart the course of the Convention's work into the next century. He applauded the evolution of the Convention's focus upon the global water crisis, the effects of climate change on freshwater and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity in developing countries; he saw more change in the past three years than ever before, in the development from a focus upon indicator species to becoming a lead partner in global biodiversity efforts. He applauded the new partnerships with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Global Water Partnership, the World Water Council, etc., and hoped for progress in developing MOUs with the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). He was

impressed by Ramsar's first-ever long-term link with the private sector, with the Danone Group, in order to improve communications and training efforts.

6. Mr McDowell promised that the Partner Organizations will rise to the challenge of assisting in new efforts and noted evidence of recent NGO contributions in the SC21 documentation. The Ramsar Convention is unique in terms of the NGO contributions to its work; as a case in point, he mentioned the Global Biodiversity Forum planned with IUCN leadership to precede COP7. The GBF has proved to be a valuable global instrument in which experts can discuss the advice they can provide to the 1000+ delegates to the COP. He thanked the Chairperson and the Secretary General for their successful cooperation over the past triennium.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

7. thanked Mr McDowell for his remarks and expressed the SC's best wishes for his future career upon his upcoming departure from IUCN.

Mr John O'Sullivan, BirdLife International,

8. avowed that BirdLife is delighted to participate at this time of the equipping of the Convention with new tools, and foresaw that COP7 should add new structures as important to the Convention as the Regina Amendments were. BirdLife strongly supports the new "Vision for the Ramsar List". It has long been agreed that Ramsar obligations involve much more than designating one site for the Ramsar List, but it had never been concluded what, and he hoped the BirdLife's Important Bird Areas network can be helpful. He said that never before have there been such opportunities for establishing new tools and foresaw a need to relate them to one another.
9. Mr O'Sullivan noted that BirdLife International has always stressed the importance of National Reports (NRs) and applauded the proposed Ramsar Regional Overviews; he hoped that the Overviews would pull no punches where shortfalls in meeting obligations are evident. He lauded the posting of the NRs on the Web and congratulated those Contracting Parties (CPs) that had already submitted their NRs, and urged the remaining CPs to report as a matter of urgency – the failure to provide thoughtful NRs will hereafter be very obvious. He asked all participants to urge submission of full NRs and the prompt payment of their dues to the Convention.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

10. underlined his comments on National Reports and hoped that the Bureau will receive **all** NRs, as it did for Brisbane, but in time to allow evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for COP7. She counted on BirdLife International for continued support.

Cassandra Phillips, WWF International,

11. observed that WWF is 10 years older than Ramsar, played a role in its creation, and continues to promote it actively. With offices now in about 50 countries, WWF can provide much experience from the field. She endorsed BirdLife's comments about National Reporting. WWF is presently following up on the Strategic Plan and Brisbane Resolutions in many ways, for example a) in contributions to the STRP and the CPs in giving guidance on the threat to wetlands from toxic pollution, b) in contributions by WWF's Social Policy Unit on integration of socio-economic values in management guidelines, c) on contributions on alien/invasive species, and d) on Recommendation 6.3 on indigenous and local people. At COP7, WWF will follow closely the progress on a Vision for the Ramsar List and considers this a very valuable initiative.
12. Ms Phillips noted that WWF will produce a report for COP7 reflecting on the Ramsar Convention's first 27 years with recommendations on the way forward, which will form a basis

for WWF's future lobbying. She observed that the Chairperson of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Dr Yaa Ntaimoa-Baidu, has recently become a senior staff member of WWF International.

Dr Michael Moser, Wetlands International,

13. expressed pleasure in reading the documentation for this meeting, with its evidence of dynamic efforts: new Contracting Parties, new strategic partnerships, and many new tools emerging from a strongly analytic approach. He endorsed the proposed Bureau Work Programme 1999 and noted how closely that fits with the Ramsar collaborative arrangements already in place with Wetlands International. He anticipated eagerly the development of the Vision for the Ramsar List.
14. Dr Moser mentioned that Wetlands International will hold its board meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1998, coupled with the 2nd International Conference on Wetlands and Development, which has received endorsement from five convention secretariats and expects 450 participants from more than 90 countries. The board meeting will review the development of Wetlands International since its creation three years ago. There have been some growing pains at the Asia-Pacific regional HQ in the past year, but the new corporate identity has settled in smoothly. Wetlands International enjoys a splendid new headquarters in Wageningen with generous support from the Government of the Netherlands, and there have been exciting global and regional developments. The Global Review of Wetland Resources project, with UK funding, will produce exciting new information. Wetlands International continues to assist in the development of National Wetland strategies and initiatives in a large number of countries.
15. Dr Moser noted that he will soon be stepping down as Director of Wetlands International (AEME) for family commitments, and thanked the SC, the Partners, and Bureau staff for a great 10 years, in which he has attended all SC meetings since 1988. He is pleased to be leaving the Ramsar Convention in such great shape and hopes to continue working with the Ramsar family in his new free lance capacity.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

16. wished Dr Moser success for the future and expressed satisfaction that he will not be entirely out of sight. She noted the Bureau's planned participation in the Dakar meeting.

Agenda item 5: Matters arising from Standing Committee 20

17. No matters from SC20 not otherwise covered in the present agenda were put forward.

Agenda item 6: Matters arising from the regional meetings

The Secretary General

18. observed that a review of the reports of the Pan-European, Pan-African, and Pan-American meetings shows that the only issue not otherwise covered is that the Pan-African meeting recommended for COP consideration 1) to start a process to amend the Convention to change its name to "Convention on Wetlands" and in the French translation to "zones humides", and 2) the development of a water protocol under the Convention. Both issues would be significant if followed up for the COP.

Uganda

19. said that African CPs are currently discussing these issues and may propose them for COP discussion. **The Chairperson** reminded the meeting of the 60-day deadline for submission of draft decisions prior to the COP.

Agenda item 7.1: The Secretary General's report

The Secretary General

20. referred to DOC. 7.1 and emphasized two omissions, regarding UK funding to regional meetings and the work of the US NGO Ramsar Committee. He noted progress since the last meeting of the Standing Committee, with 18 new CPs, closer to the Strategic Plan's "universal membership", and now more than 70 million hectares included in the Ramsar List. He affirmed the value of working relations with the Partner Organizations and expressed gratitude to Latvia, Costa Rica, and Uganda for hosting regional meetings, as well as to the CPs who assisted delegate travel financially. He also thanked the hosts of the next two regional meetings, New Zealand and the Philippines. He was especially grateful to the Government of Sweden for its generous donation to ensure participation in these, and he thanked the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its offer to host a subregional meeting aimed at encouraging neighboring countries to join the Convention.
21. The Secretary General noted the Convention's progress in communications and highlighted developments in electronic outreach, especially with the Convention's Web site, which in August recorded more than 6,000 users accessing more than 22,000 pages. He expressed appreciation to Dwight Peck for assistance in that effort. He also drew attention to the newly produced *Directory of Wetland Management Training Opportunities* and hoped that its first edition will lead to improvements in future.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe, Tim Jones,

22. drew attention to ¶ 46 of the SG's Report on the study of Europe's National Wetland Policies (NWP) carried out by Maryse Mahy and her successor Anett Zellei, working with CPs to assess implementation of NWPs; he hoped to have a report ready for the Web by the end of the year. He noted the relatively low number of new sites in Europe since SC20, save for the Ukraine and the UK, for reasons which are not clear, but hoped for more new sites before COP7.

The Regional Coordinator for the Neotropical Region, Montserrat Carbonell,

23. observed that the Government of Guatemala has approved the Management Guidance Procedure report on Laguna El Tigre, which will soon be circulated. She noted increased interest in the Convention in the Caribbean subregion, especially because of the recent regional meeting and the work of Trinidad & Tobago and the Bahamas in promoting the benefits of membership for the Small Island Developing States. She expressed appreciation for the interest of the Geneva missions of the Neotropical States in promoting the Convention.

The Regional Coordinator for Africa, Anada Tiéga,

24. drew attention to the fact that some ten African countries are presently in the process of joining the Convention and thanked the Partner Organizations for their support on this.

The Regional Coordinator for Asia, Rebecca D'Cruz,

25. thanked the Philippines and the Islamic Republic of Iran for their offers to host regional and subregional meetings and reported on the progress of the Lao PDR, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia in joining the Convention. She is giving priority to cooperation with bilateral and multilateral instruments in the region and sought the help of CPs in the region, and thanked them for their help thus far.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

26. queried the Secretary General's report relating to possible Ramsar Bureau "membership" in the South East Asian Technical Advisory Committee of the Global Water Partnership, when Standing Committee 20 had shown insufficient support for such membership. It was explained that the text refers only to talks concerning recognition of Ramsar as a partner in a working relationship with the SEATAC.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

27. thanked the Bureau for its efforts in the documentation and the Web site and expressed the need for more support for human resources development, particularly for 1) support for participation of wetland managers and planners in training programmes, for up-to-date technology, 2) training for wetland technicians, despite the difficult task of mobilizing finances for this, and 3) research and data collection.

Agenda item 7.2: the Bureau's 1998 Work Programme

Australia

28. queried references in Section 3.2.5 Oceania to the World's Greatest Wetlands and an unnamed site in Australia. It was explained by the Bureau that resources have not permitted much work on this potential new tool and the phrasing was inherited from the Bureau's 1998 work programme. Assurances were given that, should this work proceed, there would be consultation with the relevant CPs.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

29. recognized the Bureau's cooperation with other environmental instruments, especially MOUs with the CBD and CMS, potentially with FCCC and CCD, and with regional groups, which make an additional burden on the Bureau's resources.

Agenda item 7.3: Draft Work Programme for 1999

The Secretary General

30. noted that the Bureau staff is small for so ambitious a programme, but it is feasible because of help from the CPs and the Partner NGOs.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

31. invited comment on the proposed work programme and noted that the Bureau has much additional work to do in preparation for COP7. The programme may have to be amended later to account for issues emerging from COP7.

The Secretary General,

32. referring to the work programme for the Asian region, advised that a subregional breakdown had been inadvertently included and would be removed. He also acknowledged that the breakdown showed Taiwan as a sovereign state; that this was also an error and did not indicate that the Convention recognized Taiwan as such.

Israel

33. queried the SG's statement concerning Israel's inclusion in the Asian regional grouping. The SG clarified that he was making no assertion, merely pointing out that the matter was under discussion.

Australia

34. expressed the desire to submit written comments on the Oceania part of the Work Programme, which was welcomed by the Chairperson.

Decision SC21.1: The Bureau's proposed Work Programme for 1999 was approved by consensus.

Agenda item 8: Regional categorization

Hungary (the Chairperson)

35. introduced the issue and recalled SC20's discussion of Strategic Plan Action 8.1.3 on the roles and responsibilities of the SC and Action 8.1.2 on regional representation on the SC, which were treated together here. SC20 did not complete discussion of these because of concerns raised about regionalization, and a subgroup was established to deal with the whole issue. Canada, Hungary (chair), the Islamic Republic of Iran, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, and Uruguay comprised the Subgroup and Germany assisted. A discussion paper was sent to the group members for comment, but only two replied. A summary paper was distributed at regional meetings held so far and sent to all other Contracting Parties for comment, but there was very little feedback. The Chairperson felt compelled to prepare the agenda paper, including the draft decision and the proposals in DOC. 8.1. She summarized the main innovations in the proposals: 1) six regional groups, 2) non-CPs to be assigned to regions in advance, 3) groups to nominate CPs to the SC, 4) a proportional system of SC membership, and 5) elimination of the category of alternate members.
36. She reported on the results of the Subgroup meeting on Monday: different conventions use different regional administrative breakdowns, and CITES was found to be most suitable for Ramsar. The CITES model allows flexibility for CPs near the borders of the regions to choose which region they would wish to belong to. Russia requested permanent observer status at all Asian regional meetings, which the Subgroup recommended should be considered at the next Asian meeting. The proposal had an annex listing countries in each of the regions, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, raising objections, proposed alternative regional categories.
37. The Subgroup reached consensus on all paragraphs of the draft decision except 4 and 5. Accordingly, the present draft shows both the original proposal and the Islamic Republic of Iran's alternatives for these. Iran had also supplied an alternative annex of countries based upon its alternative proposal. The Subgroup could not resolve the issue on ¶ 4 and 5 and asked the SC to consider the whole matter.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

38. expressed gratitude for the Chair's objective reporting of the Subgroup's findings, insisting that Iran's suggestion was not politically motivated; rather it follows from the practice of other conventions and is in the UN tradition. The intention of the alternative proposal was not political, whereas the original proposal was political. The CITES grouping is just an indicative list from the secretariat and was never decided upon by any intergovernmental body, and thus cannot serve as a model. Iran's proposal is exactly the same as that used by many other environmental conventions.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

39. noted that different conventions follow different practices but there is no general rule. All Ramsar rules try to bring the Convention closer to the biodiversity-related conventions, thus CITES, and that is why FCCC and Basel were not considered.

Italy

40. shared the view that linkage with other conventions should be guided by those dealing with territories (like Ramsar and CMS) and agreed that CITES was thus not a good model. The aim

should be networking within biogeographical regions and should not be influenced by political or administrative concerns.

Germany

41. supported the draft decision's original proposal, for which there are good geographical reasons.

The USA

42. agreed with Germany and Italy in favoring the original proposal based on biogeographical regions, which makes sense and brings no dramatic changes to past Ramsar practice. The USA strongly endorsed the Chair's original proposal.

Hungary

43. noted the views expressed at the Pan-European regional meetings about a union of east and west Europe, and thus found Iran's alternative proposal unacceptable.

Uruguay

44. expressed the Neotropical CPs' view favoring the original proposal based on biogeographical regions on ¶ 4. On ¶ 5, the Representative advised that he would need to consult with the Neotropical CPs as to whether they prefer the original version, without the flexibility clause. At the Pan-American meeting, the Caribbean Contracting Parties were interested in studying the alternatives on regional representation that could best suit this subregion.

Malaysia

45. noted that there is no consensus on how to categorize the regions and stressed that what is important is how the decision affects the Asian region. The matter should first be considered by the Asian region before any further discussion here. The position of the Asian region should be ascertained at the February regional meeting in the Philippines, and then communicated to COP7.

Senegal

46. referred to the Pan-African Meeting's discussion of this matter in July 1998, where there was a clear preference for the six regions of the original proposal. If there should be no consensus, the matter should be discussed by the COP.

Egypt

47. endorsed Malaysia's view that any decision affecting a region should first be taken by that region, for it would be unwise to try to force an arbitrary grouping upon a region.

Australia

48. supported the original grouping based upon biogeographical considerations and supported the Oceania grouping. Australia takes its regional obligations seriously and, with Wetlands International, co-supports the Oceania regional officer who seeks accession of the South Pacific nations. Australia endorsed the original proposal.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

49. made a point of clarification on the statements from other regional groups that they support the original proposal. He is certain that Uruguay was not proposing that the Neotropics should decide for Asia; that Germany was merely supporting the conflation of 2 European regions into 1; that the USA meant that it supported the original proposal concerning the North American region; that Africa was not saying it wished to decide for Asia, only that the COP should make

that decision; that Australia supported an Oceania group and supported Malaysia's view of leaving the matter for the Asian group to determine.

50. Iran asked what is the purpose of regional groupings? It is to promote the objectives of the Strategic Plan through regional cooperation and regional organizations. If the regional grouping is so artificial that it does not thus contribute, then it must be reconsidered. If members within regions cannot work together at all, it does not contribute to those objectives; e.g., the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has not been able to function at all in the Asia region for nearly two years because of an inability to schedule meetings. It is practicability, feasibility, and serving the objectives of the Convention that are important in regional groupings.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

51. expressed the belief that the foregoing speakers were referring to the annex of countries also, which cannot easily be separated from the draft decision. It is true that the Asian CPs have had no chance to discuss this matter yet at a regional meeting. But she drew attention to the fact that the Strategic Plan mandates the SC and the COP to review the Standing Committee representation, not the regions themselves. It is the SC that must bring a recommendation to the COP. She noted that the goal of this Convention is wetland conservation and wise use, very different from that of the CTBT, and this should be borne in mind.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

52. clarified that he had only meant to say that the earlier speakers had not intended to decide anything for the Asian group, and were only speaking of their own regions.

The USA

53. observed that Iran's issue is that the regions should decide their own memberships. He noted a conflict between this and the proposed ¶ 5 assigning regions and the flexibility clause, allowing near-boundary CPs to exercise their sovereign rights to participate in alternative regions, and reported that the Subgroup endorsed the flexibility clause but did not endorse the regions deciding for themselves.

Israel

54. supported the USA's remark and supported the majority of speakers and the original proposal. Israel, as a member of the Asian region, fully intends to participate in the Asian regional meeting in the Philippines. He expressed the view that the alternative proposal is intended only to exclude Israel from the region. Israel voiced gratitude to the Chair for her objective report and to the Bureau for its documentation. Israel would resist all attempts to politicize the Ramsar Convention. The alternative proposal of Iran is alien to the Ramsar tradition of biogeographical grouping. Israel felt that the purpose was to single out Israel and prevent it from contributing to the Ramsar Convention, and was suspicious of Iran's motives for advancing its proposal. Israel asked that Ramsar not be politicized and that political issues be left to the UN General Assembly. Israel will respect any decision of the Asian regional meeting, but only if the consensus is based upon Ramsar Contracting Parties in Asia, not on the opinion of the Asia Group at the United Nations.

Malaysia

55. expressed interest in the US view on the contradiction of the regions deciding for themselves versus the sovereign rights of CPs to decide. Malaysia supported Iran's view that Asian countries must decide which CPs are in the Asian family, lest it be like someone entering a house without knocking. He urged that the Asian CPs decide for themselves in February and bring a recommendation to the COP for a final decision, so that other Asian CPs not present

here may have a voice as well. He raised the question of effectiveness – not an imposed artificial grouping, but rather one that can advance the objectives of the Ramsar Convention.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

56. led the meeting through a consideration of other provisions of the draft decision except ¶ 4 and 5 and clarified questions on the suppression of SC alternates in favor of expanded membership, on the rationale for basing the proportional representation upon 12, and on the removal of the insistence upon Ministry of Foreign Affairs notification of the names of individual SC representatives, as too cumbersome. With input from Uganda and Egypt, the new wording requiring notification from administrative authorities “by diplomatic channels” was preferred.

The Secretary General

57. raised the notion that mention of support for representatives from developing countries should be expanded to include countries with economies in transition, in line with COP6’s Resolution VI.6 expanding Small Grants Fund eligibility to the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee list. He assured Egypt that including economies in transition would not affect the level of support for developing countries, and it was agreed to add “countries in transition” to the eligibility for support.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

58. noted that consensus had been reached on all of the proposed COP draft decisions except ¶ 4 and 5, including Annex II.

Panama

59. stipulated that the report to COP7 should mention Panama’s preference for a proportional representation based on a representative for 10 rather than 12 CPs.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

60. returned the discussion to the unresolved ¶ 4 and 5 and noted that the SC must bring a proposal to the COP.

The USA

61. suggested that Egypt’s and Malaysia’s wish for an Asian discussion before the COP could be met by a caucus early in the COP.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

62. pointed out that the bodies of the Ramsar Convention have always arrived at decisions by consensus, but no consensus appeared now to be possible. It would appear that a vote would be required for the first time in Ramsar history.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

63. would not urge violating the tradition of consensus by bringing the matter to the precedent of a vote, but would not object to that, and if the Chair would insist upon a vote, Iran would have some further comments to make.

Malaysia

64. reiterated its view that the Asian family should be left to decide its own membership. He urged that the issue not be decided by a vote, which would create a dangerous precedent. He recommended following the path of consensus, with the Asian Parties deciding what is good for them.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

65. expressed a strong preference for consensus, but the Strategic Plan requires a decision on this issue, and with no consensus, a vote appears to be necessary.

Italy

66. pointed out problems with Iran's alternative proposal, e.g. the regional grouping of Greece with New Zealand. But the real problem is that groupings are most feasible under biogeographical criteria, combining Parties with similar concerns in cooperative groups.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

67. reminded the meeting that Article 5 of the Convention calls for cooperation in all circumstances, not just within regions.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

68. expressed sorrow at having to challenge the Chair's legal interpretation of Rule 14 of the Rules of Procedure and called for legal advice. Rule 14 allows votes on decisions, not on draft decisions. The issue should be reported back to COP7. He was sorry to challenge the Chair, but had to because the Chair was taking sides on the issue.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

69. noted that the decision to be taken is on what draft decision is to be put forward to the COP, and that to distinguish between decisions and draft decisions is a quibble.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

70. brought a point of order and challenged the Chair's interpretation and called for legal advice.

The Secretary General

71. pointed out that the Convention has no legal advisor, never having required one before, and agreed with the Chair that the SC is only deciding on "transmitting documents to the COP7", not deciding upon the substance of the regional grouping issue itself. That is a decision that the SC is required and empowered to take.

The USA

72. supported the interpretation of the Chair and the Secretary General. The USA had understood in the Subgroup meeting that the Islamic Republic of Iran was comfortable with allowing consensus to proceed with Iran's reservations to be noted, and saw no legal issues involved.

Malaysia

73. urged retaining the principle of consensus and suggested that both proposals be square-bracketed and put to the COP for decision. That would leave time for the Asian CPs to discuss and avoid getting groups of people working at cross purposes.

Uganda

74. suggested that the SC transmit to the COP the consensus text with Iran's proposal attached, which may seem like postponing a decision but would be preferable to voting.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

75. drew the suggested distinction between 1) calling for a vote on one version and 2) reaching a consensus on transmitting bracketed versions to the COP, with an explanation included with the report of the Chairperson of the Standing Committee to COP7.

Other comment

76. **Malaysia** supported transmitting bracketed alternatives. **Canada** would favor sending both options as a consensus decision as long as it would be noted that the majority favored one proposal and one SC member supported the other. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** would have no problem with the alternative proposal being identified as having been proposed by Iran. **Australia** said that Oceania would support transmitting both options with a note showing relative support. **Uruguay** agreed to send both options in square brackets with an indication of more support for the one than for the other. **Egypt**, though not a voting member, supported Uganda's suggestion of sending bracketed alternatives.

Decision SC21.2: The Standing Committee determined to forward for consideration by COP7 the proposed draft decision on regional categorization, as amended by the Subgroup on Categorization, including the two bracketed proposals by the majority and by the Islamic Republic of Iran, together with Annex I in alternative versions, and Annex II.

El Salvador

77. announced that El Salvador signed accession papers for the Convention on 14 May, which were ratified on 2 July, and it is hoped that El Salvador will participate in COP7 as a Contracting Party. He paid tribute to the cooperation between government officials and NGOs that made this accession possible.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

78. welcomed this news warmly and hoped that the accession process would be completed before COP7.

Agenda items 8.3 and 8.4: Composition of and membership in the STRP

The Deputy Secretary General

79. pointed out that two issues were being considered: 1) recommending members to COP7 for the next STRP, and 2) modifying the STRP's *modus operandi*. Resolution VI.7 called for STRP to act as nodes in a network of experts, but this potential has not been reached; this is no reflection on STRP members at all, but an acknowledgement that the STRP cannot work in a vacuum. Mechanisms are required to allow STRP to deliver the products required by the COP. The Bureau urges that a focal point be established in each CP as a contact for the STRP, a global network for dialogue on issues where the STRP needs the input of more experts, to increase the flow of information. The draft decision urges that the Partner Organizations become full members of the STRP, facilitating greater access to their specialist groups, and also urges reciprocal observer status with the equivalent expert bodies of Conventions with which Ramsar has either MOUs or MOCs.
80. The Subgroup recommended, in addition to the new provisions, the traditional organization of members and alternates, pending resolution of the regionalization debate.

Dr Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu, Chair of the STRP,

81. expressed agreement with the contents of the proposed revision of STRP; the Bureau's proposal will bring on board more expertise and better flow of information. She urged that the SC move in this direction even if it should be necessary to continue the present structure for another triennium. She made three further suggestions:
- a) There is a need for a clear recognition of procedures and for a clarification of the relationship between the STRP and the Bureau: how independently can the STRP function? How much influence or control should the Bureau exercise upon the STRP?

- b) The SC should consider an independent budget for the STRP, over which the STRP Chair has some control. Then STRP can decide on frequency of meetings, recruit needed expertise, etc.
- c) The SC should consider setting up an operational budget for the STRP Chair to organize the work of the STRP, unless the Chair comes from a well-funded organization.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

- 82. noted that the Subgroup tried to consider STRP and regionalization issues together and refined it to the question: Should the STRP mirror the structure of the SC in terms of regional representation? The Subgroup approved the network of focal points, recognizing that STRP cannot be expected to solve all the problems by themselves, and urged that Partners become full members.
- 83. It was considered that the idea of an independent budget for STRP would be technically feasible but unlikely, given the Subgroup on Finance's conservative views of the proposed budget for the next triennium and the fact that the Chairperson of the Standing Committee herself does not command an independent budget.

Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu

- 84. clarified that there is no present problem or conflict in the STRP relationship with the Bureau, but the question should be raised at some point of how independent STRP can be, within the SC's and COP's mandate, on choosing its focus on issues, relative priorities, etc.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

- 85. urged the STRP and the Bureau to continue working in the spirit of cooperation and take notice of Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu's request for guidance on this issue for future STRPs. The Chair asked that these comments be recorded for future reference.

Further discussion

- 86. **Hungary (the Chairperson)** suggested that the principle should be accepted that the composition of the STRP should mirror that of the SC. **Uruguay, Canada, and Australia** supported that, some of them urging the recommendation of a traditional slate of names as a fallback option failing resolution of the regionalization issue. **France** urged representation by areas of expertise rather than by region and noted that no specialists in human sciences had been selected for the proposed list of nominations. **The Secretary General** urged simplicity in the recommendation to COP, just the "mirror" principle with a promise of suggested names afterward. **The Chair** noted that though selection by expertise had been tried, regional criteria for STRP selection simply could not be avoided.

Decision SC21.3: The Standing Committee determined by consensus that the Scientific and Technical Review Panel representation should mirror that of the composition of the Standing Committee, and adopted the text of the proposed draft decision for transmission to the COP, without the suggested names of nominees. These will be recommended by the Conference Committee at COP7.

Agenda item 9: Outreach Programme

The Deputy Secretary General

- 87. noted that the several parts of the Outreach Programme will be considered separately but should also be seen as part of a whole programme.

Agenda item 9.1: Wetland Conservation Award

Canada

88. reported on the Subgroup's consideration of the Award process: with 74 completed nominations received, the Bureau established a thorough shortlisting process and gave the Subgroup a shortlist of names with documentation and suggested working principles. The Subgroup decided that "In Memoriam" awards should not be considered, but that a separate means for recognizing posthumous achievements at COP7 should be explored. The Subgroup recommended the selection of 5 laureates, splitting two of the three categories, and recommended adoption of the proposed "inexpensive piece of art", which was promptly unveiled.

Italy

89. urged that not only the winners of the award, but also the reasons for their winning, be given prominent display in the media, and **the Secretary General** described media plans to capitalize upon the award to promote the Convention through written and video interviews, presentation at COP7, etc.

Decision SC21.3: The Standing Committee agreed to award the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award jointly to Professor Vitaly G. Krivenko (Russian Federation) and Victor Pulido (Peru) in the individual category, jointly to the Lake Naivasha Riparian Association (Kenya) and the Society for Protection of Prespa (Greece) in the NGO category, and to the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program (Canada) in the government organization category, and to adopt the diploma and piece of art proposed by the Bureau for presentation to each of the laureates.

The Secretary General

90. acknowledged his appreciation for the work of Mireille Katz in heading up the Wetland Conservation Award project, which involved an enormous amount of effort in following up on nominations, negotiating the artwork, and preparing shortlist procedures.

Agenda item 9.2: New graphic identity

The Secretary General

91. described the background to the search for a new graphic identity to express the expansion of the Convention's concerns from waterfowl habitat to the broader issues of sustainable use of wetland resources. This wider approach has been occasioned in large part by the Convention's expansion to the developing countries, where wetland issues frequently involve questions of people's livelihood. SC20 had requested the preservation of the original logo in any new attempt, but that proved to be impossible. The Bureau commissioned five professional design agencies to suggest concepts and chose to pursue the concept presented by Saatchi and Saatchi, with a focus on the distinctive name "Ramsar" rather than upon any pictorial elements that would not be adaptable to small sizes.

Saatchi and Saatchi, design firm,

92. made a PowerPoint presentation of the evolution of the search for a new graphical identity and explanation of the conceptual and artistic reasoning behind the proposed new logo, and its flexibility in use.

Canada, Chair of the Subgroup,

93. thanked Saatchi and Saatchi for its work and recommended the proposed logo as excellent for promoting the Convention's new identity, to attract government and corporate interest. The

downside is the loss of 25 years of tradition, with a logo that is in use around the world, but examples of other logo changes show that it can be done smoothly and with great effect. The Subgroup was “reasonably happy” with the proposed logo and recommended that the SC adopt it.

Michael Moser, Wetlands International,

94. was invited to speak about Wetlands International’s change of logo and noted that in that case there was no option of staying with the old logo. The key is that logos cannot be decided by committee, and Ramsar has taken the sensible route of seeking expert advice; he urged that it not be left for everyone to tweak the proposed logo, that it be accepted at one go or rejected outright. He urged that the transition to the new logo be made swiftly and cleanly.

The Secretary General

95. suggested that the new logo be accepted and be launched as of 1 January. He foresaw no significant financial implications to the changeover.

Decision SC21.4: The Standing Committee adopted the new Ramsar logo designed by Saatchi and Saatchi and decided that the Bureau should launch it on 1 January 1999 by appropriate means.

Colombia

96. wished to record her sense that the new logo represents the water element very well but is lacking any sense of the element of flora and fauna, which is very important.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

97. appreciated that concern but felt that no single approach would please everyone. She was pleased to see that the distinctive word “Ramsar” is once again to be highlighted.

Agenda item 9.4: World Wetlands Day/Week

The Deputy Secretary General

98. noted the increasing success of the WWD concept, with more than 55 countries having notified the Bureau of their 1998 WWD activities at national and local levels. The suggested theme for WWD 1999 is the same as that of the COP: “People and Wetlands: the Vital Link”. The Bureau will again provide modest resource materials and a quotable statement from the SG, and he urged the CPs to begin thinking now about how best to promote this theme of local people managing their wetlands. He called WWD a “growth phenomenon.”

Uganda

99. called WWD very useful in mobilizing government and local support for activities and mentioned Uganda’s very successful celebrations in 1998. He inquired about any progress in formalizing World Wetlands Day with the UN and about the process of deciding upon themes in future.

The Secretary General

100. explained that, with generous assistance from the Malaysian mission to the UN in New York last summer, the Bureau prepared paperwork for soliciting UN recognition of WWD but missed the deadline for consideration in that cycle; since then the Bureau has not been able to follow up this matter. Concerning future themes for WWD, this matter should be included in the agenda of the SC22 meeting.

Malaysia

101. kindly offered to check with its mission in New York and ascertain at what stage the process reposes, and will come back to the Bureau for any further documentation.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

102. urged CPs to use World Wetlands Day/World Wetlands Week to promote the Convention and raise public awareness of Ramsar values of wise use.

Agenda item 9.6: Ramsar Center proposal from Panama

Panama

103. made a PowerPoint presentation of its proposal to create a Ramsar Center as part of its City of Knowledge complex in former US military facilities:

Very briefly, the presentation described Panama's unique suitability to host the proposed Ramsar Regional Center, in terms of its biological potential and its technical infrastructure, and urged that the Regional Center will constitute an important mechanism for coordination, training, research and other exchanges relating to wetland conservation and wise use. The Ramsar Regional Center for the Western Hemisphere, located in Panama City, will support the implementation of the Ramsar Convention through research and studies on the management and rational use of wetlands, with attention to biodiversity and the benefits that wetlands offer to the human population. It will promote the Convention's objectives through the development of seminars, conferences, and meetings at the regional level and will establish links among the Contracting Parties to facilitate the application of the Convention through coordination and exchange between the Western Hemisphere and other regions of the world.

The Government of the Republic of Panama is committed to conferring a concession to the Ramsar Regional Center as an international center for scientific research based at the City of Knowledge, with all the incentives conferred by the Government to the members of this international academic and scientific complex located within the former Clayton Military Base at the border of the Panama Canal. The Government also engages to participate in co-financing of salary, support, and services expenses.

The Center's mission will be "to provide support in the huge task of 'caring for the earth'" and promote human well-being through the conservation and rational use of wetlands in the Western Hemisphere, working towards sustainable development through the promotion of specific scientific and educational activities. The Center is intended to be a self-supporting entity which will negotiate its services and receive donations to accomplish the development of programmes.

Uruguay,

104. as Regional Representative for the Neotropics, thanked Panama for its initiative and its efforts towards its implementation, and recalled the Pan-American regional meeting's declaration supporting this very strongly.

Honduras

105. speaking for Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (GRUCA), affirmed their support for the Ramsar Regional Center Project, as already expressed by the Ministers of Environment and Development during their 19th meeting in Belize last April and in Ramsar's Pan-American regional meeting last June in San José. The objective of this initiative is to strengthen the training and research activities on Wetlands of International Importance in the western hemisphere. GRUCA expressed the view that the Panamanian initiative will benefit, not only Ramsar but the region as a whole, providing valuable support for future research studies similar to those being implemented by the Caddo Lake Institute and the Friends of the Earth in the Americas.

Argentina and Venezuela

106. strongly supported the Panamanian initiative.

Senegal

107. supported the Panamanian initiative and hoped that a similar project might someday be undertaken in Africa.

Spain

108. supported the Panamanian initiative and requested a formal approach for cooperation in the hope that Spain might be able to assist in more tangible ways in establishing the Ramsar Regional Center.

The USA

109. supported the Panamanian initiative wholeheartedly and pointed out that the USA/Ramsar Wetlands for the Future Initiative shares many of the same objectives, and many opportunities for joint actions with the proposed Ramsar Center should be explored.

Malaysia

110. congratulated Panama on its initiative and supported the proposal.

Decision SC21.5: The Standing Committee supported the initiative of the Government of Panama to create, in the City of Knowledge, the Ramsar Center for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere; welcomed the support of countries inside and outside the region; urged further support from Contracting Parties; and urged the Secretary General to support Panama in furthering this initiative.

The Ambassador of Panama, H.E. Kam Binns

111. expressed his Government's appreciation for the support received in this meeting. He stressed that his Government understands this initiative to be part of its commitment to the Wetlands of International Importance, of which there are four in Panama. With this initiative, Panama reaffirms its historical tradition as a meeting place, and there is the hope that Panama will once again become the centre for new developments. He offered special thanks to the delegates from Latin America and the Caribbean for their continuing support, but also recognized the support of CPs from other regions and emphasized that this initiative will be open to them as well.

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Agenda item 9.3: Ramsar Outreach Programme

The Deputy Secretary General

112. referred to draft COP7 DOC. 13 on the proposed Outreach Programme, which brings together the Bureau's efforts on Education, Public Awareness, and Communications (EPAC) and includes some actions for the CPs. The Programme grows from the Strategic Plan's General Objective 3. The handout is an extract from DOC. 13 which summarizes the Programme from the point of view of the Parties. He noted the paper's effort to identify target groups and said that the Subgroup asked for more information on the behaviors to be changed within each group.
113. He pointed to ¶ 12 on community empowerment programmes, which is largely a product of the EPAC professionals' workshop held at the Bureau in September 1998 with support from the Evian Project. Programme Area II is the communications strategy called for by the Strategic

Plan and COP6. It is an attempt for the first time to provide the Convention with a new direction in EPA and elevate these efforts in the Convention's priorities.

Canada

114. noted that the Subgroup discussed the Programme carefully and congratulated the Bureau for putting it together. He referred to the actions required from the Administrative Authorities, found on the extract page, most notably the establishment of a network of national focal points and NGO focal points. In federal states, the national authority often has less ability to reach lower levels of government. He drew attention to the role of Wetlands Link and to the presence of reporting deadlines in the document. The Subgroup recommended that the SC approve COP7 DOC. 13 in its draft form.

The Deputy Secretary General

115. observed that DOC. 13 will be discussed in Technical Session (TS) III at COP7, and a draft decision could be prepared after the SC's input, to be introduced through the TS. The EPAC workshop suggested presenting the Programme to COP7 with sponsorship by Australia and possibly other CPs, and using Waterwatch Australia as a model.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

116. questioned the use of the word "outreach", which may work in English but certainly not in Hungarian and perhaps other languages. She queried "general community" as a target group, since all members would also belong to some more focused group, and the phrase "landowners and wetland managers". The Chairperson echoed the need for additional information on the target groups and the desired effect upon them. She suggested adding "national NGOs" to group C) 3, and wondered whether Action I.1 in ¶ 12, establishing national programmes, is realistic for wetlands, rather than calling for wetland emphases as part of larger EPAC efforts such as for biodiversity.

Italy

117. described DOC. 13 as a good, comprehensive document and asked that "agriculture" be added to D) 2. He felt that "outreach" works well in English and French. He wished for more attention to wetland and water users *per se*. Italy agreed with the idea of national focal points, and it would be up to the CPs to develop that and choose people who are knowledgeable about Ramsar and able to influence other institutions in the country.

WWF International

118. expressed the view that good, detailed points have been raised in DOC. 13, but asked how much national EPAC effort will ever be focused just on Ramsar wetlands, rather than upon freshwater resources, for example. She was inclined to discourage focusing upon EPAC about Ramsar as an end rather than as a tool. But in general, WWF applauds the effort in draft COP7 DOC. 13.

Italy

119. has made specific efforts in the season of birds and noted that actions should be specific and fall within broader education campaigns, especially for schoolchildren.

The USA

120. noted that National Ramsar Committees (NRCs) are not mentioned in this document and wondered how to involve them.

The Deputy Secretary General

121. said that the Bureau was conscious of the need to strengthen the NRC role in the Programme. NRCs, where they exist, should include the EPA focal point, and that will be included in the draft decision.

Decision SC21.6: The Standing Committee decided to approve the Outreach Programme in draft COP7 DOC. 13 in principle, to be further developed for the COP7 Technical Session III, and endorsed the proposal to urge Contracting Parties to establish national Education, Public Awareness, and Communications (EPAC) focal points.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

122. expressed the Committee's appreciation for the efforts of those who worked on the draft Outreach document.

Agenda items 9.5, 9.7, and 9.8: Evian Project, Internet capacity building, and outreach materials

The Deputy Secretary General

123. supplied background on the evolution of the Evian Project, signed in January 1998, the first significant Ramsar initiative involving the private sector, in this case the Danone Group (France). DOC. 9.5 summarizes the status of Evian Project action themes at present. He cited the Bureau's survey of the electronic communications capacity of the Administrative Authorities and described the Bureau's first efforts to provide Web and e-mail access for selected CPs. He pointed out that translations of the Ramsar information pack were presently being made into Chinese, Arabic, and Farsi, including updating the already existing translation into Russian.

Canada, Chair of the Outreach Subgroup,

124. reported that the Subgroup studied the documents and applauded the efforts described, but no decisions were called for.

The Secretary General

125. explained the Evian Encounter soon to take place, the first of the "high-level roundtables" which will involve, first, the Neotropics, then francophone countries in West Africa, and then Asia, one per year. Most invited CPs are sending relatively high level people who might otherwise seldom be involved in Ramsar affairs. The Encounter will begin in Evian, and then travel to the Camargue to view restoration efforts and research on wetland-related subjects, with assistance from the Biological Station of Tour du Valat.
126. He mentioned that he is exploring possible partnership arrangements with Shell and, if sufficient interest is seen, he will begin negotiations of what kind of mutual benefits can be sought. He hoped to be able to present a firm proposal for next year's SC meeting.

Australia

127. applauded the Bureau's Internet capacity-building efforts, in view of the very high priority of these communication tools, and was pleased that his colleagues in Papua New Guinea were listed for early assistance.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

128. inquired about the "Jewels in the Crown" coffee-table book idea discussed at SC20, and the **Secretary General** reported that, though Switzerland had kindly offered partial funding, he has not yet been able to secure the remainder. A promising opportunity may exist in his talks

with Living Earth of the UK, which expressed interested in producing the book more cheaply in the UK, and this will continue to be explored, but would not yield fruits in time for COP7.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

129. affirmed that the Standing Committee has noted the progress being made in these fields, though no decision is called for, and expressed the SC's appreciation for the efforts of those involved in the Evian Project.

Agenda item 9.9: Virtual Ramsar site

The Deputy Secretary General

130. noted that SC21 DOC. 9.9 is intended to update the SC on progress in creating the Virtual Ramsar Site at a wetland education center in Sydney harbor, in conjunction with the 2000 Olympics. With generous support from the Australian federal government and other Australian sources, as well as from the Bureau, the project has developed well and now has a Web site. Further resources are still required, however, but the organizers are very hopeful. The Deputy Secretary General will visit Sydney at the time of the Oceania regional meeting hopefully to assist in encouraging potential donors.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

131. expressed the Standing Committee's wishes for the success of the project.

Agenda item 10.1: Preparations for COP7

The Secretary General

132. reported on the Subgroup's view that preparations are on track, though no recommendations were required.

Costa Rica

133. made a presentation of the planned layout of the facilities for COP7 and of the tours to be offered to delegates before, during, and after the COP. All of the details will be included in next month's mailing to the Parties.

WWF International

134. queried whether Partner Organizations will also be required to pay for exhibition space. Though this had not been considered, the **Secretary General** suggested that some space could be made available to the Partners because of their special relationship, but if a lot of space were wanted, they would probably have to pay. The purpose of selling space is to assist Costa Rica in covering the costs of the COP by every possible means. **The Chairperson** drew attention to MKI Travel's hotel booking brochure, which will also be included in the mailing; the MKI Web site shows even cheaper accommodation possibilities than are included in the ones officially being offered.

Further discussion

135. revealed that the Technical Sessions' regional breakouts will be held in the plenary room with partitions up and in the hotel just across the parking lot. There will be organized transport to and from all hotels in the mornings and evenings. Information on visa requirements will be communicated as soon as known, and the Bureau and the Organizing Committee are working with immigration authorities in the hope of getting special dispensations to facilitate visas in the most simple manner, e.g. by making arrangements to grant them upon arrival in San José.

Spain

136. noted its strong interest in the success of COP7 and wished to set up cooperation with Costa Rica to ensure the participation of Latin American delegates. He noted the lessons of the recent Doñana disaster, wherein Spain suffered the results of poor coordination. Spain's National Wetland Policy will strive to coordinate policies in the water sector and may be able to provide a model for others, which will be presented to COP7's Technical Session I.

Costa Rica

137. expressed its gratitude to Spain for its kind offer to assist in supporting COP7.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

138. affirmed that the Standing Committee noted the progress of COP7 preparations, thanked Costa Rica for its efforts thus far, and urged the Bureau and Costa Rican authorities to clarify visa requirements in good time.

Agenda item 10.2: Revised Rules of Procedure for the COP

The Secretary General

139. noted that COP6 called for revised Rules in line with those of other conventions, especially the CBD, to be adapted for Ramsar needs where necessary. The Subgroup has reviewed the proposed rules and recommended them to the SC with the following amendments. Most notably, Rule 21.3, on the COP President serving as Chair of the SC, should be eliminated; the SC Chair should continue to be elected by the incoming SC members.

Further discussion

140. Specific changes of wording are reflected in the revised Rules of Procedure attached to these minutes, but the Parties expressed the following ideas. **Senegal** hoped that all tabled documents would be distributed in all three languages, but the **Secretary General** noted that in exceptional cases of proposals admitted from the floor, simultaneous interpretation should suffice, because written translation would delay the proceedings too much. **The Philippines** and **the USA** suggested wording to prevent the proceedings from being stopped on technical grounds, in order to preserve flexibility whilst preventing new proposals from being tabled unexpectedly. The Subgroup recommended adding to the provision for any CP requesting a secret ballot the stipulation that this must be approved by a simple majority of the Parties present and voting, lest one Party retard proceedings with calls for ballots. Further suggestions for amended wording in several Rules focused on provisions for who may call for a ballot and how. Flexibility was added to the requirement that credentials be presented promptly at the beginning of the COP. **The USA** noted the absence of budget matters from the COP agenda list in Rule 9; the **Secretary General** explained that the COP is already required to deal with budget matters by the text of the treaty.

Uruguay

141. asked that Rule 46.2 be left unresolved until after the discussion of "decisions" in Agenda item 10.3

The Secretary General

142. entered into the record the USA's stipulation in the Subgroup meeting that Rule 40 on adoption of the budget should not be interpreted to mean that Contracting Parties that have not yet accepted the Regina Amendments would be subject to mandatory dues.

The UK

143. pointed to unclearities in Rule 4.3 on the process of gaining support of 1/3 of CPs for an extraordinary meeting and Rule 13 on how to circulate papers, and was invited to suggest amended text to the Bureau.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

144. expressed concern that Rule 3.2, on holding the COP in the Bureau's host country in the absence of an invitation, should be discussed with Switzerland. **Switzerland** promised to consult with his government on this matter. It was noted that, in such a situation, "hosting" the COP would not have the normal financial implications of that word; financing would have to come from other source. **The Chairperson** wondered who, in that case, would pay for the meeting, and the **Secretary General** observed that this is a problem unique to the Ramsar Convention among other treaties, that no budgetary provision is made for conducting the COP; in the absence of a host willing to bear a large part of the costs of holding the COP, there is no ready alternative. **The Netherlands** noted that when the CMS received no invitations for its COP, it was able to hold its COP in the UN premises in Geneva using its COP budget line.

Further discussion

145. The SC discussed the desirability of a glossary of equivalent names for government ministries in charge of external relations/foreign affairs, lest Rules requiring signatures of the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" be used to exclude delegates from CPs with other names for such ministries. Concerning Rule 7.1 on qualifications expected in observer NGO delegates, the Bureau would merely make further inquiries of NGOs not already well known to staff. The President of the COP would not be required by Rule 25 to open the next COP personally; a compatriot would automatically be present as a member of the SC. There was caution about opening the Conference Committee to too many observers, lest it become unwieldy, but this Rule refers to the special relationship with the Partners and leaves open the possibility of involving them when necessary. It is understood that delegates, in order to vote, must be duly accredited to the COP by their governments. **Malaysia** wondered when the proposed Rules would enter into force, and it was understood that they would come into force immediately at the time of the agenda item which, for this Convention, is required as an early item in every meeting, the adoption of the Rules of Procedure. **Malaysia** and **Uganda** queried the legality of changing the Rules mid-COP, but the **Secretary General** expressed confidence that it is common practice for all meetings to adopt their rules at the beginning of the meeting and then follow them.

Panama

146. expressed dissatisfaction with Rule 50's provision for drawing lots in cases of hung balloting and preferred to continue balloting until someone was elected. Panama's suggested text for Rule 50 was accepted by consensus.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

147. proposed to reach a decision on the proposed Rules of Procedure as amended.

Decision SC21.7: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposed Rules of Procedure, with the agreed amendments. (The approved text is attached to these minutes.)

Hungary (the Chairperson)

148. expressed the SC's gratitude to the colleagues who worked on the proposed Rules.

Agenda item 10.3: COP decisions

The Secretary General

149. reported the Subgroup's endorsement of the recommendation in ¶ 7 of SC21 DOC. 10.3, that in future all resolutions and recommendations should be referred to as "decisions".

Uruguay

150. pointed out that the legal opinions ascertained on the subject do not support that conclusion, do not coincide, and in fact contradict one another. A different solution would appear to be needed. Resolutions and recommendations have been the Ramsar tradition, though there has occasionally been some confusion between them; but there is a difference between them in that resolutions have a binding character. To change to "decisions" may create confusion about intentions of earlier actions. Uruguay urged keeping the present distinction whilst being more careful in their use, and suggested a new proposal for COP7 with definitions of the words "resolution", "recommendation", and "decision".

The USA

151. reported that the Office of Legal Affairs of the U.S. State Department advises, as did UNESCO, that the title cannot be changed without amendment of the Convention text. The USA supported Uruguay on continuing to use the traditional terminology of resolutions and recommendations. Article 6 of the treaty establishes that the COP should make "recommendations" to the CPs and that was intentional. Resolutions are to be used for procedural matters; recommendations should be used to call for actions by the CPs and others.

Further discussion

152. **Panama** supported Uruguay's recommendation, and the **Czech Republic** felt that the Resolution/Recommendation distinction is quite clear and that using "decision" would blur that distinction. **Senegal** explained the distinction in terms of resolutions affecting CPs, which have voluntarily accepted the Convention's obligations, and recommendations being made to others who have not accepted those obligations. Others noted that voting Parties may "resolve" that they themselves will do something but may only "recommend" that others should do something. **Uganda** and **Hungary** called for these terms to be defined in the Rules of Procedure.

Decision SC21.8: The Standing Committee determined that the Convention will continue to make the distinction between resolutions and recommendations in official terminology, and may use the generic term "decisions" in the Rules of Procedure to refer to both.

Agenda item 10.4: National Reports and the preparation of Regional Overviews

The Secretary General

153. reported that the Subgroup considered and accepted without amendment the Bureau's proposed method for compiling and presenting the Regional Overviews at COP7, that in effect the Regional Representatives will introduce each Regional Overview and the Bureau's Regional Coordinators will then deliver the summary presentation aided by a PowerPoint presentation.

Decision SC21.9: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's proposed method for creating and presenting the Regional Overviews at COP7 based upon the National Reports.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

154. urged all Contracting Parties to submit their National Reports if they have not yet done so.

The Secretary General

155. proposed combining the Regional Overviews for the Eastern and Western European regions into one presentation and invited the Regional Representatives from these regions to provide input on that idea.

Agenda item 10.5: The WCMC feasibility study on harmonized information management infrastructure for the five biodiversity-related conventions

The Secretary General

156. reported on the Subgroup's endorsement of the Bureau's recommendations on the follow-up to the World Conservation Monitoring Centre study, which was commissioned and funded by the five biodiversity-related conventions (Ramsar, CBD, CITES, CMS, and World Heritage), and urged that the SC endorse the Bureau's continuing its involvement in this project, as expressed in ¶ 9 of DOC. 10.5.

The Deputy Secretary General

157. related that there have been two workshops involving the five conventions mentioned above, the first in Geneva at the policy level involving himself and the second, recently in Bonn, at the technical level involving Mr Peck, and that action is moving forward. The workshops both agreed to put the WCMC final report forward to the Standing Committee-equivalents of each convention. The technical workshop agreed upon ways to implement quickly the low-cost recommendations, such as a common Web "entry page" for all five conventions, and tasked WCMC with presenting concrete proposals for the more costly items. The cost estimates came from the first workshop, with suggestions for attracting assistance, with UNEP support, from GEF among others. The preliminary steps have much smaller budgets. There is no expectation that the Convention's core budget would ever be needed to implement the recommendations contained in Section V.2 of the WCMC report.

The Netherlands

158. considered these efforts to be extremely important despite their high costs and long timeframe and believed they would save money in the long term. He saw the WCMC study as more of a gap analysis, with the real work of harmonizing yet to be done. He urged that a distinction be made between reporting at the international and national levels. He wondered why the Bern Convention had not been included, which has much in common with these concerns.

The Secretary General

159. speculated that the absence of the Bern Convention might be because of its regional nature or merely because the secretariat chose not to participate in contributing to fund the study.

Italy

160. noted that the Bern Convention is important in Europe and urged that its inclusion in this effort be investigated both with the Bern secretariat and with WCMC. **The Chair** tasked the Bureau with inquiring into possible Bern Convention participation.

Panama

161. queried whether FCCC and CCD intended to bring the WCMC study to their upcoming COPs, and the **Secretary General** noted that it is really for WCMC, not Ramsar, to make those inquiries.

Decision SC21.9: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's intention to progress its cooperation in the WCMC proposals for the development of harmonized convention information resources and a lessons-learned network, and endorsed in principle the WCMC recommendations on streamlined national reporting. The Committee requested

the Bureau to prepare an agenda paper and draft decision for COP7 on follow-through with the WCMC harmonization project and urged that the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and possibly the Bern Convention, be encouraged to participate in the project. The Committee authorized the Chairperson to approve the draft decision to be sponsored by the SC to COP7, after the Bureau has circulated the draft decision to all SC members for comment.

Agenda item 10.6(a): Report of the Standing Committee to COP7

The Secretary General

162. reported on the Subgroup's recommendation that the Standing Committee endorse the SC report.

Decision SC21.10: The Standing Committee accepted the draft Standing Committee report, to be finalized and transmitted to the COP.

Agenda item 10.6(b): Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

Dr Yaa Ntiamao-Baidu, chairperson of the STRP,

163. reported on the progress of the STRP and noted the membership of the STRP for this triennium, with Makoto Komoda, Mihály Vegh, Roberto Schlatter, Allan Smith, Keith Thompson, François Letourneux, and herself, with alternate member Max Finlayson attending all meetings because of his expertise in the matters in hand. Dr Smith resigned after the first year and was replaced by Mauricio Cervantes Abrego. The STRP was also assisted by the Partner Organizations, and she acknowledged especially David Pritchard and John O'Sullivan of BirdLife International, Scott Frazier and Nick Davidson of Wetlands International, Jean-Yves Pirot of IUCN, and a number of experts from WWF.
164. Dr Ntiamao-Baidu noted that STRP tasks were mandated by COP6 and the Strategic Plan, and the Bureau assisted by identifying 10 areas of priority. At its first meeting, the STRP reprioritized these and moved forward on all four issues they identified as most important: 1) the Ramsar Criteria, 2) monitoring and ecological character, 3) management planning guidelines, and 4) restoration and rehabilitation.
165. On the Criteria, the STRP found the existing Criteria to be basically sound but recommended reorganization into two groupings, on representativeness and uniqueness and on biodiversity. The STRP recommended including human use values in the guidelines to the Criteria rather than in the Criteria themselves. The SC asked the STRP to reconsider that recommendation with two representatives from the social sciences present, and in its next meeting the STRP reached the same conclusion, proposing to reorganize the Criteria into two groups, revise their language to remove ambiguities, and develop the guidelines further. She drew attention to Bronwen Golder's STRP contribution, to the effect that the Convention asks for designation on natural science grounds, but that, once sites have been designated, it is necessary to pay particular attention to socio-economic issues in order to manage the sites effectively, and thus urging further development of the Wise Use principles. She feared losing the focus and diluting the effect of designating Wetlands of International Importance if human use criteria were included in the Criteria.
166. The STRP pursued further the definitions of ecological character and change in ecological character and has proposed new language to modernize these and remove ambiguities.
167. Drs Komoda and Schlatter conducted a study of the effectiveness of the Ramsar Management Planning Guidelines and found no need to change them significantly.

168. On restoration, the STRP received a comprehensive report from Mihály Végh. A full report on all of these STRP issues will be prepared for COP7.

Senegal

169. called for more attention to human use issues. He likened SC discussions of human use issues to a dialogue of the deaf and could not believe that all of the sites on the Ramsar map were designated on natural science grounds only.

Dr Ntaimoa-Baidu

170. replied that the STRP does not at all doubt the immense importance of wetlands to people and observed that, being from Ghana, she knows this at first hand in the African context. But what makes a wetland important, gives it its character, is not the use it's put to. Once the wetland is ecologically sound, the human uses do not determine its character as a wetland of international importance, which is the purpose of the Criteria.

Uganda

171. questioned why hydrological values had been taken out of the Criteria, and **Dr Ntaimoa-Baidu** explained that the existence of each wetland is so interlinked with its hydrology that the hydrological values are implied in the first Criterion and will be further brought out in the Guidelines.

Italy

172. stated that the discussion was reminiscent of conflicts between stakeholders and strict preservationists. From its beginnings, Ramsar has evolved much more widely and now embraces socio-economic realities. Ecology must be seen in the broad scope. The document is modern and includes the need to measure the impact on values in the wetlands in order to be sustainable. It recognizes that protected areas cannot remain as islands.

The USA

173. valued the STRP view that the existing Criteria do have implications on social and economic concerns, but believed it should be possible to develop criteria based on transfrontier hydrological systems. For example, the Pantanal, which is part of several states, impacts on many social factors like flood control, commerce, and transportation.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

174. noted that one of the COP7 Technical Sessions will deal with all of these issues, that the STRP will report to COP7, and that a draft decision is planned. She urged that the SC let the COP consider the whole matter; the SC cannot now take a stand on this, but all comments will be recorded. Each of the STRP products mentioned is being covered under a different Agenda item in this meeting. She thanked the STRP members for their work and congratulated Dr Ntiamoa-Baidu for having chaired the Panel so effectively. She encouraged the STRP members to continue their work in the preparation of documents for the COP.

Agenda item 10.6(c): Report of the Secretary General or Ramsar Bureau

The Secretary General

175. reported that the Subgroup accepted the form of the report for COP7, with the wish that the report include a progress report on implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Decision SC21.11: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposed structure of the Bureau's report to the COP, which should be presented as the Report of the Secretary General.

Agenda item 10.7(a) on Draft decisions in preparation: Rules of acceptance of NGO partners

The Secretary General

176. reported that the Subgroup recommended the draft decision to the SC but amended Rule 4 to stipulate that **all** of the following characteristics must be fulfilled, not just any of them. The proposed rules were expanded from non-governmental organizations to cover intergovernmental organizations as well. He noted that the four Partners all suggested amendments to Canada's draft from last year, and all were incorporated. The COP would have to recognize the status of any new Partners.

Canada

177. averred that the Rule 4 requirements are far too restrictive and recommended removing the word "all" and changing "most" to "many". He found this a project designed for failure, which will preclude rather than promote new partnerships.

The Secretary General

178. agreed and noted that some involved in the process had been nervous about including too many new partners indiscriminately.

The USA

179. agreed with Canada and the SG and hoped that Ramsar would encourage new partners, perhaps with an informal MOU for a trial period of two years, for example. The rules as given are intimidating. A new category might be added, such as associate rather than partner.

Italy

180. applauded the fact that the Ramsar Convention has been so open to cooperative partnerships and hoped it would be receptive to new ones. Young groups with little experience but a lot of good will should be encouraged to participate.

Australia

181. preferred only one partner category and suggested changing the requirement of fulfilling "most" of the characteristics to "many" in Rule 4.1, and changing Rule 4 to "taking into account the following characteristics". **Malaysia** supported the Australian suggestion.

Decision SC21.12: The Standing Committee determined to adopt the proposed draft decision for COP7 and new rules for acceptance of new partner organizations, with the inclusion of Australia's amendments to the wording.

Agenda item: The Ramsar Database

Scott Frazier, Ramsar/Wetland Sites Officer, Wetlands International AEME,

182. reported on the status of the Ramsar Database and observed that the quality of the data continues steadily to improve. Whereas only 62% of sites had RIS or equivalent at the SC meeting of October 1994, now 76.5% have, and only 7% have no appreciable data. 4% have no map, 24% have poor maps, 28% have good maps, a slight improvement over last year. Wetlands International provided reports for five Ramsar meetings in the past year and participated in three of them. Programming for streamlined entry of data is nearing completion. Wetlands International - Africa Europe Middle East has secured funding to develop a Web presence for the Database; presently this is in the form of a "Graphical Profile", and a new profile on application of the Criteria has recently been added for the seven regions. The next step is to provide remote user access to the Database, but development of this will not

commence until after COP7. The user will be able to ask a number of questions and pursue an interactive map from region to country to individual site.

183. Mr Frazier noted that a comprehensive update of the *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance* is planned for COP7, in wordprocessor and pure text formats rather than printed. The deadline for inclusion of data in this Directory is the end of the year. The Government of the Netherlands through RIZA is providing funds for a revised edition of the *Global Overview of Ramsar Sites* and 31 December is the deadline for inclusion of data in that publication.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

184. thanked Mr Frazier for his report and commented on the evident value of taking the trouble to complete the RIS properly and provide good information for the Database.

Agenda item 10.7(b): Vision for the Ramsar List

The Secretary General

185. reported that the Subgroup 1) noted places where more work was needed on DOC. 10.7(b), 2) called for a consultation meeting in January, and 3) had no amendments to suggest to the karst proposal.

The Deputy Secretary General

186. recounted the history of the Vision project. The exercise is largely built around the STRP's work on the Criteria, including reorganization and the human uses issue. At the same time, Canada challenged SC20 to establish a vision for the Ramsar List and its long-term goals. SC21 DOC. 10.7(b)'s attached draft COP7 DOC. 13.3 is very much a work in progress, but it proposes a preliminary text for this vision, linking each Ramsar Criterion to its objectives and including a glossary. The document has been through five iterations and will probably need as many more before COP7. The purpose is to give the CPs tools to help take a strategic approach to the designation of new sites for the List. The Subgroup's input will be worked into further drafts of the document. David Stroud, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, and many others have assisted greatly, and more CPs should be drawn into the project as the draft document evolves. The proposed focused workshop in January 1999 is a good idea, though its financial implications need further study.

Canada

187. continued its challenge to answer the question: what do we do with the List? The goal is now to conserve the biological diversity of wetlands. We need to give people the tools to determine what to do with the List. Canada has tabled another document, an idea-piece suitable for discussion, upon which no decision is required now.

The Secretary General

188. expressed his excitement about this process and foresaw an excellent new product, and was very grateful to all who have been working on it. He was concerned that all the contributors so far have come from developed countries, despite attempts to draw in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. He hoped to assure that the planned January workshop would have a better balance in that respect.

Senegal,

189. considering the overall objectives of the Convention, noted the absence of human and social aspects from the vision draft and from Canada's document. The documents were prepared by scientists in the area of natural sciences but they need input from socio-economic experts as well.

BirdLife International

190. noted that its input in the Vision process has been garnered from BirdLife sources in both the developed and developing countries. He asked that the meeting record his strong view expressed in the Subgroup that Part III of the draft text which refers to human use values as indicators of international importance in BirdLife's view runs counter to the advice of the STRP and should be changed. He reiterated BirdLife's opening remarks on the importance of the Vision exercise, which should set out strategic purposes for systematically constructing the right total List by reference to defined objectives. Some such objectives have been implied in the past, e.g. in Article 3.1 on wise use and Part 4 of the Preamble to the Convention (on stemming loss) and in the Strategic Plan and the Conference recommendation on under-represented habitat types. But there has been no explicit expression of what should be "captured" in the List for it to be adequate for its purpose. The paper submitted by Canada is helpful in indicating how the List can best be capitalized upon when it is in place, and this should probably slot in behind a framework which helps with decisions about constructing the right List in the first place. He concluded by affirming that an articulation of the Vision will be an historic step for the Convention if it is done in the right way.

The UK

191. welcomed the development of the Vision document, offered further assistance to its development, and pointed out that the new Criteria do not mention hydrology though that is explicit grounds for site selection both in Article 2 of the Convention and the current Criteria. Especially given the Convention's developing focus on water resource issues, enhanced guidance with respect to site selection on hydrological grounds will need to be developed.

Italy

192. observed that we need to account for what goes on around the listed sites, the socio-economic issues. We cannot exclude humans but we must fix limits: that is the dilemma. It is difficult to set a threshold especially where traditional forms of use are involved. Designation for the Ramsar List should not be just for image, it should assist in creating a biogeographical network. In this sense, COP7 DOC. 13.3 is very good.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

193. promised that the comments have been recorded for input into DOC. 13.3 and noted the STRP's opinion on the human uses issue, with the requested two relevant experts. She hoped that the January workshop will involve diverse input.

Decision SC21.13: The Standing Committee endorsed the approach being undertaken by the Bureau to provide Parties with improved Criteria and guidance for their application, and endorsed the further development of COP7 DOC. 13.3 on a Vision for the Ramsar List and associated draft decision. The Committee encouraged the Bureau and others to continue their work on the document and draft decision, possibly through a small workshop in the near future.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe, Tim Jones,

194. broached the issue of karst and other subterranean hydrological systems and noted that, despite Brisbane Resolution VI.5, no karst systems have yet been designated for the Ramsar List. The National Reports show that guidance is needed on this subject. Hungary and Slovenia have been working on such guidance and a draft decision is intended. The Subgroup discussed this and suggested adding a new point to the draft document concerning the importance of these systems as a source of water for Wetlands of International Importance. He pointed out that, though this now exists as a separate draft decision, it is intended to form part of the Vision, Criteria, and Guidelines, following adoption at COP7.

Italy

195. supported this work on karst zones and was sorry to have been unable to attend the Slovenia meeting. Italy urged that this work be progressed.

Decision SC21.14: The Standing Committee endorsed the work being done on guidelines for designating karst and other subterranean hydrological systems and encouraged further development upon it.

Agenda item 10.7(c): Framework for developing National Wetland Policies

The Secretary General

196. reported that the Subgroup had no comments on the document and recommended the Committee's endorsement and sponsorship of the draft decision for COP7. He explained the background of the National Wetland Policy guidelines and acknowledged the work of Clayton Rubec of Canada with input from others, including Paul Mafabi of Uganda. He asked the SC to give the Bureau and the drafters the authority to make further revisions.

Canada

197. noted that the document requires one further draft to add further policies identified in the National Reports and two short case study essays, and thanked the Committee for the opportunity to work on this project.

The Netherlands

198. asked whether the terminology might be broadened, in line with the Convention's expanded mandate, to National Wetlands and Water Policies, but it was felt that such an expansion would require considerable reworking of the document.

Uganda

199. noted that the Pan-African regional meeting in Kampala had urged that Parties be encouraged to assist other CPs in developing their NWP.

The Deputy Secretary General

200. gave an example of the desired international cooperation on developing NWPs, when Jim McCuaig from Canada came to assist the Australian Government, and later the Deputy Secretary General, having since joined the Bureau, passed on that experience to Botswana in developing its own NWP. There are now many people who have experience in developing NWPs and this document reflects many lessons learned.

Decision SC21.15: The Standing Committee endorsed the draft decision on National Wetland Policies and its annex and agreed to sponsor the draft decision for the COP.

Agenda item 10.7(d): Guidelines for review of laws and institutions

The Secretary General

201. reported that the Subgroup endorsed the draft decision and annexed guidelines prepared by the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, and noted that the Bureau is very happy with the results of the project.

Canada

202. inquired whether the background papers would be published before COP7, to which the **Secretary General** replied that, if they can be published, it could not be by then. Neither

IUCN nor the Bureau has sufficient resources, and the same is true of the case studies compiled on community participation with seed money from WWF International. **Canada** asked what level of funding was being sought for this purpose. **The Secretary General** estimated that the funding required for each publication and distribution to the developing countries would be about SFR 15,000 per language version.

Australia

203. observed that the paper used a very prescriptive approach to the Review Team and some aspects throughout the document may not suit or apply to all circumstances.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

204. noted that the Committee is being asked to sponsor many documents which are not yet finished, and which should eventually be translated into local languages in the Parties, and she implored the drafters to write as clearly as possible, with as little jargon as may be, in order to assist translation.

Decision SC21.16: The Standing Committee agreed to endorse the draft decision and annexed guidelines on review of laws and institutions and to sponsor them for transmission to the COP.

Agenda item 10.7(e): Guidelines on local communities and indigenous people

The Secretary General

205. described this project as promising another important set of tools and hoped that the COP will adopt it. It has been a long process, spearheaded by the IUCN Social Policy Group but including WWF, the Kushiro International Wetlands Centre in Japan, and the Caddo Lake Institute in the USA, with many more people involved in the workshops and inputting to the draft document. The Subgroup invited the Standing Committee to sponsor the draft decision to the COP.
206. The Subgroup only recommended amendment of the wording of ¶ 13 of the draft decision from “further urges” to “invites” and removal of the words “full range of” from stakeholders in the same paragraph.

The Netherlands

207. noted that no mention was made in the document of the International Labour Organization's Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and it was agreed that this reference would be included in the preamble of the draft decision.

Decision SC21.17: The Standing Committee endorsed the draft Guidelines and agreed to sponsor the draft decision (with the minor changes in the text requested) to the COP.

Agenda item 10.7(f): Alien/invasive species affecting wetlands

The Deputy Secretary General

208. asked the Standing Committee to note the progress made and provide advice as appropriate. This will be a Key Issues topic for COP7. IUCN has indicated its willingness to provide leadership on developing terms of reference for a keynote speaker.

Australia

209. said that WWF Australia has proposed a draft decision and there have been discussions about linking this draft with IUCN's work on this important issue. He invited input from other Parties as well.

Senegal

210. hoped that aquatic weeds, as a major challenge for both East and West Africa, would receive due attention.

Wetlands International

211. suggested that SBSTTA's work on this problem should be sought out in contacts with Peter Schei, and the **Deputy Secretary General** promised that Ramsar will invite the CBD to work together on this issue.

Canada

212. has long focused on this and has many documents available. Canada would like to be involved in the process.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

213. noted that the Standing Committee has only been asked to note progress on this topic, and it has been so noted.

Agenda items 10.7(g) (l) and (m) on incentives and impact assessment

The Deputy Secretary General

214. noted that these three issues have been integrated into two papers for Technical Sessions III and IV. Terms of references have been finalized for the two papers and they will be linked together. They will provide a way forward on the incentives issue, how Parties can examine institutions to locate conditions that will encourage bad behavior ("perverse incentives") and steps to be taken to encourage desired behavior.
215. On the issue of Environmental Impact Assessment, much progress was made at COP6 but it needs to be pushed forward to include new ideas on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Social Impact Assessment as well as environmental impacts. This is a strong point of cooperation with the CBD. The Bureau will participate in an upcoming workshop involving the CBD aimed at developing a paper for the COP7. A number of COP7 products can be brought directly to the SBSTTA meeting about 10 days after Ramsar's COP7. David Pritchard of BirdLife is the foremost advocate in the Ramsar family on the EIA issue and has been recognized by the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) as Ramsar's spokesperson. The papers will be in draft form by the end of the year.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

216. affirmed that the Standing Committee noted the progress being made in these areas.

Agenda item 10.7(h): Restoration and rehabilitation of wetlands

The Deputy Secretary General

217. observed that the STRP has given a high priority to this issue, and because the regional meetings showed a greater interest than had been foreseen, the Bureau gave the issue greater prominence in the preparation of the Technical Sessions for COP7. The Bureau has been working closely with Hans Skotte Möller and Palle Uhd Jepsen of Denmark; it has been agreed to bring the issue forward with a paper focused on how governments can integrate restoration into national planning. Nick Davidson has brought in the Wetlands International Specialist

Group. The Bureau is helping to seek worldwide input, with good results, most notably from New Zealand among others.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

218. affirmed that the Standing Committee has noted the actions currently under way.

Agenda item 10.7(i): Global action to preserve peatlands and mires

The Deputy Secretary General

219. referred to the Secretary General's statement to the Society of Wetland Scientists' general assembly in Anchorage, which was conveyed by Ed Maltby, and commented on the strong response this has evoked from SWS for follow-up; he foresaw a lot of cooperation with the SWS in future, especially through their proposed observer status on the STRP.

Canada

220. has long been interested in peatland issues and looks forward to a planned workshop at the GBF preceding COP7, where a session is being planned on the Global Carbon Challenge and the connections between biodiversity and global carbon trading and how that impacts the Ramsar Convention. He hoped that a draft decision can be devised that will build upon that GBF product.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

221. thanked Canada for its work so far and IUCN as well. The Standing Committee has noted these developments with appreciation.

Agenda item 10.7(j): Management Planning Guidelines

The Deputy Secretary General

222. described the study undertaken by Drs Komoda and Schlatter of the STRP, following up on how effective the Management Planning Guidelines (Kushiro, 1993) have been. Though there was a disappointing response to the two questionnaires, the authors had sufficient input to arrive at some clear conclusions and recommendations. The Guidelines are proving useful in most cases, but the Convention needs to incorporate more modern practices. The authors noted that the complexity of the Guidelines causes some problems and the study urged more training in applying them. The study urged that the STRP provide supplementary guidance on impact assessment, zoning and multiple use principles, buffer zones, the precautionary principle, and cost-benefit analysis. He congratulated Drs Komoda and Schlatter for their comprehensive study and clear set of recommendations.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

223. expressed concern that so few replies to the STRP's questionnaire had been forthcoming: a great deal of energy goes into developing guidelines, and if we have them made, we should try to use them.
224. The Standing Committee took note of the results of the STRP's study of the effectiveness of the Management Planning Guidelines and expressed its special gratitude to Drs Komoda and Schlatter for their efforts.

Third day, 23 October 1998

Agenda item 10.15: Status of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Ramsar Convention

The Secretary General

225. referred to SC21 DOC. 10.15 and apologized that there is a significant error in paragraph 4: rather than indicating that UNESCO has decided to accept the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) as a successor to the original member, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it should read that UNESCO has not so accepted the FRY. He explained that he has been concerned about this issue since it was raised at COP6 but not resolved, and lest it arise at COP7 and consume too much valuable time he asked the Standing Committee to help to resolve the matter in advance.
226. He reported that there was no consensus on the issue in the Subgroup on COP7, and that the Subgroup Chair, Costa Rica, was asked to prepare a recommendation for the SC. Costa Rica's recommendation has been tabled and in essence urges that, because Security Council Resolution No. 777 (1992) and UN General Assembly Resolution No. 47/1 (1992) did not recognize the FRY as the successor state to the former SFR of Yugoslavia, the Standing Committee should seek advice from the legal office of UNESCO, the depositary of the Convention, to clarify the status of the FRY with regard to the Ramsar Convention, based on the text of the Convention, and convey in writing the results of this clarification to all Contracting Parties before COP7.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

227. observed that the purpose of this is to prepare ourselves to discuss the issue at the COP more efficiently.

Australia

228. referred to its position expressed in its statement made to COP6, which was printed in the Proceedings, and noted that Australia's position remains the same, that the FRY is not the automatic successor state to the SFR of Yugoslavia. Australia queried whether UNESCO is the appropriate body from which to seek legal opinion. He felt that Costa Rica's recommendation does provide a way forward to the COP.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

229. observed that UNESCO is the official depositary of the Convention and the only body to which the secretariat can turn on legal matters concerning membership.

The Secretary General

230. concurred that the only impartial source of legal advice for the Convention would be the depositary. That advice could be challenged, but not the source of the advice.

Australia

231. accepted that explanation but suggested that the Bureau should seek additional information about how the issue has been handled in other bodies of the United Nations.

The USA

232. presented its position that the SFR of Yugoslavia has ceased to exist and in the place where it was we now have Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the FYR of Macedonia, Slovenia, and the FRY. UN Security Council Resolution 777 and General Assembly Resolution 47/1 made clear that the FRY is not the sole successor to the SFR of Yugoslavia and that the FRY is not a member of the United Nations, but rather should apply for membership in the UN as have the other four states. The FRY has not done so. Each of the five present states has the same rights and responsibilities. Corollary issues pending resolution of the succession from the SFRY include the disposition of assets of the former Yugoslavia, and it is important that the attempt by the FRY to portray itself as the successor to that state not be given credibility in international forums.

233. The USA believes that the Standing Committee has the authority to act on this issue by virtue of Resolution 3.3 (Regina, 1987) and asked the Bureau not to communicate with the FRY as if it were a Contracting Party, so that it will not attend the COP. The USA noted Costa Rica's suggestion to seek legal advice from UNESCO and hoped that that would be done in plenty of time so that a draft decision can be brought to COP7.

Senegal

234. stressed the importance of the principle of the political issue of membership in the Convention and noted that he was not empowered by his government to make decisions of an important political nature. He urged that a concrete resolution be circulated in advance and considered by COP7 when delegates will have had a chance to come with guidance from their governments.

Canada

235. stated that his government had asked him to make a statement to the effect that Canada concurs with the position of the USA, that the FRY should not be considered as a member of the Ramsar Convention and the Bureau should not transmit materials to the FRY. Legal advice should be sought from UNESCO, but the FRY should not be treated as a Contracting Party in the meantime.

Venezuela

236. suggested that, since the Convention text requires that Parties be members of the UN or its specialized agencies, it would be useful to learn whether any of the specialized agencies do recognize the FRY.

Malaysia

237. stated his government's position, which is in agreement with the view expressed by the USA. He felt that this was a necessary conclusion because of the UN General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions that have been quoted. That position is clear and, since UNESCO is a UN body, there would be no purpose served by seeking UNESCO's advice. Rather the Bureau should follow through with the UN's decision that the FRY is not the SFR of Yugoslavia but may apply for UN membership. He urged the Standing Committee to take a decision on the issue.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

238. cautioned against making any precedents on political issues. Since the matter has been clearly decided by the General Assembly and Security Council, there is no need to seek UNESCO's advice. The SC should conform to the Security Council's decision.

The Czech Republic

239. recounted his country's own experience with a divorce of a former socialist country, in which both parties agreed to become successor states. By contrast the other former Yugoslav states did not agree on the succession and joined the UN in their own names. Thus the Czech Republic supported the USA's and Australia's position.

Uruguay

240. observed that some delegates have not received advice or instructions from their own Ministries of Foreign Affairs and noted that the Bureau's error in the agenda paper may have been misleading. Thus the matter should not be decided at this time, even if the eventual resolution of the issue may seem clear, based on Resolution 47/1 of the UN General Assembly. The official legal advice of the UN on the status of membership of the FRY in the UN, its specialized agencies, and other bodies mentioned in Article 9 of the Ramsar Convention,

should be sought through the depositary, UNESCO, in order to have a clear picture of the situation. There would no problem with refusing the credentials of the FRY at COP7 if that should be necessary. In some other forums, credentials of the FRY have been refused on the basis of the cited UNGA Resolution; nevertheless, in some meetings representatives of the FRY were accepted as observers and invited to apply for membership.

The Russian Federation

241. reiterated that the SC should follow the normal Ramsar procedures for decision-making. No decision was made at COP6 and so the Bureau continued to treat the FRY as a Contracting Party. Evidently the FRY continues to fulfil its obligations as a CP, including its financial ones. He maintained that none of the UN resolutions decided the status of the FRY as a party to international treaties, and no treaties have decided to eject the FRY from membership.
242. Russia contested the view that there is an international consensus on this issue; there are international differences. Neither could he agree that the issues are clear – the only things that is clear is that the issue is unresolved. No general determination has ever been made concerned the FRY's participation in treaties. Some treaties have excluded representatives of the FRY from specific meetings, but all have avoided general determinations of its status.
243. He continued that the issue has no scientific relevance to the Ramsar objectives of the conservation and wise use of wetlands, but is rather a political question that should be left to political bodies for decision. The governing bodies of the FCCC and WIPO, he said, have avoided taking decisions specifically because of the political character of the issue, since their mandates are only to deal with pragmatic and not political matters.
244. The Russian Federation maintained that there is no legal ground for raising the question of the status of the FRY and noted that the UN decisions did not terminate or suspend the FRY's membership in the UN. He found the Costa Rican proposal to be a sound way forward which will follow normal procedures, and he urged that the Costa Rican proposal be adopted without the suggestions of later papers that have been distributed.

Argentina

245. cited the UN decisions of 1992 as having stated unequivocally that the FRY cannot continue automatically the membership of the former SFRY but may apply for UN membership. Argentina endorsed both resolutions and considers that the FRY should not be considered as a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention.

Austria

246. said that his government has stated its position in many forums: Austria does not accept that the FRY is the automatic successor to the SFRY.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

247. reminded the meeting that Resolution 3.3 mandated the SC to oversee the Bureau's implementation of policy, but that is hard to do when no policy has been set by the COP. She noted that Ramsar is not a UN body and need not necessarily be bound by UN practice; though UNESCO is the depositary, it is not above the Convention in a hierarchy. She observed that the UN decisions being cited are not presently available for reflection. She explained that COP6 did not take a decision on this issue, so the Bureau was not advised to conduct itself in any different manner.
248. The Chairperson noted that all of the delegates have spoken on behalf of their governments, whereas SC members are normally expected to be representing their regions. On this issue, however, it is proper for government positions to be known. She suggested that the Costa

Rican proposal should ask the Bureau to seek the legal advice of UNESCO, taking into account Article 9.2 of the Convention, and make that advice available so that all delegates can come to the COP with knowledge of their government's positions.

Russia

249. urged an editorial change in paragraph 2 line 2 of Costa Rica's proposal so that it should contain the precise language of the UN Resolutions, to the effect that the FRY (Serbia-Montenegro) cannot continue automatically the membership of the former SFR of Yugoslavia in the United Nations.

Malaysia

250. asked that if the precise wording were to be included, the remainder of the quoted paragraph should also be included: "and therefore decides that the FRY should apply for membership and cannot participate in the work of the General Assembly".

The USA

251. suggested the addition of a third paragraph to Costa Rica's proposal, to the effect that until such time as legal advice has been obtained, the Bureau is instructed to suspend communications with the FRY.

The Russian Federation

252. objected that until a final decision has been made, there would be no legal basis for instructing the Bureau to alter its present practice.

Malaysia

253. read out the text of Security Council Resolution No. 777 for quotation if necessary.

Senegal

254. wished the record to show that Senegal's position is that the issue should be referred to the COP for resolution.

Malaysia

255. continued to support the position of the USA, but in the interest of gaining a consensus on the way forward, he dissuaded the SC from adding the text suggested by the USA. He agreed that the matter should be taken to COP7.

Uruguay

256. suggested modifying the USA's additional text to say that any communications with the FRY by the Bureau should cite the pending status of the FRY and note that legal advice is being sought.

The USA

257. supported Uruguay's suggestion and urged that the decision should call for the Standing Committee to review the legal advice of UNESCO and make a recommendation to COP7 on the status of the FRY.

Italy

258. felt that since this issue was raised in COP6, it should be taken up again by COP7; there is no requirement that the Standing Committee should consider it.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

259. noted that the issue came up on the last day of COP6 and left no time for consideration by the Credentials Committee, so the Bureau was given no guidance. The SC's mandate is to deal

with preparations for the COP and provide guidance to the Bureau, and this is why the issue must be raised.

Costa Rica

260. noted that it was pleased to be able to contribute to a solution, since there seems to be a consensus forming, and accepted the suggested additional wording and the inclusion of the Security Council Resolutions' wording if desired.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

261. expressed her understanding that the Standing Committee would come back to the issue when sitting as the Conference Committee just prior to the COP.

The USA

262. suggested that the SC review the legal interpretation provided by UNESCO before the opening of COP7 and make a recommendation to the COP on the legal status of the FRY.

Russia

263. expressed the view that the SC is not able to decide on the legal status of the FRY and that adding wording only serves to complicate the issue. It is obvious that the SC may present UNESCO's legal interpretation but it may not take the COP's role in deciding the issue.

The Secretary General

264. suggested that the Bureau be requested to prepare an official conference paper for the COP transmitting the legal advice received from UNESCO.

The USA

265. noted that if the advice should be clear cut, the SC might be able to make a clear recommendation to the COP; on the other hand, it might wish to make no recommendation at all, and the COP would be left to consider the issue with no guidance from the Committee.

Malaysia

266. thanked the USA for its clarification and approved of the amended wording. As the USA explained, when the Standing Committee meets, having received the legal advice, it will be in a better position to provide guidance to the COP.

The Russian Federation

267. wished to make it clear why Russia opposes the suggestion. It is solely the domain of the COP to consider this issue and the SC has no role in it. The USA's suggested wording has legal consequences that should be avoided.

The USA

268. would defer to Uruguay's suggestion as to the wording of the Costa Rican proposal, but stated that is clear that the Standing Committee can discuss this issue if it wishes to take it up.

The Secretary General

269. stated the Bureau's willingness to prepare a conference paper transmitting the legal advice, with perhaps some contextual background, but it will not prepare any sort of legal analysis of the issue.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

270. summarized that there is a consensus that the Bureau should prepare a paper containing the legal advice received and present it to the COP in good time, and that the Standing Committee may or may not wish to take the issue up prior to the opening of COP7.

Decision SC21.18: Based on Resolution No. 777 of the Security Council, dated 19 September 1992, and UN General Assembly Resolution No. 47/1 of 22 September 1992, the Standing Committee decided to:

- 1) instruct the Bureau to request that the Office of International Standards and Legal Affairs within UNESCO (as the depositary of the Convention) clarify the status of the current Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with regard to the Ramsar Convention, based on the stipulations of the text of the Convention and in the light of international law; and**
- 2) instruct the Bureau to prepare a conference paper transmitting the results of the clarification sought in Point 1) to the Conference of the Parties as part of the COP7 documentation.**

In subsequent review of the minutes of this discussion,

Malaysia

271. queried whether the decision should not contain clear instructions on what COP7 is intended to do with the documentation received.

The Secretary General

272. recalled that the discussion's only consensus had been that the Bureau should acquire the legal advice and transmit it to the COP; there was no consensus on what the COP should then do with the advice, and the Parties would have to decide that at the COP.

Uruguay and the USA

273. questioned whether it would not be better to quote the United Nations resolutions in the decision, so that people would know what the issues is about.

Hungary (the Chairperson) and the Secretary General

274. expressed a preference not to quote them, as they would need to be quoted in full or not at all, and a clear reference is made to the documents themselves. There was no consensus on which parts to quote.

The USA

275. felt that it is clear that the UN Resolutions have one main point, that the international community does not recognize the FRY as the successor state to the SFRY, and the SC's decision would make more sense if that context were added.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

276. felt that the Agenda item makes the subject sufficiently clear.

Agenda item 10.7(k): Ramsar and water

The Deputy Secretary General

277. referred to SC21 DOC. 10.7(k), which outlines the draft COP7 decisions emerging on the theme of Ramsar and water. COP6 had devoted attention to the issue, resulting in Resolution VI.23. Since then, the sustainable use of water resources has emerged as one of the world's highest priorities, and SC20 decided that water should be a key theme for COP7. This decision will be taken forward in Technical Sessions I and V at COP7. For Technical Session I, 'Ramsar and Water', a consultant has been engaged by the Bureau to develop draft guidelines for integrating wetland conservation and wise use into river basin management. Technical

Session V, 'The framework for regional and international cooperation regarding wetlands', will devote attention to the management of shared river basins and guidelines for international cooperation.

Italy

278. supported the actions outlined by the Deputy Secretary General and drew attention to the various water-related Directives of the European Union.

Decision SC21.19: The Standing Committee decided to endorse the approach being taken to highlight the issue of 'Ramsar and water' in COP7 Technical Sessions I and V, including the preparation of draft COP decisions adopting guidance on river basin management and international cooperation for shared wetlands and river basins.

Agenda item 10.7(n): Wetland Risk Assessment Framework

The Deputy Secretary General

279. clarified that a revised version of SC21 DOC. 10.7(n) had been distributed to participants. The revised title, 'Wetland Risk Assessment Framework', differs from that shown in the SC agenda. He recalled COP6 Resolution VI.1 which adopted working definitions of 'ecological character' and 'change in ecological character', as well as the report of the STRP Chair under Agenda item 10.6(b) which highlighted the effort devoted to this subject in the past three years. In particular, the STRP concluded that the Ramsar Information Sheet, intended mainly as a database tool, does not constitute an adequate instrument for describing the baseline ecological character of Ramsar sites.
280. A technical workshop held prior to the 1998 meeting of the STRP had concentrated on following up one of the specific issues contained in Resolution VI.1, namely Early Warning Systems for detecting change in ecological character of wetlands. A lengthy, highly technical document on Wetland Risk Assessment resulted from the workshop and a more concise version is presented as SC21 DOC. 10.7(n), Annex 1. This is accompanied by a draft COP7 decision adopting the proposed Wetland Risk Assessment Framework, as well as the STRP's recommendations for revised definitions of 'ecological character' and 'change in ecological character'.

The Deputy Secretary General

281. clarified that the SC was simply being requested to approve the draft decision and its annex for forwarding to the COP. He also noted that the full version of the paper on Wetland Risk Assessment is being prepared for publication in a scientific journal. It is the Bureau's hope that the published version can be included in the Ramsar Web site.

The UK

282. reported that UK conservation agencies are developing common standards for monitoring of designated sites and that the results of a workshop on alert limits for certain taxa could be a useful contribution to the Convention's work.

The Secretary General

283. suggested that the UK's experience, and that of any other CP wishing to contribute, should be brought to the attention of the appropriate Technical Session in Costa Rica, since it will be difficult to constantly modify COP7 papers prior to the meeting.

The Deputy Secretary General

284. confirmed that the Bureau will standardize terminology in COP7 texts, including the present paper, in relation to alien/invasive/exotic species.

Decision SC21.20: The Standing Committee decided to endorse submitting the draft decision and annex on Wetland Risk Assessment Framework, as contained in SC21 DOC. 10.7(n), to COP7.

Agenda item 10.7(o,p): Guidelines for international cooperation under the Convention

The Deputy Secretary General

285. introduced SC21 DOC. 10.7(o,p), stressing that this is a paper which has been prepared by the Bureau in response to Action 7.3.4 of the Strategic Plan. It requires further development, and the Bureau suggests that this could be done through establishment of a drafting group of the SC. Such a subgroup could also assist in developing a draft decision for eventual submission to COP7. It is proposed that Technical Session V will consider the draft guidelines in two parts; one dealing with shared wetlands, river basins and species, and the other with mobilizing financial support from bilateral and multilateral donors.

The Secretary General

286. reported that the SC Subgroup on COP7 had reviewed the documentation and recommended it to the Standing Committee's attention with only two suggested additions. Spain had requested that the MedWet initiative be highlighted, whilst Australia had requested greater emphasis on non-binding legal instruments, such as Memoranda of Understanding.
287. He expressed his feeling that the proposed guidelines on international cooperation are an extremely significant development for the Convention and his hope that the SC would agree to establish a subgroup to continue the work started by the Bureau.

The Netherlands

288. reported on Dutch activities in support of both the Ramsar and Bonn (CMS) Conventions, noting that the Netherlands places great importance on networking and cooperation among international treaties. The Netherlands has spent 5 million USD on wetland and waterbird projects in the last three years, mainly through BirdLife International, IUCN and Wetlands International. A report on the programmes supported is available to participants. The welcome broadening of the scope of the Ramsar Convention means that flyway Agreements under the Bonn Convention have an increasingly important role for waterbird conservation. The Netherlands has produced a postage stamp celebrating the importance of flyways and wetland habitats, which will be launched on 2 February 1999, World Wetlands Day, offering excellent publicity opportunities. Similar stamps are under consideration by other countries, including the Russian Federation, Senegal and South Africa.

Argentina

289. indicated that it was willing to join the subgroup, but first wished to confer with appropriate technical experts.

Decision SC21.21: The Standing Committee decided to establish a drafting group composed of representatives of Argentina (subject to confirmation), Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Switzerland, Uganda, the USA, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, and WWF. The group was charged, together with the Bureau, with producing a more complete draft of guidelines for international cooperation, as well as a draft decision, for submission to COP7.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

290. thanked the volunteer members of the subgroup and invited them to consider becoming co-sponsors of an eventual COP7 decision on this issue.

Agenda item 10.7(q): Synergy with other environment-related treaties

The Secretary General

291. referred to SC21 DOC. 10.7(q) and noted that the Ramsar/CBD Joint Work Plan adopted in May 1998 by CBD COP4 is being prepared in brochure format and will be distributed to Contracting Parties of both Conventions. It is hoped that the Joint Work Plan will be formally adopted by Ramsar's COP7 so that it is officially endorsed by both Conventions. Special attention should be given to the fact that the Joint Work Plan gives Ramsar Contracting Parties a more clearly open 'doorway' to access GEF funding for wetland biodiversity projects.
292. The Standing Committee was also invited to endorse a draft Memorandum of Cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), reflecting the vital importance of freshwater in arid and semi-arid zones. It is hoped that this can be signed in early December 1998, at CCD's COP2 in Senegal.
293. Finally, the Standing Committee was also asked to endorse the Bureau's approach to developing synergies with other Conventions, and, specifically, the relevant text within the draft 'Guidelines for international cooperation'.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

294. praised the efforts of the Bureau to bring the Joint Work Plan with CBD to fruition at CBD COP4. She also thanked the Bureau for supporting her participation, as Chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee, at CBD COP4. She noted that CITES and the Bonn Convention (CMS) will participate at the forthcoming Oceania Regional Meeting. It is hoped that the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) will also participate, and that the trend for other convention secretariats to attend Ramsar regional meetings will become firmly established.

IUCN

295. reported that it is convening the 12th Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF) immediately prior to CCD COP2, from 4-6 December 1998. This will include a special workshop devoted to the links between biodiversity and desertification. Ramsar's Regional Coordinator for Africa will take part in the GBF.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

296. agreed that it is important for the Convention to develop new partnerships, but noted that this will be a significant additional burden for the already heavily committed Bureau staff.

Senegal

297. strongly supported the move towards greater synergy with other treaties, and welcomed the opportunity for access to GEF offered by the Joint Work Plan with CBD. Whilst the Small Grants Fund is an important and useful instrument, the limit of SFR 40,000 per project seriously limits the possibilities for its use. It will be essential for the Bureau to be in a position to assist Contracting Parties with developing suitable projects for submission to GEF.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

298. thanked the Bureau for its efforts and asked for further information about links with FCCC.

The Secretary General

299. referred to his report to the Standing Committee under Agenda item 7.1 and confirmed that the Bureau is giving high priority to closer links with FCCC. A Bureau representative attended the Kyoto meeting in December 1997, and consideration is being given to inviting a COP7 Special Intervention on the links between wetlands and climate change.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

300. stressed that cooperation between international secretariats is important and welcome, but that coordination and synergy between treaties is also necessary at national level.

Australia

301. strongly endorsed the approach being taken by Ramsar and noted that cooperation at national level is greatly assisted when MoUs, or similar instruments, have been concluded internationally.

Canada

302. reported that the role of peatlands as carbon sinks would be an important theme of the GBF 13 preceding COP7 in May 1999.

Decision SC21.22: The Standing Committee noted and endorsed the Joint Work Plan with CBD, the planned signature of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Convention to Combat Desertification, and the continued development of appropriate text in the draft 'Guidelines for international cooperation' being developed for discussion at COP7.

New Contracting Party to Ramsar

The Secretary General

303. departed from the agenda to report excellent news just received from UNESCO. By depositing an instrument of Accession to the Convention on 25 September 1998, Madagascar has become the 113th Ramsar Contracting Party. Two wetlands, 'Complexe des lacs de Manambolomaty' and 'Lac Tsimanampetsotsa' have been designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Agenda items 10.8 & 10.14: Advance preparation of a draft decision on specific Ramsar sites that are under threat; Review of Montreux Record

The Deputy Secretary General

304. referred to draft Ramsar COP7 DOC. 13.1 and explained the Bureau's efforts to package together a number of closely related issues bearing upon the description and management of Listed Sites. The last Standing Committee meeting had specifically asked the Bureau to avoid having a long series of 'stand alone' Recommendations and Resolutions at COP7, but instead to group related subjects. The resulting Standing Committee and draft COP7 documentation for Listed Sites is complex, but hopefully helps to avoid the confusion and possible overlap which could result from many separate documents.
305. Ramsar COP7 DOC. 13.1 aims to avoid the pressure of formulating 'on the spot' a draft COP7 Recommendation dealing with specific Ramsar sites where particular issues have been raised by the National Reports or through other official channels. By way of background, the document gives a status summary of Ramsar Information Sheets and boundary maps; an overview of the implementation of management plans, to be taken from the National Report table on this issue; and a site-by-site update for the Management Guidance Procedure and Montreux Record.
306. The Deputy Secretary General continued that, with regard to the Montreux Record, 71 sites have been included in the MR since its inception in 1990. Of these, 10 have subsequently been removed at the request of the Contracting Party concerned, following implementation of

appropriate measures. However, since 1994, only 3 sites have been added to the Montreux Record, suggesting that the MR is still not perceived as the positive, dynamic tool intended.

307. Similarly, there may be a need to ‘revamp’ the Management Guidance Procedure to recognize that some sites have issues of such complexity that a rapid Ramsar mission can only ‘scratch the surface’. Furthermore, whilst the name Management Guidance Procedure has already been changed since 1990 and the name of the Montreux Record established by the COP in 1993, there is a feeling that further change, to more informative titles, would be helpful. The names suggested in the documentation are: ‘Ramsar Advisory Mission’ for the MGP and either ‘Record of Ramsar Sites receiving Priority Management Action’ or ‘Record of Ramsar Sites identified by the National Government for priority attention’ for the Montreux Record.
308. Finally, it should be noted that much of the detailed content of the document will only be drafted when all of the National Reports have been received.

Austria

309. queried the need for renaming the MR and MGP, indicating that the meaning and purpose of both mechanisms were well known and well accepted in Austria. Perhaps greater effort should be given to investigating why the MR has a negative ‘black list’ image, although its positive aspects have been seen clearly at Austrian Ramsar sites.

Canada

310. called for clarification of the term ‘suitable map’ in relation to describing Ramsar sites, and suggested that in future the Ramsar Database might seek to collect photographs and digital imagery for Listed Sites.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

311. felt that the proposed new names for the Montreux Record were too long and complicated, but had no problem with the proposed renaming of the MGP.

Uganda

312. endorsed the Bureau’s approach to amalgamating COP7 documentation on site issues, but urged caution in changing the names of mechanisms which arose from earlier COP decisions.

The Secretary General

313. conveyed his view that the current names for the MR and MGP are more or less meaningless to anyone outside the specialized ‘Ramsar constituency’; it doesn’t help the Convention to use obscure jargon.

Italy

314. proposed renaming the Montreux Record as the ‘Wetlands at Risk (WAR) List’.

The USA

315. endorsed the words of the Secretary General and called for the Management Guidance Procedure to focus on proactive, rather than reactive, approaches to site management.

Australia

316. was not opposed to re-naming of the Convention’s tools, but felt that it would always be a logical inference that inclusion in the Montreux Record, or similar list, means that not everything is as it should be at the sites concerned. The need to explain the rationale and purpose of such a tool will not be solved by a name change.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

317. considered that the meeting was in favour of changing the name of the MGP to Ramsar Advisory Mission, but that the name of the Montreux Record should be retained, to be combined wherever possible with promoting a more positive approach.

The Deputy Secretary General

318. fully endorsed the need for a positive, proactive approach and stressed that this was indeed the approach followed by the Regional Coordinators in their daily work, only a small part of which is devoted to MGPs. However, it would be ludicrous to expect that the Bureau's small staff could develop proactive approaches to all 955 listed sites.

The Secretary General

319. confirmed that, subject to Standing Committee approval, the Bureau will continue development of COP7 DOC. 13.1 and seek Contracting Party sponsors for the completed draft during the conference itself.

Decision SC21.23: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's approach to the development of COP7 DOC. 13.1 on review of the description and management of Ramsar sites and agreed to recommend to COP7 the renaming of the 'Management Guidance Procedure' to 'Ramsar Advisory Mission'. The proposal for a change in name for the Montreux Record was not supported, but the need for a positive, proactive approach to this tool was reinforced.

Agenda item 10.9: Guidelines to Contracting Parties on the submission of draft decisions

The Deputy Secretary General

320. referred to SC21 DOC. 10.9 and noted that the issue of draft decisions is covered by the revised Rules of Procedure for COP7 already discussed under agenda item 10.2. Nevertheless, the Bureau requested the Standing Committee to consider whether additional guidance, as proposed in SC21 DOC. 10.9, could help to avoid an excessive number of possibly contradictory draft texts being submitted at the last minute.

Australia

321. welcomed the establishment of a firm deadline, within the Rules of Procedure, for submission of draft conference decisions, and felt that additional formal guidance was unnecessary. However, the meeting of the Standing Committee preceding each COP should make a point of trying to maximize coordination between Contracting Parties in the preparation of draft decisions. Australia is preparing three draft decisions for COP7 dealing with invasive species, cooperation on migratory waterbirds in the Asia-Pacific region, and the procedure for redefinition of Ramsar site boundaries in a Contracting Party's 'urgent national interest' and when errors had been made at the time of designation.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

322. requested the Bureau to attach to the Minutes of the meeting a list of all draft Recommendations and Resolutions approved for submission to COP7 by the Standing Committee.

Decision SC21.24: The Standing Committee requested the Contracting Parties, Standing Committee members and Bureau to make every possible effort to ensure that draft COP7 Recommendations and Resolutions are prepared as far in advance as possible, and that texts on similar or overlapping themes are coordinated. The Standing Committee did not consider that additional formal guidance was needed, beyond that contained in the revised Rules of Procedure.

Agenda item 10.10: Preparations for the Technical Sessions

The Deputy Secretary General

323. presented the table attached to agenda paper DOC. 10.10 showing plans for the COP's Technical Sessions as presently known.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

324. on behalf of the SC noted the plans made so far and encouraged further progress.

Agenda item 10.11: Special interventions during plenary session

The Secretary General

325. updated the list of speakers and subjects as far as presently known and noted that efforts will be made to accommodate a special intervention on "Wetlands and climate change". The COP agenda will be very tight, and time may also have to be carved out for high-level visitors who will wish to make a statement. It is hoped that the Crown Prince of Spain will attend.

Panama

326. observed that the special interventions are an important part of the COP and requested consideration of inviting representatives of UNEP who are involved in the convention on pesticides and the evolving convention on persistent organic pollutants.

The Secretary General

327. applauded the suggestion and noted that, since the special intervention on toxic substances in wetlands at COP6, there has been less progress on this issue than had been hoped for, due to a number of factors; such an intervention at COP7 might help push the issue forward for the next triennium and the Bureau will look into the suggestion.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

328. on behalf of the Standing Committee received this information with thanks.

Agenda item 10.12: Global Biodiversity Forum 13

IUCN

329. reported that IUCN had planned to circulate the second announcement for GBF13 in mid-October, but the workshop themes have not yet been finalized. There have been expressions of interest from governments and NGOs concerning these themes: the private sector and wetlands; the global carbon cycle and peatlands, wise use and management opportunities; invasive species; community participation in wetland management; Ramsar and water; wetland restoration; and amphibians. There has so far been no interest in the suggested topic on the Vision for the Ramsar List. Offers and suggestions are coming in, but the final list of themes and coordinators will probably not be ready before mid-November. IUCN will produce a proposal for funding to be presented to the GEF.
330. Traditionally the GBF communicates to the COP by means of a brief GBF proceedings document prepared by the rapporteurs and a 5-10 minute oral presentation early in the COP proceedings.

The Secretary General

331. noted that some of the GBF themes will be carried forward in the Technical Sessions as well. He accepted IUCN's request to allow time for a GBF13 statement at the opening session or at the first substantive plenary session.

The USA

332. reported that the US Department of State has informed IUCN that it will make a proposal for a workshop on Amphibian Declines: The Role of Wetland Management.

The Secretary General

333. informed the SC that Friends of the Earth International has announced plans for another pre-conference meeting of NGOs; the Bureau knows very little about this or about whether FOE International will approach the Bureau to seek cooperation.

Agenda item 10.13: Consolidation of resolutions and recommendations

The Secretary General

334. reported that, in response to Resolution VI.11 and subsequent discussions in Standing Committee, the Executive Assistant for Communications at the Bureau has prepared a Key Concept Index of the Resolutions and Recommendations from all six COPs, the Strategic Plan 1997-2002, and the major Convention guidelines. He has also produced an annotated version of the Strategic Plan showing links to all past COP decisions wherever relevant to the Plan's objectives and actions. These documents benefit from being on the Web because the cross-references are linked for immediate access. The limitations are that 1) so far the consolidation exists only in English, and translation in the other languages and maintaining the documents would require additional resources, and that 2) because they are on the Web only, not everyone presently has access to them. Consideration is being given to publishing a print version of the consolidation documents.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

335. congratulated the Bureau on this effort and instructed that the record should show special thanks to Dwight Peck, who took the lead in developing these instruments.

Agenda item 10.16: Venue of COP8

The Secretary General

336. noted that the new Rule 3 of the proposed Rules of Procedure requires that invitations to host the COP should be signed by the Head of State or Government or the Cabinet or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in order to ensure that the entire government is supportive.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

337. urged the Bureau to explain this Rule to any Parties that may show an interest in hosting the Conference of the Parties.

Spain (on day 1 of the meeting)

338. reported that the Government is developing a proposal, which it is hoped can be presented at COP7, to host COP8. This is not yet certain, but Spain hopes to make a formal offer.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

339. welcomed Spain's intervention and looked forward to further developments.

Agenda item 11 on Convention finances: 11.1, Budget outcome for 1997 and projections to December 1998

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

340. reported on the Subgroup's recommendations concerning a) the Auditors' Report for 1997, b) the Budget Report for 1998, c) the Reserve Fund, and d) the status of projects administered by the Bureau. The Reserve Fund presently contains an excess of SFR 140,000 over the mandated amount, and the Subgroup recommended that the Secretary General be authorized to use this excess to help defray costs of the secretariat's services for COP7 if that should prove necessary.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

341. on behalf of the Standing Committee noted the 1997 Auditors' Report, 1998 Budget Report, and status of projects, expressing gratitude to the governments and organizations that have funded those projects.

Decision SC21.25: The Standing Committee authorized the Secretary General to employ the excess amount of money in the Reserve Fund to help defray costs of the secretariat's services for COP7 if required.

Wetlands International

342. inquired about funding for the position of MedWet Coordinator, which runs out at the end of this year. The **Secretary General** reported that discussions are continuing, but there are good indications that funding will be secured to continue that position for at least another year.

Agenda item 11.2: The Bureau's proposed budget for 1999

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

343. reported that the proposed budget fits within the parameters established at COP6 and the Subgroup endorsed it.

Decision SC21.26: The Standing Committee accepted the Bureau's proposed budget for 1999.

Agenda item 11.3: Small Grants Fund, 1998 allocations

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

344. expressed the Subgroup's gratitude to Malaysia for relinquishing its allocation for a 1997 project that was unable to be got under way. He noted that the process of reviewing SGF proposals has become more and more streamlined, and that the Bureau's submission to the Regional Representatives of all proposals from each region permitted more input from the Representatives than ever before. There were 64 proposals for consideration, of which 16 were rated A1. (Category A1 refers to proposals which will be funded with presently available resources, A2 to those which will be funded if additional resources should become available, and B to those which will be funded if still more resources should become available; category C includes those which are not thought to be suitable for funding as presented by the respective Administrative Authorities.) The Subgroup endorsed the proposed list of allocations with some modifications for the Neotropical region requested by the Regional Representative. Concerning the proposal from Jordan, the Subgroup recommended that it be held for revision and that the agreement of the Chairperson of the Subgroup on Finance should be secured for any final decision.

Uruguay

345. noted a correction to the changes mentioned in the Subgroup's report (the inclusion of a project from Nicaragua in list A1), and the **Chair of the Subgroup** reported that this amendment would have no financial impact on the overall allocations.

The Netherlands

346. reported that the Dutch Government has approved a contribution of SFR 40,000, which should arrive soon.

Wetlands International

347. reported that four years ago, Ducks Unlimited, Wetlands International, and FACE launched the European Habitat Conservation Stamp Programme which has funded projects in several countries. He hoped that it will be possible to establish strategic cooperation with the SGF and pledged US\$ 10,000 from that programme for this year's SGF allocations.

Uruguay

348. requested that the Bureau prepare a revised list of project allocations and that this be included as an attachment to the minutes.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

349. noted that the Subgroup will collaborate with the Bureau in revising the SGF Project Proposal Review Form. No Standing Committee action was required on the matter at this stage.

Decision SC21.27: The Standing Committee adopted the list of allocations presented by the Subgroup on Finance for allocations from the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (as attached).

Switzerland

350. announced a Swiss Government decision to allocate funds for the SGF.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

351. thanked the Netherlands for confirming its announced pledge, Wetlands International and the other NGOs involved in the European Habitat Conservation Stamp Programme for their pledge, and Switzerland for its continuing support for the Fund.

The Secretary General

352. noted that the SGF proposal review process has been streamlined over the years and has been working very well. However, he felt compelled to put on record his dissatisfaction with the fact that, this year, last minute changes were made in the proposed allocations for the Neotropics by the Regional Representative contrary to the recommendations arrived at by the Bureau's review process, without any previous discussion with the Secretary General and/or the Deputy Secretary General who are ultimately the officers responsible for the recommendations presented to the Standing Committee. The full process involves preliminary evaluations by the Regional Coordinators for their own regions, followed by global review by all of the RCs, the Deputy Secretary General and the Secretary General. The recommended allocations are presented to the SC under the Secretary General's signature only after the completion of this process of internal review and incorporation of the input of the Regional Representatives. This year, no input was received from the Regional Representatives before dispatching the papers to the Standing Committee. In addition, time was set aside at this SC meeting to provide an opportunity for everyone to consult with the Bureau and clarify any doubts about the recommendations made by the Bureau for funding projects. The proposed informal session was canceled when no one showed interest in taking advantage of the opportunity. The Secretary General was therefore surprised that the Regional Representative for the Neotropics brought last-minute changes in the list of projects to be funded to the Subgroup on Finance meeting, changes which brought the review process back to a much earlier stage, to the RC's preliminary evaluation for that region. In effect, changes introduced by the Regional Representative implied that two projects submitted by Bolivia and Brazil and considered by the

supervisors of the Regional Coordinator as being of national importance were removed from the list recommended by the Bureau and replaced by two projects that in the view of the SG and DSG were of only local importance, one in Bolivia to be implemented by an NGO and the other one in Chile, to be implemented by an independent consultant.

353. The Secretary General raised the issue as a procedural matter and asked the SC to further improve the decision-making process related to funding of SGF projects, by establishing that when a Regional Representative's view differs from the results of the review process within the Bureau there be consultations with the Secretary General and/or Deputy Secretary General before changes are made; or that the review process be amended to involve only the Regional Coordinator for the region and the Regional Representative. Otherwise, the review process will remain muddled.

Uruguay, the Regional Representative for the Neotropics,

354. noted that when the Bureau sent the 1998 SGF projects for their consideration, they were on mission for their government. When they returned, they requested copies of the project review forms completed by the Regional Coordinator for the Neotropics. These were provided by the Deputy Secretary General. Early in the week, they had informed the Bureau that they would be proposing changes; they were unable to attend the suggested SGF discussion session but informed the Bureau of that.
355. Uruguay reminded the meeting that in the Ramsar Convention decisions are made by the Contracting Parties and not by the staff of the Bureau. They regretted that sometimes the opinions of the Bureau may not be the same as those of the CPs, but felt that the basic principle that decisions are made by the governments works toward the good functioning of any convention. They regretted that the Standing Committee's time was being taken up with issues like this one.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

356. noted progress over the years in moving away from political considerations in the allocations. He felt that despite the fact that the Regional Representative's changes were similar to the RC's original wishes, they had been arrived at independently, but he suggested that attention to be given to how the Bureau's list came to differ so much from the RC's in the first place. The Subgroup offered to work with the Bureau to smooth the way to agreed criteria in the review process. He sympathized with Uruguay's remark that, as he does not work full-time for the Convention, he cannot be held to a short timetable for input in Bureau processes. He perceived too many political issues still among the technical ones in the review process and suggested that an alternative process might be desirable, either agreed priorities for criteria or, failing that, an outside review process. Nonetheless, the process this year was less political than last year's. An excellent slate of proposals has been approved and the Parties can be comfortable that the SGF money is being used well.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

357. felt that the Bureau will be too busy in coming months to revise the review process, and the call for new proposals set for November will certainly come too soon for a revision. She asked the Bureau and the Subgroup on Finance to discuss a way forward.

The Secretary General

358. noted that a new project evaluation form (for completed projects) is being proposed and suggested that the allocation request form should be in line with that. The request form cannot be revised by November, but the new evaluation form can be used by the time of the COP. He agreed with the USA that there are different views on allocation priorities within the Bureau

and felt that 100% consistency would not be achievable, suggesting that perhaps agreement could be reached on other concerns to be included in the review process.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

359. took up the Subgroup's suggestion to work together with the Bureau to harmonize the request and evaluation forms for the next round of grants after 1999.

Agenda item 11.4: Budget for COP7

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

360. reported that the Subgroup discussed the possibility of a shortfall in COP7 funding and recalled its opposition last year to the introduction of a delegate's fee as a remedy. After a review of Costa Rica's solid efforts to meet expenses, the Subgroup now recommends that a fee of US\$ 100 be charged for each delegate to COP7, at the discretion of the host country, without setting a precedent for future COPs. The USA remains philosophically opposed to the concept of charging fees for the COPs of treaties.
361. He reported that the Subgroup also urged that the SC draw up a letter recognizing the efforts that have so far been made by Costa Rica and inviting the Government of Costa Rica to make a contribution to the trust fund that has been established for COP7, to ensure that all obligations related to hosting the COP will be met.

Uruguay

362. wished to record that as the Neotropical Representative they have dropped their opposition to charging a fee for delegates in recognition of the great efforts being made by Costa Rica and with the understanding that the fee will be included in the assistance package offered to delegations that will receive such assistance to attend the Conference.

Costa Rica

363. expressed its gratitude for Uruguay's support for this position. The Costa Rican representatives noted that they had no objection to such a letter being sent from the Standing Committee to their government.

The Philippines

364. cautioned that the fee might be difficult for some CPs to pay, especially given the current financial crisis in Southeast Asia, and might result in smaller delegations.

The Secretary General

365. reiterated the assurance that all delegates receiving support from the Bureau will have that fee included in the support.

Austria

366. announced that his government intends to sponsor one COP7 delegate from a country with economy in transition.

Decision SC21.28: The Standing Committee endorsed the charging of a fee of US\$ 100 per delegate to COP7, at the discretion of the host country, with no precedent for future meetings of the Conferences of the Parties.

Decision SC21.29: The Standing Committee resolved to send a letter to the Government of Costa Rica inviting a cash contribution to the Trust Fund established for COP7, in order to ensure that all obligations related to hosting the Conference will be met.

Agenda item 11.5: Budget implications of changes in the composition of the Standing Committee

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

367. reported that the possible changes in the SC and STRP composition involve only small increases and have already been accounted for in the proposed budget for 2000-2002.

Agenda item 11.6(a): Proposed format for the 2000-2002 Work Programme

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

368. reported that the Bureau has proposed a new format, basing the Work Programme on the Strategic Plan, and the Subgroup recommended its adoption by the SC. The Work Programme format has no budgetary implications. The proposed Programme will be circulated as a conference document.

Decision SC21.30: The Standing Committee endorsed the new format for the 2000-2002 Work Programme proposed by the Bureau.

Agenda item 11.6(b): Proposed core budget for the triennium 2000-2002

The Secretary General

369. explained that he had hoped to ask for virtually no increase (cost of living only) in the budget for the next triennium, but then learned that 1) Wetlands International reconfirmed that the Convention's contribution for maintenance and development of the Ramsar Database is insufficient, a view with which, upon careful examination, the Bureau agreed, and 2) IUCN also indicated that its charges to the Convention Bureau for services do not cover its costs, a view with which, after thorough talks and study of cost breakdowns, the Bureau also agreed. These two necessary increases in costs require a budget increase of some kind.
370. The Bureau proposed three budget options for the Standing Committee's consideration:
- a) The first is a "minimum core budget", involving an increase of only 7.9% to cover normal cost of living adjustments as well as increased contributions to Wetlands International and IUCN for contracted services.
 - b) The second option, requiring an increase of 16.5%, would cover the above costs and permit the addition of a full-time Development Assistance Officer (salary plus operating costs), which many Contracting Parties have called for over the past several years, in order to focus attention on relations with the GEF, World Bank, and other bi- and multilateral donor agencies.
 - c) The third option, requiring an increase of 22.4%, would include options I and II and add SFR 170,000 per year which, accumulated over three years, would permit the Bureau to cover its own costs relating to servicing the meetings of the Conference of the Parties. Ramsar is probably the only Convention which does not budget for the running of its COPs, so that host countries must bear the secretariat's expenses as well as their own. The hosting of COP7 by a developing country has proven how difficult this can be, and though the donor countries are assisting this will probably not be sufficient to cover the

Bureau's expenses. Setting aside a mere SFR 170,000 per year for this purpose would eliminate the necessity of confining Ramsar COPs to wealthy nations and would permit developing countries to consider hosting future COPs.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

371. referred to the Bureau's minimum core budget option, involving an increase of 7.9% in the first year, 2% in the second, and 2% in the third, and reported that the Subgroup recommended instead a budget increase of 5% in the first year, 2% in the second, and 2% in the third. The Bureau's Options II and III did not gain consensus support in the Subgroup. He noted that all Subgroup participants supported the concepts of the Development Assistance Officer and the COP expenses, but they could not reach a consensus view on how to include the necessary sums in the budget.

The United Kingdom

372. asserted that the Bureau's management of Convention finances has been extremely effective and disciplined. The Bureau is given many mandates and its operations should be covered by membership dues. The UK finds the Bureau's minimal option of a 7.9% increase completely justified and also supports a firm contribution in the core budget for the Small Grants Fund and the costs of cooperation with other conventions. The Parties cannot pare down the Bureau's running costs and at the same time expect the Bureau to do more and more.
373. She stated the UK's position that the UK supports the Bureau's 7.9% minimal option and could also support an increase to cover the costs of running the COP, but does not support the additional expense of a Development Assistance Officer at this time.

BirdLife International

374. associated itself with the UK's position and noted that the "minimal" 7.9% option really was minimal.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

375. reported that the Subgroup expressed no views on which budget lines should be affected by the amendment from a 7.9% to a 5% increase.

The Secretary General

376. explained that the amended agenda paper showing a budget for only 5% increase includes reduced figures for travel, Ramsar Database, Newsletter and publications, Regional Representatives' expenses, and the Small Grants Fund. Salary costs could not be reduced without reducing staff.

Wetlands International

377. observed that a breakdown in the Ramsar Database costs had been provided and he was glad to see that the proposed reductions were not too dramatic. Wetlands International is carrying significant co-financing for the Database as a contribution to the Convention but cannot increase that further. He will try to encapsulate some parts of the Database services and seek project funding for these in order to make up the core budget differences. He pledged that Wetlands International would not reduce the quality or quantity of the services it is providing to the Convention.

The Chair, speaking on behalf of Hungary,

378. reaffirmed the United Kingdom's view and reminded the SC of how many tasks have been given to the Bureau throughout the meeting, especially in networking with other conventions

and organizations, as well as in many other areas. She doubted that the SC can expect all of this to be done well without providing sufficient funding to do them. Relative to the budgets of other conventions, the Ramsar budget is very small indeed. She expressed the view that someday the SC will have to reconsider the question of a Development Assistance Officer.

The USA

379. said that he would never question the desirability of having a Development Assistance Officer; with all of the Convention's recent achievements, its work should be increasingly attractive to donor agencies. The question is where the money to pay for such an Officer is to come from. He said that the USA suggested to the Subgroup that the Small Grants Fund allocation be devoted instead to sharing the costs of a Development Assistance Officer with some other organization, with the expectation that the Officer's work would recuperate that money quickly, but there was no consensus for that idea.
380. The USA continued that the Parties do not have the money for these ideas: their agencies have been cut (the Canadian Wildlife Service has lost half its staff), whereas the Bureau's budget has never had to be cut. He observed that the costs of new mandates may have to be weighed carefully before the Bureau is instructed to undertake new initiatives.

The Chair, speaking on behalf of Hungary,

381. stressed how important a Development Assistance Officer would be to countries with economies in transition as well as to developing countries. She also noted that, without some support, not many countries could afford to host a COP, and no Eastern European country has been able to do so. She noted that other conventions have others goals and perhaps more Contracting Parties, but most countries seem willing to pay much more to the UN conventions.

Uruguay

382. noted for the record that the Neotropical Region supported both the Development Assistance Officer and the COP costs options in the Pan-American Regional meeting held in Costa Rica in July 1998.

Uganda

383. expressed sympathy for the financial mood around the world but noted that the Regional Representatives from the developing countries expected good service from the Bureau and were concerned about the suggested reduction in the budget line for Regional Representatives' support at the same time that more was being asked of them. The **Secretary General** explained that that budget line had not been much used in recent years.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

384. looked ahead to the agenda item on unpaid dues and reminded the meeting that SFR 200,000 have not been paid for 1997, as well as some SFR 800,000 for 1998 so far.

Papua New Guinea

385. observed that the small Parties often have trouble meeting their obligations to so many conventions. He felt that this issue will be of interest to the Small Island Developing States at the Oceania regional meeting in New Zealand. He argued that there should be a person in the Bureau to assist in seeking donor funding for biodiversity-related purposes, especially in small countries with natural resources that are not protected.

The Secretary General

386. recalled that the Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to present several budget options to COP6 and offered to do so again for COP7, along with the Standing Committee's recommendation, in order that the other two budget concepts will be aired. The other options

have been discussed at the three regional meetings already held and there has been no opposition to them.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

387. noted that the Standing Committee discussion of this issue has mirrored the Subgroup's: everyone endorsed the Development Assistance Officer and COP costs concepts but reached no consensus on how to make them possible. The only consensus was for the recommended 5% budget, and the USA preferred to bring only that recommendation to the COP.

Germany

388. affirmed that he could live with the Subgroup recommendation but could accept nothing higher than that.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

389. sympathized with the Secretary General's wish to allow the concepts to be aired at the COP and suggested that this could be done outside the context of budget proposals.

Decision SC21.31: The Standing Committee agreed to bring forward for consideration by COP7 the revised minimum core budget for the next triennium (5% increase the first year, 2% the next, and 2% the next).

Uruguay

390. requested that the Subgroup on Finance of the next Standing Committee be provided with detailed figures on the Bureau's travel expenses and the costs related to the preparation of the new logo.

Agenda item 11.7: Review of the Small Grants Fund

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

391. noted the table on page 16 of draft COP7 DOC. 13.2 showing final reports still outstanding from past SGF projects and reported the Subgroup's recommendation that no country should receive further project funding if progress or final reports should still be outstanding from projects funded in previous years. The Subgroup urged that the wording in the document's Recommendation 1 (page 21) be changed from the donor CPs agreeing to "commit themselves" to "make every effort" to provide a minimum level of funding of US\$ 1 million annually. Other minor suggested amendments would be communicated to the rapporteur.

Austria

392. inquired what "make every effort" would actually mean in practice. **Hungary (the Chairperson)** noted that evidently the Subgroup felt that the word "commit" was too strong.

Decision SC21.32: The Standing Committee decided that the document on "Critical evaluation of the Small Grants Fund" and its recommendations, with further improvements and noting the Subgroup on Finance's amendments, and with a draft decision, will be recommended to the Conference of the Parties.

Agenda item 11.8: Minimum dues for Contracting Parties, and the issue of unpaid dues

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

393. reported the Subgroup's conclusion that the SC should recommend to the COP that the Convention should assess a minimum dues of SFR 1000 per year, beginning on 1 January 2000, because lower amounts cost the Bureau more to process than they bring in. The SFR

1000 would relieve the Bureau of the burden of pursuing too small amounts. He noted that Uruguay abstained from the Subgroup's recommendation.

The Secretary General

394. noted that 50 Contracting Parties presently pay annual dues of less than SFR 1000, with some paying only SFR 28, and these 50 would generate income of only SFR 12,000 per annum. With a minimum of SFR 1000, those 50 could be expected to contribute SFR 50,000 to the Convention's expenses.

Uruguay

395. noted for the record that 1) the Bureau's reasons for requesting the SFR 1000 minimum are logical, and that 2) if the minimum were adopted, it would imply an increase for 13 CPs in the Neotropical region, up to 35-fold for some of them. Uruguay was hesitant to speak in the Subgroup because they did not know the opinions of the region's other CPs.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

396. requested the Bureau to show the 1000 minimum in the budget to be recommended to COP7. **The Secretary General** promised to prepare a paper showing the effect but noted that the recommendation must still be adopted by the COP. He observed that the Convention would not be gaining any money by this action, but would no longer be losing as much.

Canada

397. expressed appreciation of the principle involved but wondered whether an analysis had been made of whether these sums would actually be collectible, since some of the CPs in question might be able to pay neither the old nor the new dues. He inquired whether it would be more efficient simply to waive all dues below some amount.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

398. pointed to the principle of all Contracting Parties taking responsibility for themselves and paying their share, and **the Secretary General** observed that of the 50 CPs concerned, only 15 to 20 are not paying their dues. **Canada** wondered whether in-kind contributions might be substituted for cash transfers in some cases, and **the Secretary General** expressed doubts that in-kind contributions worth SFR 28 would be useful.

Decision SC21.33: The Standing Committee decided to recommend to COP7 that a minimum annual contribution of Contracting Parties should be established at SFR 1,000 as of 1 January 2000.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

399. reported that there was no consensus in the Subgroup as to the recommended sanctions against CPs with unpaid dues, and the matter was sent back to the SC with no recommendation. The Subgroup saw the need for examples of cases in which the suggested measures have been successful and asked that all other Ramsar policies be examined to bring them into harmony with these measures.

The Secretary General

400. reported that often, after many reminders, CPs do pay their arrears; in some cases, the problems involve bureaucratic delays. The most worrying cases are those CPs that have not paid their contributions and, despite Bureau efforts (including personal letters), have not taken the trouble to explain why.

The Regional Coordinator for Europe

401. assured the meeting that two European CPs included in the list distributed to the Standing Committee, Spain and Belgium, have given firm commitments that their past contributions will be paid as soon as possible.

Senegal

402. deplored the fact that his country is on the list of CPs with unpaid dues and explained that a conflict between ministries has been the cause; steps have been taken to remedy that and the situation should be resolved soon.

Malaysia

403. expressed confidence that the Asian CPs Iran, Pakistan, and Vietnam will pay their contributions eventually and urged that reminders be sent. He noted that sanctions and penalties for unpaid dues can be effective, as in the United Nations.

The Secretary General

404. reminded the meeting that asking the Bureau to do more studies of the issue would defer any COP decision until 2002, or effectively 2005, unless the Standing Committee takes some decision at this time.

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

405. responded that, since the Subgroup could not reach a consensus, it would be difficult to reach a decision in SC. The Subgroup chose not to force a vote on the issue.

The Czech Republic

406. expressed surprise at seeing Small Grants Fund recipient Parties on the list of unpaid contributions and suggested that they be denied SGF project allocations until their obligations have been met.

Uruguay

407. observed that, since any Contracting Party can bring the issue to the COP, the SC does not need to take a decision at this time.

Australia

408. recalled the Subgroup's discussions on desirable sanctions, especially that involving the SGF, and urged the Committee to go forward with the proposed sanctions so that the principle can be further discussed at the COP.

Uruguay

409. expressed dissatisfaction with that suggestion and sought clarification about the Regina Amendments, which adopted the budget for the Bureau. Their understanding was that the Amendments apply only to those Contracting Parties that have accepted them, and they inquired which CPs have accepted them.

Hungary (the Chairperson)

410. noted that, with Uruguay's objection, there was no possibility of consensus and the issue was not worth calling a vote for. She urged all Contracting Parties to make every effort to pay their obligations to the Convention.

Decision SC21.34: The Standing Committee determined to pass over the question of sanctions for Parties with unpaid dues with no action.

Agenda item 11.9: Alternatives to the UN scale of assessments

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

411. reported that the Subgroup endorsed the Bureau's suggestion in ¶ 11 of the agenda paper that the Convention should continue to use the UN scale of assessment for determining the financial contributions owed by the Contracting Parties.

Decision SC21.35: The Standing Committee decided to recommend to the COP that the Convention should continue to use the UN scale of assessments for determining the financial contributions of Contracting Parties to the Convention's budget.

Agenda item 11.10: Legal status of IUCN in Switzerland

The USA (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance)

412. reported that the Subgroup endorsed the Secretary General's recommendation in ¶ 6 of agenda paper 11.10.

The Netherlands

413. reported on recent experience with procuring international status for the IUCN office in the Netherlands and said that he understood that that status can never be achieved because of IUCN's mixed nature. But as an intergovernmental body, the Ramsar Bureau's case might well be different and might be eligible for international status.

[**Note:** Subsequent to the meeting, IUCN management clarified a point in ¶ 4 of its annex to SC21 DOC. 11.10. Paragraph 4 should read: "Consequence of corrective measures. A "true" fixed-term appointment would normally come to an end automatically and carry no termination benefits. However, (according to an interim IUCN termination package), staff holders of either a fixed-term appointment with notice period (*de facto an indefinite appointment*) or an indefinite appointment are eligible for termination indemnities, at present two weeks of gross salary per year of service, calculated on a *pro rata* basis."]

Decision SC21.36: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretary General to follow closely the IUCN's negotiations with the Government of Switzerland concerning its legal status and, if need be, to explore the possibilities of separate legal status for the Ramsar Bureau in Switzerland, whilst maintaining its service arrangement with IUCN.

Agenda item 12: Work Programme of the Bureau has been covered earlier in the meeting (see Decision SC21.30).

Agenda item 13: Approval of the minutes of the meeting

Decision SC21.37: The Standing Committee approved the minutes of the first two and a half days of its 21st meeting, with editorial polishing and the incorporation of amendments communicated to the rapporteur, and empowered the Chairperson to approve the last half day's minutes on the Committee's behalf.

414. The minutes and the Summary of Decisions will be circulated and published on the Web in English, French, and Spanish. The reports of the Subgroups will not be published.

Agenda item 14: Next meeting of the Standing Committee

Decision SC21.38: The 22nd meeting of the Standing Committee will take place immediately prior to the opening of the 7th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, on 9 May 1999, from 9.00 - 18.00 hours, at the Herradura Hotel, in San José, Costa Rica.

Agenda item 15: Any other business

The Secretary General

415. referred to the tabled document providing preliminary information on the five winners of the Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Award. The winners have been notified and the Bureau will make the announcement once all five have confirmed their acceptance of the Award. He asked the meeting's participants not to publicize the winners until the Bureau has had an opportunity to do so officially.

Agenda item 16: Closing remarks

Hungary (the Chairperson)

416. observed that this has been the last regular meeting of the present Committee and noted that a lot of things have been achieved to pave the way for COP7. The Committee and the Bureau have all worked hard and will make others work hard at the COP. The work has not been completed, many documents must be further developed, and the Committee members' input will be required. The Director General of IUCN said in his opening remarks that the Convention has changed more in the past three years than ever before, from a focus on indicative species to issues of global biodiversity, and all the Contracting Parties and Partner Organizations have a right to be proud of that. The first meeting of the Standing Committee was held in a small room in the basement of WWF, and this meeting has been held in three big rooms with the tables all in rows. This growth reflects the increasing role of the Convention. As, with more recognition, the Convention becomes more visible, the problems of the international community can be expected to become more apparent as well, and the Committee has been challenged in this respect, but it has treated all of these issues fairly.
417. On a personal note, the Chairperson felt honored to have been chosen to chair the Standing Committee over two triennia; she felt grateful for the confidence shown in her and hoped that she has lived up to these expectations. In 1999, she will have served ten years with the Ramsar Convention.
418. The Chairperson expressed gratitude for all of the contributions from the floor, and especially to Canada, Costa Rica, and the USA for having chaired the Subgroups. She thanked Clayton Rubec of Canada for many other contributions as well. She reiterated the Committee's best wishes to David McDowell and Mike Moser, who will soon be leaving IUCN and Wetlands International respectively. She thanked the NGO Partner Organizations for their continuing assistance. She sought a better word than "thanks" for the Bureau and congratulated all the Bureau staff for their preparations for the meeting, and she wished them courage for the interval leading up to COP7. She expressed the hope to see all of the meeting's participants in San José in May 1999.

Rapporteurs: Dwight Peck, Tim Jones