

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

26th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001

Report of the 26th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Stephen Hunter (Australia), Chair of the Standing Committee (SC)**, welcomed the participants and reminded them that the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP8) is less than a year away. He cited the SC's responsibility to provide sound advice to the COP and noted the challenges and opportunities inherent in COP8's coming soon after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). A good start to this SC meeting has been made by two days of constructive Subgroup meetings. He complimented the Bureau on the organization and documentation for the meeting.
2. **Jean-Yves Pirot (IUCN – The World Conservation Union)**, on behalf of Director General Achim Steiner, indicated that IUCN feels privileged to host another meeting of one of the most successful environmental treaties and praised the Convention for its receptivity to collaboration with NGOs, as shown by evidence of the inputs of NGO partner organizations in the agenda papers. IUCN plans to highlight Ramsar achievements in the context of wetlands and water resources at the WSSD. As evidence of Ramsar's success in fostering international partnerships, he pointed to common efforts to restore estuarine Ramsar sites on both sides of the Senegal river and the progress in developing a regional management plan for the Okavango delta. He said that IUCN has prepared a report on IUCN support to the CBD/Ramsar Joint Work plan and called for suggestions on how better IUCN may support the Convention strategically. [The full text of this statement is available on the Ramsar Web site.]
3. The **Secretary General** welcomed the SC members and the International Organization Partners (IOPs) and expressed pleasure at seeing so many Observer Parties present. After two days of productive Subgroup meetings, he looked forward to three more in plenary sessions. He thanked IUCN for its continued excellent cooperation, in both administrative services and substantial technical help. He also thanked the other IOPs and stressed their valuable contribution to the recent regional and subregional meetings.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

4. The draft agenda was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

5. The observer states and organizations were admitted by consensus.

Agenda item 4: Statements by the International Organization Partners

6. **Dave Pritchard (BirdLife International)** greeted the participants and noted that this meeting is uniquely significant, given next year's global attention to the environmental

conventions, when the position and effect of all of them will be under review. He drew attention to BirdLife's contributions to Ramsar, both in the documents under review and also at national level. He also pointed to BirdLife's new report on potential Ramsar sites in Europe, and its Important Bird Areas report on Africa, which may lead to a similar Ramsar exercise for that continent. He reported on BirdLife's continuing contribution of funding and expertise for Ramsar Advisory Missions – he welcomed the emerging concern with Article 3.2 issues of reporting change in ecological character, but noted that the Article 3.2 instances reported were all initiated by NGOs rather than by the Parties; thus BirdLife urged approval of the guidance proposed in DOC. SC26/COP8-9.

7. BirdLife's emphasis upon site issues may seem old-fashioned but it should be recalled that the Ramsar List is a core basic of the Convention. BirdLife paid tribute to the enormous depth and breadth of high quality materials produced by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and called for greater resourcing for this fundamental area of the Convention's work. Mr Pritchard noted that there is now a burgeoning industry of global data tools, assessments, and analyses, in which Ramsar and the STRP are fully involved; what is less developed is the question of what decision-makers should do with these results, and Ramsar is well positioned to take the lead on that issue. [The full text of this statement is available on the Ramsar Web site.]
8. **Simon Nash (Wetlands International)** reported on the results of the recent 3rd meeting of their Board of Members, which, following a major review of WI's operational effectiveness, modified the structure and redefined the future strategy of the organization. A Strategy 2002-2005 was adopted in principle and a new Board of Directors was chosen, reflecting a new blend of skills and geographical representation. Dr Max Finlayson was chosen as the new President, and the new Board will include Victor Pulido, Dave Pritchard, Daizaburo Kuroda, and Stefan Pihl, and others well versed in Ramsar issues. Wetlands International Regional Focal Points will be established in all six Ramsar regions, and the Ramsar Parties are urged to call upon these Focal Points to assist in implementation of the Convention at regional level. Wetlands International is poised to fulfil its role as a science and knowledge-based organization with sustainability built into all actions, driven by the needs of its users. Mr Nash outlined a number of Ramsar-related products and initiatives in the coming year and invited the SC to name a subgroup to review potential additional support from Wetlands International. [The full text of this statement is available on the Ramsar Web site.]
9. **Jamie Pittock (World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF)** outlined the mission of the Living Waters Programme, including the designation of new Ramsar sites and protection of river basins; he pointed to some 20 million hectares of new and imminent Ramsar sites in 15 Contracting Parties (CPs). The ten-year goal is 250 million hectares and he called on the Parties to help reach that. Much of the Living Waters Programme's work depends upon the help of the Parties and Bureau, as evidenced by recent successes in Algeria and Bolivia. He called upon the Parties to work towards 100 million hectares by COP8. He noted that only 60 of the 400 new sites pledged at COP7 have so far been designated, and urged all CPs to assist those that have pledged to meet their targets. He mentioned the goal of achieving sustainable management in 50 river basins and noted that the Lake Chad Basin Commission has sought to become a Ramsar International Organization Partner organization. He said that WWF welcomes the Convention's emerging emphasis upon cultural values, and he urged the SC to consider how best to position the Convention in the water debate. Much of WWF's work depends upon the skill and dedication of Bureau

staff, who are genuine partners on the ground. He commended the Bureau's excellent management, with its budget always balanced despite its being very low indeed, only ¼ to ½ of the budget of comparable conventions. He said that WWF understands that some governments are undergoing tight times, but he urged the participants to consider how they can better resource the Convention's achievements.

Agenda item 5: The Secretary General's report

10. **The SG** drew attention to the text of his report and wished only to highlight a few important issues. Under Objective 1, he reported seven new Parties and described the successful resolution of the status of Yugoslavia in the Convention, according to Resolution VII.30, with both the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia & Herzegovina having declared their succession to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. He has invited the Presidency of the European Union to consider proposing an amendment to the Convention to open membership to regional integration organizations (principally, the European Community); he said that a second EC meeting was taking place on 5 December to decide whether or not to submit a request for such an amendment. The SG hoped that this would be ready in time for COP8 – since an amendment would require an extraordinary Conference of the Parties, the only cost-effective way to accomplish this would be as an adjunct to one of the ordinary COPs, and unless the process can be “fast-tracked” it would have to wait for COP9.
11. Referring to Objective 2, the SG described encouraging progress with the River Basins Initiative, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the European Space Agency's TESEO project. He reported disappointing progress with the Global Environment Facility, which has agreed only to invite Ramsar to Council meetings when projects relevant to Ramsar's concerns are to be discussed, with so far no invitations. Ramsar is involved in a number of GEF projects, so while there is progress on the ground, there is still resistance at the institutional level. Some CPs have helped with the process, but he urged that more should do so.
12. Concerning Objective 3, the SG was pleased to report the Bureau's progress with the Convention's vital Outreach Programme. Some 69 CPs have designated their government focal points for communication, education and public awareness (CEPA), and 53 have named their NGO focal points. He drew attention to the materials the Bureau has produced for World Wetlands Day 2002. The Ramsar Web site continues to be the main instrument of the Convention's communications and press efforts, with some 1,700 users visiting per day, and he thanked the webmaster for his efforts. He noted that the “high quality book” on wetlands is progressing nicely and should be ready in time for the WSSD. It is intended mainly to be a public relations tools for high-level decision-makers, but that will not be its only use. He acknowledged the Swiss and Spanish governments for making the book possible.
13. The SG noted that applications are still being taken for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award, until 31 December, and in light of the disappointing number of quality nominations so far, he urged the SC to assist in identifying more good nominations.
14. Concerning Objective 4, the SG described recent efforts at capacity building, including a training workshop in Armenia and the 4th Evian Encounter for Arabic-speaking Parties

and non-Parties. He drew attention to the significant contribution of Algeria in facilitating this.

15. Referring to Objective 5, he explained the Bureau's deep concern about Germany's decision to invoke Article 2.5 on urgent national interests in the Airbus case involving Muehlenberger Loch, citing the potential bad precedent. He also noted the UK's case, which he said was different in that the procedures employed were quite different as well. He described progress in fulfilling Resolution VII.12's call for improving the quality of data in the Ramsar Sites Database, both for sites with bad RISs and those with RISs submitted before 1990, but indicated that the progress was insufficient. He thanked BirdLife International / RSPB for its annual contribution to the Ramsar Advisory Missions, and drew attention to the SG Report's list of Article 3.2 communications of change of ecological character.
16. Concerning Objective 6, the SG observed that there have been 72 new Ramsar sites this year, compared to only 31 in the previous year. Still more efforts will be needed to reach the Contracting Parties' goal of 2000 sites by 2005. He expressed the Convention's gratitude to the extraordinary work of WWF's Living Waters Programme in assisting in new site designations and to BirdLife International for its helpful new report on potential Ramsar sites in Europe, expressing the hope that this effort will be extended to other regions.
17. On Objective 7, the SG drew attention to four new MOUs and to the fact that Ramsar has been invited to participate in the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the UN Administrative Committee on Coordination. He pointed to his report's list of activities of the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation as demonstrating that the Convention is making progress on increased resourcing; though increasingly well known in the environment community, Ramsar is still unknown in finance circles. It is not easy to obtain funding for wetland projects *per se* and the goal is to link wetland issues into projects on sustainable development and poverty alleviation in particular. He described promising funding proposals for Brazil and Africa and highlighted work on resourcing the Small Grants Fund (SGF), largely through a proposed Ramsar Trust Fund.
18. On Objective 8, the SG reported the secondment of Carlos Villalba by the Government of Spain to serve as Technical Officer for COP8 and the establishment of the MedWet Coordination Unit in Athens, with the appointment of a new Coordinator, the first Ramsar office outside of the Bureau in Gland. The challenge now is to ensure its permanence. The Convention's finances are normal, with a small surplus last year and hopefully this year as well.
19. The SG stressed that it is absolutely impossible to achieve more with the present staffing level, as the staff is now working entirely to its limits. Any more activities to be accomplished or resources to be employed will require more staff. At COP6 in Australia in 1996 there were 92 Parties requiring attention, now there are 130; the number of sites requiring attention has increased dramatically; the new areas of the Convention's work, e.g., water issues, and the developing working relations with so many more conventions and organizations have all contributed to a vastly increased workload. Synergies with others produce very good results, but every new MOU increases the workload still further. Any more work must mean more staff members.

20. The SG noted that the Bureau has had a very positive year and felt that everyone – Parties, IOPs, and the Bureau – can be very proud of the work we are doing round the world. He thanked the Parties and the Partners for their help and cooperation.
21. **Norway** congratulated the Bureau on its impressive work and reported that the problem with the Tautra & Svaet site looks soon to be resolved, with a barrier that was causing ecological change soon to be replaced by a bridge, so that Norway is no longer planning to list the site in the Montreux Record.
22. **India** reported that it has submitted 11 more RISs, bringing its total of new designations to 16. He noted that the question people ask is what benefits countries will receive after including more and more Ramsar sites in the List.
23. **Uganda** thanked the Bureau for its report and conveyed the news of its new Wetland Sector Strategic Plan, which still requires additional financial support for implementation. Uganda plans a side event at COP8 on the process, in order to show how wetland issues can be integrated into poverty reduction efforts.
24. **Trinidad and Tobago** reported that a National Wetland Policy has been approved by the Government, and with respect to a complaint made to Ramsar by a tourist on the negative aspect of a proposed development in the Nariva Swamp it should be noted that the developer has since withdrawn this proposal. In addition, the Government has allocated \$100,000 (TT) for the management and protection of the Nariva Swamp during the current fiscal year.
25. **Iran** reported on progress with its GEF PDF-B project, soon to be approved by its Steering Committee for forwarding to the GEF Council. He thanked the Bureau for its help on the Steering Committee and noted the continuing need for co-financing. The Committee is considering the suggestion of listing the four GEF-project sites in the Montreux Record. Iran indicated that the Ramsar subregional meeting to be held in Teheran will also be the occasion for celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Convention's signing in Iran. It was noted that the Iranian delegate in the GEF Council has been working for a Ramsar presence there, and CPs were urged to include Bureau staff in the steering committees of their GEF projects. He inquired about the ESA's Treaty Enforcement Services using Earth Observation project and the meaning of "enforcement" and asked how these services will be made available to the Parties.
26. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** explained that "enforcement" was chosen by the ESA, since two of the four targeted conventions (Marine and Kyoto) are compliance-based, whilst the other two (CCD and Ramsar) are practical implementation-based. The Bureau has made it clear that enforcement is not relevant to Ramsar. The ESA plans to make available the outputs and produces of the Ramsar TESEO project at the time of COP8.
27. **Tanzania** noted that amending the Convention to include international organizations will not be easy, in terms of the ratification procedures needed in each country, and the earlier the process is begun, the better.
28. **Argentina** noted that, in Annex I of the SG's report, the information concerning Argentina's protest concerning the UK's designation of two sites in the Falkland Islands

(Malvinas) is missing the following text: “A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)’ (United Nations Secretariat information circulars ST/ADM/SER/A 1084 of 18 March 1966 and ST/CS/SER.A/42 of 3 August 1999).”

29. **Spain** expressed its gratification at being part of the Ramsar process, in hosting the next COP and being able to second a needed staff member to the Bureau. He reported that the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, in the Foreign Ministry, has adopted a project for the Mediterranean Basin and plans to dedicate part of it to wetlands.
30. In response to inquiries from **The Netherlands**, the **SG** agreed that the process of amending the Convention to admit the EC would be a long one, but hoped that the necessary ratifications could be acquired within five years or so, if the process could be begun at COP8. He explained that synergies among conventions has been increasingly successful at the secretariat level, but far less so amongst implementing agencies within the respective Parties, which is where it really counts.
31. **India** pointed out that as the number of Ramsar sites and Montreux Record sites continues to increase, Parties need financial assistance to manage them; he felt that a mechanism is needed for informing people of Ramsar benefits. **The SG** agreed that this is a fundamental issue for the developing world, where the means may not exist to ensure that designated sites can be well managed. The problem boils down to the fact that the Convention has no financial mechanism, as others do. The SG has been urging that there should be a financial mechanism for each of the proposed “clusters” in the International Environmental Governance process.
32. **Nicaragua** announced the designation of five new Ramsar sites.
33. **Cuba** noted its recent accession and promised to work seriously on implementation of the Convention. He pledged Cuba’s readiness to work with the secretariat in any way possible.
34. **Mexico** noted that, through its President, it has decided that water and forests are part of national security, which has large implications for their sustainable use. Ramsar sites, and all wetlands, are receiving high priority in the new government, and more Ramsar sites are promised. **The SG** noted that linking national security to the sustainable use of wetlands is a promising approach, and invited Mexico to make a presentation on this at COP8.
35. **The UK** indicated that it had no doubt whatsoever about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and considered Argentina’s reservation to be unfounded.
36. **Costa Rica** wished to join previous speakers in congratulating the Bureau for its work, especially the SG, Margarita Astralaga, and Marco Flores. Despite scant resources, Ramsar has become one of the most effective and talked-about conventions in the world.
37. **Spyros Kouvelis, the MedWet Coordinator**, described the inauguration of the new MedWet facilities and thanked the Bureau for its assistance in the establishment of the Coordination Unit to support some 25 countries already. He offered special thanks to the Governments of Greece and Spain.

Agenda item 6: Reports of the Regional Representatives

38. **The Chair** reported that, for Oceania, Australia has been encouraging new accessions from among the SIDS in the South Pacific. He and Bill Phillips will be working with South Pacific nations and SPREP on the advantages of accession, targeting possibly three new accessions before COP8, and supporting projects aimed at identifying and documenting potential new Ramsar sites. Moreover, Australia will finance a Ramsar regional meeting in April 2002, in New Zealand, to which Pacific Island non-CPs will be invited.
39. **Norway** observed that the greatest Ramsar event in Europe this year has been the Regional Meeting and warmly thanked Slovenia and specifically Gordana Beltram for making this possible. In northern Europe some 40 news sites have been designated, and a new assessment of Nordic Ramsar sites, conducted by the Nordic Council of Ministers, is resulting in a report and a new pamphlet describing Ramsar sites in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.
40. **Japan**, on behalf of 10 East Asian CPs, thanked the Bureau, especially Najam Khurshid, for enabling the fruitful exchange of views at the East Asian meeting in Bangkok. Japan contacted all nine other CPs in the region through diplomatic channels on a number of Ramsar issues, and the results that were received have been communicated to the Subgroup meetings. Japan described recent progress in implementing the Convention in China, the Philippines, and Thailand, and noted that Japan has been financially supporting numerous wetland projects in the region.
41. The **Slovak Republic** described Ramsar-related efforts in the central European region through a number of ministerial and expert meetings and through bilateral contacts with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. He described an important new Ramsar-related trilateral MOU for the Morava/Dyje floodplain signed among Austria, the Czech Republic, and the Slovak Republic in August 2001.
42. **Trinidad and Tobago** reported that it hosted a Ramsar/SPAW training seminar, including 10 non-CPs; of these, Barbados, Guyana, and St Lucia are indicating interest in accession.
43. **Mexico** cited cooperative wetland-related agreements with Canada and the USA since 1939 and described many promising innovative tools on wetland issues. Promotion of Ramsar specifically has not kept pace as well as could be wished but should improve in the next triennium.
44. **France** thanked Slovenia for the European Meeting and expressed satisfaction at the links and progress facilitated by that meeting. France is closely involved with MedWet and hopes for permanent establishment. France is planning for its experts to participate, mainly through bilateral projects, in helping other Parties (e.g., Poland and in North Africa), both on the ground and at the institutional level. Progress is foreseen on coral reefs through relations with its overseas territories.
45. **Argentina** described efforts to improve contacts in its region, largely through an e-mail list. Argentina and the Bureau organized the first South American subregional meeting in Buenos Aires, September 2001, financed by Argentina. Argentina also assisted in the Honduras subregional meeting and a meeting on synergies between CCD, CBD,

UNFCCC, and Ramsar in Bolivia, and played a role in other regional cooperation meetings, including in Paraguay. To contribute to capacity building activities, Argentina organized a meeting, together with the University of Valencia, the Ministry of Environment of Spain, the Ramsar Bureau, and the University of Buenos Aires.

46. **Costa Rica** described recent efforts to involve the seven countries of Central America and pointed particularly to Pacific coastline cooperation as a benefit for wetland issues. He applauded the emerging emphasis on cultural issues.
47. **Uganda** enumerated a number of subregional efforts, in addition to the Lusaka meeting, and drew attention to the East Africa Wetland Project (involving Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) sponsored by NORAD and IUCN-East Africa. Ethiopia shows interest in accession, and Mozambique may as well. Uganda has produced a CD-ROM on its innovative wetland work and makes it available to other countries in the region. Uganda hosted a workshop in wetland inventory, which resulted in what is being called the “Kampala Matrix”. There are still grave problems with communications within the region, and he urged an increased presence of the Convention there.
48. **Armenia**, after congratulating Slovenia and Gordana Beltram, described progress in the creation of Black Sea Wet and listed other bi- and tri-lateral activities in the region, involving transboundary protected areas and capacity building.
49. **Togo** described efforts concerning transboundary sites, the Niger Basin and the Mono River between Togo and Benin, and listed efforts to establish synergies among conventions. He thanked the EC for assistance in capacity building.
50. **Algeria** is preparing to host the North and Central Africa Subregional Meeting and to invite several non-CPs, and is implementing the MedWet North Africa Project. Algeria represented Ramsar at the 3rd IEG meeting in September and is working to sensitize Arab-speaking countries to Ramsar values.

Agenda item 7: Report from STRP10

51. **Dr Jorge Jiménez, Chair of the STRP**, stressed the importance of STRP10 as the last STRP meeting of the triennium. Despite its ambitious work plan and the limitations of its *modus operandi*, STRP delivered a very substantial part of its programme of work. He listed the main areas of work, as reflected in the present agenda papers. He expressed the need for a feedback mechanism to learn how useful the Convention’s guidelines really are. He described STRP’s interactions with the Millennium Assessment and the work of other conventions, and noted the assistance of other conventions at STRP10. Dr Jiménez urged a substantial revision of the STRP *modus operandi*, and offered thanks to the Bureau, especially Nick Davidson, and the IOPs for facilitating the STRP’s work.
52. **The Chair** observed that he’d had the good fortune to attend the STRP meetings and, on behalf of the SC, he commended the STRP and its chair for their intense and difficult work.

Agenda item 8: Listed Sites and Article 3.2

53. **The SG** drew attention to the “urgent national interests” and Article 3.2 issues discussed in DOC. SC26-2 and pointed out that virtually all of the Article 3.2 notifications have been communicated to the Bureau from others, not from the Administrative Authorities (AAs). The Parties are evidently not fulfilling their Article 3.2 obligations but it’s not clear why: perhaps the AAs are not organized so as to know what’s going on at Ramsar sites, and perhaps, even when they are notified, there is a natural reluctance to recognize problems that will have to be resolved. The Bureau believes that this is a very important issue – boasting 1110 Ramsar sites is no victory if they are not well managed. The Bureau suggested creation of a “Valencia Register” of Article 3.2 sites, as a formal reminder of the issue, but the Subgroup wishes not to submit that Resolution, and rather to request a discussion paper for COP8. It is to be hoped that some firm mechanism will come out of this which will encourage Parties to remain aware of any changes in ecological character.
54. **The SG** indicated that Article 2.5 issues are also of great concern to the Bureau, which has lately been preoccupied by Germany’s use of “urgent national interests” mainly to create employment. Jobs for people is doubtless an important value, but if one of the world’s richest countries uses this clause lightly, what may occur in the poorer countries? According to Article 8.2 of the Convention, it is the Bureau’s right and duty to share its concerns with the SC, lest this be a precedent leading to a snowball effect of restricting or delisting Ramsar sites. He pointed out that Article 8.2 requires the Bureau to forward news of such alterations of ecological character to all Parties for discussion at the COP. The purpose is not for blame but rather to find ways in which the Convention can help both for conservation and sustainable development, which requires discussion and reflection on how that can be achieved. The SG feels that guidelines are needed, because though the Convention’s obligations remain “soft law”, the Parties need to have the best possible soft law.
55. **Argentina** observed that it has requested inclusion of Laguna de Llanquanelo in the Montreux Record and a RAM mission – the mission was successful and a report will follow soon. Responding to the UK (paragraph 35 above), Argentina also indicated that Argentina has no doubts about its rights of sovereignty over the Islas Malvinas. Argentina recalled UN General Assembly resolutions 2065 (XX), 3160 (XXVIII), 31/49, 37/9, 38/12, 39/6 and 40/21, 41/40, 42/19 and 43/25 in which it was said that the General Assembly recognized the existence of a dispute of sovereignty concerning the Islas Malvinas and asked Argentina and the UK to initiate negotiations with a view to finding the means to resolve peacefully and definitively all the aspects related to the future of the Islas Malvinas in accordance with the UN Charter.

Agenda item 9: The third Joint Work Plan with the CBD

56. **The DSG** observed that the second Joint Work Plan (JWP) with the CBD has been very successful, both in improving cooperation and in providing a model to other conventions for their joint work. The Bureau is now working with the CBD secretariat on an evaluation of JWP2 and the elaboration of a third JWP. Both will be circulated to the SC for approval by correspondence, prior to the CBD’s COP6 in April 2002. The DSG listed significant areas of activity for JWP3, and then noted that DOC. SC26-25 conveys the CBD’s proposal for harmonizing criteria for site designation between the two conventions. JWP3 will also reach out to other conventions, in addition to Ramsar and CBD, and will focus more on joint actions for CPs at national level. Input from the SC will be welcomed.

57. **Argentina, Japan, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland** applauded this cooperation and suggested areas of focus for joint work. Discussion ensued on the extent to which cooperation between the secretariats may increase work loads over the short term but possibly reduce them eventually.

Agenda item 10: Ramsar's participation in the UN environmental processes

58. Concerning the International Environmental Governance process, **the SG** explained the background, in the context of the future of UNEP: should it remain a programme of the UN or become a specialized agency, or be replaced by a new 'World Environmental Organization' to balance the World Trade Organization. This process also includes important discussion on the future arrangements for synergies among the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). He described Ramsar's participation in the process, required in order to ensure that wetland issues and the Convention as an institution should be included in whatever results emerge from WSSD. The Bureau was displeased by UNEP's recent proposal for the "clustering" scheme.
59. **The SG** noted that there is not much overlap in government delegations to the conventions, and in some fora the delegates do not even know very much about Ramsar. The IEG process is nebulous but will eventually lead to something, and it's important that Ramsar's values and contributions should be visible in the IEG's recommendations to WSSD. He urged the SC to make sure that their colleagues in these meetings are adequately briefed on Ramsar values.
60. **Iran**, as Chair of the Group of 77 and China, described the position of the group regarding the IEG process and offered to assist in promoting Ramsar values in this process. Similarly, **Argentina** observed that the Regional Representatives can help to explain these issues in the regions, since Ramsar achieves tangible results.
61. **Tanzania** voiced concern about the difficulty of implementing the IEG clustering idea at national level, given that each Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) may be under different ministries. There is a reluctance to embark upon still another expensive reform process without some guarantee of its effectiveness.
62. Concerning the WSSD preparations, **the SG** outlined Ramsar's participation, acknowledging that some CPs have been supportive in keeping wetland issues in the process. He urged that one Party in each UN regional grouping be designated to advance wetland and Ramsar issues.
63. **WWF** voiced the opinion that WSSD is an opportunity to position the Convention on water and wetland issues contributing to sustainable development. WWF regularly argues that Ramsar and wise use are key in river basin and mountain wetlands issues, and approves of the suggested "course corrections". WWF shared the SG's doubts about the success of the process and urged CPs to bring Ramsar's *Agenda 21* document to their colleagues at home. It was suggested that an SC contact group draft a Resolution after WSSD in time for COP8 as a follow-up on the summit conclusions.
64. **Uganda** urged that wetland issues be included in National Statements for the WSSD and offered its assistance in the region.

65. **France** agreed that Ramsar must be visible in the process, but expressed surprise at the statement in the SG's report that the Ramsar Administrative Authorities are not involved in the WSSD preparatory process – in France, all relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, are involved. France believes that we should not underestimate the importance of the regional preparatory meetings – many of those participants will be at WSSD and regional results will be included in the global process.
66. **IUCN** has UN observer status and will seek the Bureau's views on how best to represent itself on the themes of 1) environmental governance, 2) ecosystem management for sustainable livelihoods, and 3) financing sustainable development.
67. **Togo** noted that, in that country, all focal points were convened for input, and he asked the Bureau to send information that can be used on such occasions.
68. **Japan** supported a strong Ramsar presence at WSSD but expressed concern about spokespeople representing the Convention without some agreed procedure for selecting them. **Iran** added that formal coordination amongst these regional spokespersons would be desirable.
69. **The Chair** summarized that there is a consensus that Ramsar issues must be given appropriate profiles in WSSD preparatory processes, both by the Bureau and by national delegations informed by the Administrative Authorities. There is concern about selecting one CP from each region, and the suggestion of an agreed procedure. He urged the members to discuss this further and return to the issue later, but he noted the Bureau's suggestion that an analysis of WSSD results be prepared as an official document for COP8.
70. **WWF** suggests that, in addition, a follow-up Resolution be drafted after WSSD, and **France** agreed. **The SG** pointed out that the 60 days notification rule for new Resolutions leaves very little time after WSSD, but he proposed invoking the "unforeseen matters" rule which allows proposals for Resolutions on matters that could not have been foreseen.

Decision SC26-1: The Standing Committee agreed that the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism of South Africa should be invited to address the COP8 plenary on the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, that the Bureau should prepare an analysis of the WSSD outcomes as an official document for the COP, and that a draft Resolution should be prepared urging Ramsar follow-up to the WSSD outcomes.

71. **The SG** reported on the progress of the UNEP Environmental Management Group and expressed the hope that eventually this work would lessen the burden of national reporting and encourage synergies in the Parties.

Agenda item 11: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)

72. **The DSG** supplied background on Standing Committee's past support for the MA and the Bureau's, and STRP's, recent involvement in the evolution of the project, which has now achieved nearly complete funding and set up its permanent secretariat in Penang. Ramsar's lead has been taken by Nick Davidson of the Bureau, Max Finlayson representing the STRP, and Doug Taylor of Wetlands International, also representing STRP. He noted the

MA's recent call for nominations of experts and urged SC members to consider making nominations.

73. **Canada** viewed the MA as a significant opportunity for advancing Ramsar values, as in the case of Wetland International's South American Assessment. He posed the question of whether the MA assessments can feed back into Ramsar's strategic planning process, to which **the DSG** replied that the MA should supply baseline data that will be useful for Ramsar Parties.
74. **Japan** appreciated the active Bureau and STRP involvement in this important process and drew attention to the UNU workshop held in Tokyo in September 2001, related to the Millennium Assessment and the Asia-Pacific Innovative Strategy, for environmental monitoring using remote sensing.
75. **The SG** reported that the Executive Director of the MA, Dr Walter Reid, has agreed to make a plenary update on the MA at COP8. He urged that the SC endorse the STRP's agreed terms of reference for the STRP focal points to the MA.

Decision SC26-2: The Standing Committee endorsed the "Terms of Reference for STRP Millennium Assessment focal points" as adopted by Decision STRP 10.1 at the 10th meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

Agenda item 12.2: Ramsar Regional and Subregional Meetings

76. **The SG** provided background on the Standing Committee's decisions concerning regional and subregional meetings in preparation for COP8, noting that he believes they have been successful and well worth the money spent upon them. Some SFR 600,000 has been raised so far. He described each of the five meetings that have been held and explicitly expressed gratitude to the donors that have made the meetings possible: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Honduras, Hungary, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, UK, USA, Zambia, and the MAVA Foundation. He noted that the final reports of all five meetings, and acknowledgements to the donors, are available on the Ramsar Web site.
77. **The SG** drew attention to four meetings still planned, for which funding is still incomplete, and noted that SC25 called for two second subregional meetings in the Americas region, for which there are presently no secured resources.
78. **Slovenia** presented an overview of the European Regional Meeting in Bled, Slovenia, with particular thanks to Tobias Salathé and Inga Racinska of the Bureau and financial support from the countries already mentioned by the SG and a number of international organizations and Slovenian private sector entities. Gordana Beltram outlined the various sessions held and subjects covered, including the excursion to the Skocjan Caves, and noted that the report of the meeting, as well as the agenda papers and photographs of the events, are available on the Ramsar Web site.
79. **Argentina** presented an overview of the South American Subregional Meeting in Buenos Aires and transmitted the formal request of the meeting to the Standing Committee to elaborate a new Ramsar criterion for designation of sites based on the cultural and socio-economic values of wetlands. Argentina also reported that the Subregional Meeting has

decided to elaborate a South American strategy for the implementation of the Convention, based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan, and that Colombia is currently preparing a project on environmental indicators to monitor changes in wetlands. She noted that the meeting urged increased cooperation between institutions in the region and Spanish institutions. In this regard, a project to launch a master's degree in wetland management is under consideration.

80. **Mexico** reported on the Subregional Meeting for Central America, the Caribbean and North America held in Honduras, and welcomed the great progress of the Convention in the Neotropics over the past decade. It was noted that the report is available on the Ramsar Web site. Mexico reported that the Bahamas had proposed that the Ramsar regionalization be revised so that Central America and the Caribbean should join the North America region, and South America should stand alone, noting also that the USA had drawn attention to several problems with that idea. The Subregional meeting has requested that this possible change in the categorization of Ramsar regions be kept under review by the Standing Committee.

81. **Uganda** reported on the Eastern and Southern Africa Subregional Meeting in Lusaka, noting that this meeting has also requested that the Standing Committee consider the elaboration of a new criterion for designation of Ramsar sites based on the cultural and socio-economic values of wetlands. The meeting also requested that Ramsar begin consideration of the idea of creating a regional presence in this part of Africa.

82. **Japan** reported on the East Asia Subregional Meeting in Bangkok, with nearly 80 participants, including non-CPs Lao PDR and Myanmar, which showed interest in accession. The report of the meeting is available on the Ramsar Web site.

83. **The Secretary General** noted that he had had the privilege of attending all of the subregional meetings except the one in Honduras and had been impressed by the energy and commitment of the participants. He expressed gratitude to the donors who made the meetings possible, and hoped that more support could be found for the remaining planned meetings. He saw a particular importance in these intersessional meetings because they help to sustain the energy and momentum of the COPs, and felt they were money well spent.

84. **The Chair** noted that a proposal emanating from the Eastern and Southern Africa and the South American Subregional Meetings, concerning the desirability of Ramsar designation criteria based upon socio-economic and cultural values, will be tabled tomorrow and discussion of this topic can be deferred until then. **Japan** reported that this issue had been raised at the East Asian meeting as well, but expressed the view that more discussion would be required before deciding upon cultural values as criteria for designation.

85. **The SG**, in relation to the Eastern and Southern Africa meeting's request for an increased Ramsar presence in the region, indicated his belief that regional presences should be the next step in the Convention's evolution. He said that suggestions had been made that the Bureau's Regional Coordinators should be posted in their regions, but he felt that that was not a good idea; the RCs form the heart of the secretariat and must remain there. Still, any further development in regional assistance should be focused upon the regions.

86. **The SG** observed that we have only one RC and one junior assistant to serve each of these very big regions, which can never be adequate. Nonetheless, he felt that the solution is not to add staff in the Bureau in Gland but rather from now on to develop a presence in the regions. The MedWet Coordination Unit provides an example, with the particularity that MedWet spans three regions.
87. He reported that the Cartagena Convention has offered to host a Ramsar officer in its offices in Jamaica. The Nile River Initiative, representing 10 riparian nations, has a secretariat in Entebbe, Uganda, and has invited Ramsar to be present and active in its work – but the Bureau has reached its absolute limits and cannot respond positively. The SG suggested appointing an “**honorary Ramsar officer**”, suitably qualified, to represent the Convention in the Nile River activities under the supervision of the Bureau’s RC for Africa and the SG. There would be minimal financial implications, to be covered within the travel budget.
88. **Spain** endorsed the Bureau’s suggestions on future development in the regions and felt that regional implantation is necessary.
89. **The Netherlands** pointed out that implementation of the Convention in the regions does not necessarily require Ramsar officers. The SG hastened to agree that there is no intention to open Ramsar offices all over the world with Ramsar staff.
90. **The USA** expressed satisfaction with the results of the regional meetings, but noted that, given the budget discussions in the Subgroup in recent days, it was disappointing that there had been no more discussion of budgets at the regional meetings. He suggested that that should be made a fundamental agenda item for all regional meetings.
91. **Argentina** urged a greatly strengthened role for regional coordination and a long-term effort to translate investment into sustainable development. There should be 1) regional strategies, reflecting the Convention’s Strategic Plan, and 2) a major effort in strengthening management training, especially in conflict resolution, working style, etc. Better communication amongst the Regional Representatives would be desirable.

Decision SC26-3: The Standing Committee endorsed the appointment an “honorary Ramsar officer”, suitably qualified, to represent the Convention in the Nile River Initiative activities under the supervision of the Bureau’s Regional Coordinator for Africa and the SG.

Agenda item 12.1: Report on preparations for COP8

92. **Ms Inés González Doncel, Director General of Nature Conservation of Spain**, provided background on Spain and Valencia and explained that Spain is made up of 17 autonomous regions which are fully competent in matters of nature conservation, so that the national government’s role is one of coordination. She explained the rationale of the COP8 logo and slogan and described the organization of the preparations for the COP, including an MOU with the Bureau and a Steering Committee composed of central, regional and local administrations, NGOs, and the Bureau. She outlined Spain’s recent progress in forming a National Wetland Committee to coordinate the work of the regions, the development of a National Strategy in 1999, the preparation of six new Ramsar sites, a number of restoration projects, and completion of a National Wetland Inventory. She

described the COP venue and listed other events to be held immediately before COP8, like the Global Biodiversity Forum and an international NGO conference. She mentioned various promotional items (posters, logo, book, Web site) and the secondment of Carlos Villalba to the Bureau to assist in preparations.

93. **José Ramón Picatoste** demonstrated the Web site which is being set up in Spanish and (soon) in English and French for the COP, with background information on Ramsar sites in Spain, practical information on the Valencia region and on the COP itself. There will soon be reciprocal links with the Ramsar Web site.
94. **WWF** voiced gratitude for Spain's efforts and looked forward to the COP eagerly. He expressed concern about Spain's National Hydrological Plan, adopted in January 2001, which will require 120 major infrastructure works and take other steps which will have an impact upon many wetlands, among them Ramsar sites, including the Ebro Delta. He hoped that Spain will try to mitigate the harmful effects of this plan.
95. **Director General González Doncel** explained that Spain has always had an enormous problem with water – there are regions with agricultural potential but no water, and regions with water but less potential. The Plan has been worked on for over a hundred years and provides technical solutions which not everyone will like. The Ministry of Environment intends to conserve nature as well as implement the Plan, so that both nature and socio-economic welfare will be served. The Ministry has almost completed its strategic assessment of the Plan. As the recent Ramsar Advisory Mission to the Ebro Delta discovered, the Ebro Delta is an intensely populated area; it is understood that there may be difficulties ahead, but the Plan is intended to minimize the detriment of the water diversion as far as possible. She hopes that when the strategic assessment is ready there will be a detailed assessment of the effects of the water transfer. She pointed out that Spain is contributing 25% of all the area covered by the Natura 2000 network in the 15 European Union countries, which constitutes a clear demonstration of Spain's commitment to conservation.
96. **Argentina** thanked Spain for its presentation on COP8 preparations and offered the full support of the Neotropical Region to Spain in its efforts.
97. **The SG** recorded how pleasant and efficient has been the Bureau's work with the Director General and the Ministry of Environment, with rapid and fruitful progress. He thanked the Spanish Government for all of its support.

Agenda item 12.3 (a) (i): Interpretation of Articles 2.5 and 4.2

98. **The SG** described the evolution of this issue from a mandate from the Parties at COP7 to a paper prepared by IUCN's Environmental Law Centre which SC25 asked to be circulated to the Parties in the three languages for comment. The ELC then received those comments and produced the draft guidelines found in DOC. SC26/COP8-1.
99. **Spain, the Chair of the Subgroup on COP8**, reported that the Subgroup found the paper to be too prescriptive, providing mandatory procedures instead of guidance, and formed a Contact Group to rework the text, which is now presented as SC26/COP8-1 Revision 1.

100. **Australia** reported that the Contact Group sought to simplify the document and to place in proper context the Contracting Parties' rights under Article 2.5, especially in regard to how to interpret their own national interests.
101. **WWF** supported the revised draft and commended the Contact Group for its efforts.
102. **Mexico** argued that the interpretation of urgent national interests had implications that go beyond the Convention itself. He felt that Revision 1 showed progress but that more revision was needed. He proposed that the COP simply be offered a series of elements that might guide Parties in their cost-benefit analyses of relevant cases.
103. **Argentina** expressed the view that Article 2.5 expresses the right of Parties to restrict or delist Ramsar sites. Interpretation is entirely up to the Parties. A new contact group was proposed to make another revision.
104. **The Netherlands** wondered about the effect of these issues upon transboundary sites and suggested that a new point 4.5 be added urging that CPs "take into account whether the proposed change will affect other Contracting Parties".
105. **The Chair** proposed that the Contact Group continue its efforts, to be made up of Australia, India, Japan, USA, BirdLife International, and WWF, but open to all interested participants, including observers. The Group will report before the end of the SC26 meetings.

Agenda item 12.3 (a) (ii): Review of Ramsar site boundaries for reasons other than national interests

106. **The SG** recalled that the SC had requested a paper from BirdLife International and that Australia had offered to provide a case study, from both of which the Bureau prepared the draft Resolution and guidance in DOC. SC26/COP8-2.
107. **The Chair** reported that the Contact Group felt that a good deal of work remains to be done on this document, and he listed areas for improvement. He suggested that revised Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs) might be a mechanism for redefining a Ramsar site and urged attention to cases in which a Ramsar site has lost its ecological character entirely. The Group decided to offer two resolutions, one on cases in which Parties can more accurately define boundaries by means of new RISs and another on cases involving the unintentional and irreversible loss of a Ramsar site and cases in which a wetland no longer meets the Ramsar Criteria. The second might also urge creation of a register of delisted Ramsar sites and encourage compensation for sites so lost.
108. **The USA** felt that the first draft Resolution could be finalized by the May Subgroup on COP8 meeting, but that the second Resolution to COP8 should merely propose these issues for further study in the next triennium. **The UK** offered to supply material on case studies for the Contact Group to consider. **France** applauded the procedure of splitting these issues into two different Resolutions. **WWF** offered to continue working with the Contact Group.

Decision SC26-4: The Standing Committee appointed a Contact Group consisting of Australia (Chair), Japan, the USA, BirdLife International, and WWF, and

Argentina and the UK subject to confirmation, to craft two Resolutions for the Subgroup meeting in May 2002, one on boundary definition and another calling for future discussion of the issues of Ramsar sites no longer fulfilling the Criteria for designation.

Agenda item 12.3 (b) (i): Guidelines on allocation and management of water

109. **The DSG** provided background on the STRP process of developing DOC. SC26/COP8-3, with help from invited experts Heather Mackay and Mike Acreman, and STRP member Geoff Cowan, which includes a draft Resolution, proposed guidance, and a background paper. He thanked the USA for providing the financial support to STRP which enabled this work.
110. **Spain** indicated that the Subgroup on COP8 recommended that the draft Resolution and guidelines be approved, with the addition of a few issues as noted in the Subgroup's report (DOC. SC26-24), and that the background paper be translated into the Ramsar languages and circulated to the Parties as an information document for the COP. Spain will supply updated information on the Tablas de Daimiel as a case study.
111. **Uganda** promised to forward Botswana's comments on the paper to the Bureau for consideration.
112. **IUCN** wondered how the STRP will ensure smooth integration in the final drafting of the related papers on water allocation, restoration, World Commission on Dams, among others. **The SG** replied that the STRP has finished its work, with no resources remaining for further tasks, so the Bureau will undertake a final review to ensure that coherence; he urged everyone who found disharmonies amongst these documents to inform the Bureau, so that they can be amended before the Subgroup meeting in May.
113. **IUCN** inquired as to how the potential Resolution on agri-ecosystems, being discussed by Slovenia, IUCN, and Wetlands International, should be inserted into the process. **The SG** said that the draft has to be formally submitted by a Contracting Party, so for the moment it is only a potential Resolution.

Decision SC26-5: The Standing Committee adopted the draft Resolution and guidelines on water allocation and management, with the addition of text on water pollution, fish passage, dry cycles and seasonability. It determined that the background paper will be submitted to COP8 as a formal information paper in the three languages.

Agenda item 12.3 (b) (ii): Climate change and wetlands

114. **The DSG** noted that the STRP, working with the IPCC, has prepared a background paper, as well as a "Key Issues" document to provide wetland specificities beyond the IPCC's Third Assessment Report. These, and a draft Resolution, are not entirely complete. **Spain** indicated that the Subgroup on COP8 recommended that the documents be completed and submitted to the Subgroup meeting in May.

Decision SC26-6: The Standing Committee authorized the finalization of the draft Resolution and its “key issues” annex, and the background paper, for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 in May 2002.

115. To **France’s** inquiry about the process for seeking SC consultation and approving documents following the present meeting, **the SG** explained his understanding of the process, that the SC will delegate the authority to the Subgroup on COP8 to approve COP8 documents at its meeting in May, that the Subgroup suggested that all documents be circulated to all SC members for comment before that meeting, and that the Bureau should notify all CPs of the draft agenda and invite them to that Subgroup meeting if they should wish to attend as observers.
116. **The USA** queried how the STRP will be able to review the final stage of its documents after the Subgroup’s meeting in May, to which **the SG** replied that the STRP is a subsidiary body and (in most cases) has now provided its advice for the Standing Committee to act upon as it sees fit. Some work has still to be finalized by STRP Working Groups, and the procedure has been agreed in each case with the STRP. For the documents already finalized by STRP, so far the SC’s Subgroup has not recommended any major changes.

Decision SC26-7: The Standing Committee determined that it will delegate to the Subgroup on COP8 the authority to approve documents for COP8 at its meeting in May 2002, and that all of the documents to be considered at that meeting will be circulated to all Standing Committee members at the time of circulation to the Subgroup in order to provide an opportunity for comment. All Contracting Parties will be welcome to attend the Subgroup’s May meeting as observers if they wish to, and the draft agenda will be formally transmitted to them in advance.

Agenda item 12.3 (b) (iii): Principles and guidelines on integrated coastal zone management

117. **Spain** reported the Subgroup’s recommendation that the SC should approve the finalization of the Principles and guidelines document on integrated coastal zone management, based upon the outline of its contents in DOC. SC26/COP8-5, for consideration by the Subgroup in May.
118. **The UK** asked whether input on evolving documents will be sought from the STRP National Focal Points, and **the DSG** indicated that all papers will be made available to the STRP NFPs by means of the Bureau’s e-mail “list serve” that has been established for them. They are viewed as a vital source of additional expertise.
119. **Costa Rica** suggested that paragraph 14 in the outline contents include some attention to mangroves, especially in poorer coastal areas, and that a new point 14.13 be added to discuss coastal zones as biological corridors.

Decision SC26-8: The Standing Committee approved the finalization of the Principles and guidance document on integrated coastal zone management for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 at its meeting in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (b) (iv): Synergies with other conventions

120. **Spain** reported the Subgroup's recommendation, as adopted in the following decision.

Decision SC26-9: The Standing Committee requested that the Bureau prepare a draft Resolution for the Subgroup on COP8 meeting in May 2002, taking into account all developments of interest to Ramsar that may have occurred in the UNEP-led process on International Environmental Governance and other developments related to interactions between Ramsar and other environmental conventions in the meantime.

Agenda 12.3 (c) (i): Framework for wetland inventory

121. **The DSG** supplied background and noted that some work is still incomplete, including a table of standard metadata models, which is under way with financial support from the Government of the UK, and an example of inventory methodology from Ecuador. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup recommended adoption of the document, with these two additions.

Decision SC26-10: The Standing Committee adopted the draft Resolution and annexed Framework for Wetland Inventory for transmittal to COP8, following the addition of a table on metadata standards and an example from Ecuador.

Agenda item 12.3 (c) (ii): Gaps and harmonization of Ramsar guidance on ecological character

122. **The DSG** reported that the STRP, in its strategic role, had identified some gaps and inconsistencies in existing Ramsar guidance documents and proposed to prepare a draft Resolution and a "Wetland Ecosystem Assessment Framework" in time for the May meeting. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup supported this plan.
123. **Japan** requested clarification of the meaning of para. 6a) concerning "development of additional criteria for the identification of . . .", expressing its concerns about this phrase, and suggested that it be amended to "review of existing criteria for the identification of . . .".
124. **The DSG** drew attention to DOC. SC26-25 with CBD's memo on convergence of criteria and classification and its request to Ramsar and STRP for input.
125. **The UK** urged that the gaps identified for further work in DOC. SC26/COP8-8, paragraph 6, should be prioritized, stressing the practical ones over those that are academic or bureaucratic in nature.
126. **Canada** noted that the concerns listed by STRP continue to focus on land-use and other anthropogenic impacts, and wondered about the role of natural causes of change in ecological character, such as climate change effects. Should these too be reported under Article 3.2?

Decision SC26-11: The Standing Committee approved the proposal that STRP draft a Resolution on gaps and disharmonies in existing Ramsar guidance on ecological character, with prioritization in favor of practical matters, and that it prepare a

“Wetland Ecosystem Assessment Framework”, both for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (c) (iii): Proposed guidance on reporting change or likely change in ecological character

127. **The DSG** provided background to Article 3.2 of the Convention and the establishment and history of the Montreux Record since 1990. Few sites have been listed on the Record, at a declining rate. Though the Record is not fulfilling its original purposes, it is still important, but there is a need for a simple mechanism to help monitor changes, status, and trends. The STRP suggested that a register be created for notifications of change under Article 3.2.
128. **Spain** reported that, following broad discussion, and agreement that the Montreux Record is not functioning as well as it should, the Subgroup felt that much more study and consultation is needed before any steps toward a new record are taken. The Subgroup recommended that the resolution not be adopted, but that discussion of the issue be continued for COP9.
129. **Canada** drew attention to two issues. One is that, since the Convention is constrained by the anthropogenic language of Article 3.2, a decision is required about whether to go beyond that language and include natural causes of change in ecological character. The second is that Ramsar, with its network of sites, is well placed to be a model for other conventions on tracking changes in climate change and biodiversity, and he urged that the Convention should choose to go beyond the existing Article 3.2 constraints. He welcomed the suggestion that there be further discussion.
130. **BirdLife International** urged that, given the importance of the issue, the Standing Committee not go too far in deferring decisions. He noted that some parts of the draft Resolution are not concerned with the proposed new 3.2 register and need not be abandoned. A revised Resolution could be brought to COP8 encouraging Parties to make a greater commitment to meeting their Article 3.2 reporting obligations.
131. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** seconded Canada on the desirability of including change due to natural causes and noted that the Montreux Record does not reflect the tremendous pressures upon wetlands caused by natural disasters like drought and floods. Some 19 Iranian Ramsar sites are seriously affected by severe drought and some have gone dry; though some are already on the Montreux Record for human causes, naturally-caused changes are under-represented in any mechanism of the Convention. Iran urged: appropriate attention to this as part of any review of the Montreux Record; consideration of adding natural disasters to the causes of change in ecological character; the inclusion of illustrative case studies; the request for a mission from the Bureau or the IOPs to Iran's affected sites for a report to the COP; a workshop on the subject, with results to be reported to the COP; and the Convention to participate in the processes of the International Convention on Disaster Relief.
132. The **Regional Coordinator for Europe** suggested that the World Heritage in Danger list would provide a good model for study in this regard.

133. **India** urged that sites affected by natural causes should also be placed on the Montreux Record. Funds should be made available for Advisory Missions to sites that are not yet on the Record.
134. **The USA** supported improving the Montreux Record process first, streamlining it and making it more effective, before considering creation of any new mechanisms.
135. **Spain** pointed out that changes caused by natural causes are frequently cyclical and self-correcting, whereas anthropogenic changes are seldom cyclical.
136. **Argentina, Japan, and Uganda** agreed that more discussion is required on these issues.
137. **The Chair** summarized that there is a consensus that the Montreux Record should be further developed and made more effective; that there is a need for further guidance on Article 3.2 reporting, especially regarding natural events and disasters as well as human causes; and that there should be further discussion of these issues at the COP. He perceived a need, not for a draft Resolution, but rather for a discussion paper to be presented to COP8, but he recalled BirdLife's suggestion that some of the existing draft Resolution could still usefully be carried forward.
138. **The SG** noted that the discussion paper could include possible wording for a draft Resolution which the Subgroup on COP8 could, if it wished, adopt in May or, alternatively, circulate to the CPs possibly to be brought up as a Resolution at the COP under the "emerging from debate" rule. **The DSG** noted that the STRP could be called upon to contribute ideas for the discussion paper.

Decision SC26-12: The Standing Committee requested that the Bureau and the STRP prepare a discussion paper on Article 3.2 and the reporting of change in ecological character, both human- and naturally-caused changes, for the Subgroup on COP8's meeting in May 2002. The discussion paper should incorporate elements of a possible draft Resolution for the Subgroup's consideration.

Agenda item 12.3 (c) (iv): Impact assessment

139. **The DSG** reported that the STRP was unable to complete its assignment to review guidelines on impact assessment, because of a lack of resources, but proposed to transmit the CBD's Guidelines into the COP8 process with a document which interprets these guidelines in a Ramsar and wetland context. The CBD guidelines will be presented for adoption by CBD's COP6 in April 2002 – the Ramsar paper would be finalized between the end of COP6 and the beginning of the Subgroup on COP8 meeting in May. This is an illustrative example of the benefits of collaboration between the conventions.
140. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup recommended approval of the finalization of a draft Resolution and a document interpreting the CBD guidelines for the Ramsar Parties, and that the final CBD guidelines be made available to the Parties.

Decision SC26-13: The Standing Committee encouraged the STRP's Working Group to finalize a draft Resolution on impact assessment and a document for the Parties which will interpret the CBD's Guidelines in the Ramsar and wetland context.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (i): Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List

141. **The Chair** recalled that Uganda, representing the Eastern and Southern Subregional Meeting, had requested that the SC consider the addition of a criterion based upon cultural and socio-economic values to the Criteria for Identifying Wetlands of International Importance. He drew attention to the memorandum circulated by Paul Mafabi on this matter.
142. **Uganda** reported that the Subregional Meeting noted the invaluable benefits of wetlands to people's socio-economic well-being and asked the SC to explore this issue. The tabled paper is the result of that mandate and summarizes many of the views expressed in the meeting concerning the need for such a criterion and the means by which it might be done under the existing language of the Convention text.
143. **Japan** expressed serious concerns with this proposal and cannot support it. She noted the paper's description of the previous debates on this issue in STRP and SC, and supported those conclusions. Japan feels that the definition of criteria for designation in Article 2 cannot be read to include socio-economic or cultural concerns. Such a change would lead to reorganization of the existing Criteria and fundamental changes to existing mechanisms.
144. **BirdLife International** is in favor of the attention the Convention pays to cultural issues; it has been involved in Ramsar work in this area for a long time and looks forward to the COP8 Technical Session on this issue. But BirdLife felt that a new Criterion on cultural issues (and newly on socio-economic aspects as well) would be a different thing and echoed the STRP's view that it would not be desirable. If international importance should be based on human uses, the door is opened to importance based upon fluctuating conditions, perhaps even market values; it would be hard to draw the line, and would run counter to the Convention's valuing international importance as an enduring quality. BirdLife felt that Article 2 would probably have to be amended as well. He felt that there should be lively discussion of the role of cultural values in the Convention but not in the context of a new criterion; they should be emphasized as important management issues but not matters of site selection. He also felt that cultural values should be kept distinct from socio-economic values when discussing issues of human uses.
145. **Costa Rica** reported that the Subregional Meeting in Honduras also expressed a need for discussion of cultural aspects of wetlands, which are especially important in the region because of the many ancient indigenous cultures. He supported the opening of discussion on these matters.
146. **Spain** noted that the COP8 slogan has to do with wetlands and culture, which is a fundamental issue, and supported discussion of unique cultural values being used as a criterion for designation.
147. **The DSG** drew attention to DOC. SC26-25, page 2, in which the CBD urged Ramsar to review its Strategic Framework for the List in order to harmonize criteria with CBD's criteria on inland water systems. He noted that the RIS calls for information on cultural matters, so the issue could be addressed through the Strategic Framework.

148. **The USA** observed that it would be hard to think of a wetland that would qualify for the List on socio-economic grounds but not under the existing Criteria. He asked for examples of sites that would not qualify for the List without the addition of a new Criterion.
149. **Canada** pointed out that “eco-cultural” grounds for listing national wildlife areas, with indigenous community approval, is under consideration there. The sites must have wildlife values first, but cultural values can be added to the designation to enhance recognition. He suggested thinking in terms of sites that are enhanced by their additional cultural values.
150. **Argentina** described its mandate to transmit the sense of the South American Subregional Meeting which has asked the Bureau to organize an event at COP8 to give voice to cultural expression. There is a need to strengthen these values. The majority of wetlands in the region have archaeological importance. Argentina supports the need to stimulate the importance of the cultural values of wetlands, but does not support the creation of new criteria.
151. **The Secretary General** noted that he has always supported the idea of new criteria based on human uses and values, but even he was surprised by the vehemence of the call for this at the Buenos Aires and Lusaka subregional meetings. The participants said ‘how can the Ramsar Convention not have criteria based upon human values in this day and age’ and they did not want to wait until COP9, insisting that the need is urgent. The issue is how the Ramsar Convention, in 2001, can refuse to recognize criteria based upon human values. This call comes mainly from the developing world and shouldn’t be ignored; the issue is of symbolic importance, because it is important to show the developing world what values the Convention holds.
152. **The SG** noted that, in previous Ramsar discussions of the issue, he felt that the talks were “controlled” as it were by speakers from the developed world, and that those from the developing world felt somewhat intimidated. He felt that it is his obligation to convey the strength of people’s feeling on this issue, to the extent that many people feel that the Convention is insensitive to their concerns.
153. **Spain** recalled the Convention’s base in biology but pointed out that it is now concerned not only with conservation but with sustainable development as well. It would seem appropriate to add cultural to biological issues in selection processes.
154. **Argentina** observed that the ecosystem approach cannot leave cultural and socio-economic issues out, they are already included in the process. He urged that the next regional meetings should focus on this issue once again.
155. **Costa Rica** noted that, since the Rio agreements in 1992, one cannot ignore the world’s focus on sustainable development, which is not in contradiction with what Ramsar is already doing. He cited the Costa Rican example for integrating human values in the management of national parks, and called for further discussion of these matters.
156. **The Chair** summarized the views presented and perceived a willingness to have a broad-ranging discussion of cultural and socio-economic issues at the COP, but no consensus on restricting that discussion to a new criterion, though a new criterion might form part of that broad-ranging discussion. He urged that the Technical Session on cultural issues be used for this broad-ranging discussion, including the question of a new criterion, and felt

that a discussion document, including but broader than Uganda's tabled paper, would be helpful.

157. **Uganda** expressed its willingness to continue this dialogue and contribute to the discussion paper.
158. **Costa Rica** reported that the SC members from the region wished to ask the STRP to review and revise the parameters of existing Ramsar sites in this regard, in order to fit cultural issues in. **The Chair** noted that the STRP will not be meeting again in this triennium, but the broad-ranging discussion could embrace this request as well.

Decision SC26-14: The Standing Committee determined to have a broad-ranging discussion on the role of cultural and socio-economic issues in the Convention, and on how to enhance that role, and requested the preparation of a discussion document to facilitate talks at COP8. Uganda was invited to work with the Bureau, the Chair of STRP and any other Party and IOP interested to contribute, in the preparation of the discussion paper.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (i): Convergence between Ramsar and CBD criteria and classification

159. **The DSG** drew attention to the CBD's working paper on convergences among the CBD's Annex I, Ramsar's Strategic Framework for the List, and other documents, which will be submitted to CBD's COP6 in April 2002. He noted that the CBD includes some criteria (notably concerning wild relatives of domesticated species; species, communities, or genes of social, scientific, or cultural importance; and importance for research) that Ramsar does not, and that will bear further study, though it is not clear what timeframe the CBD is contemplating.

Decision SC26-15: The Standing Committee determined that the discussion paper on cultural and socio-economic issues cited in the previous decision should also examine the CBD's suggestions and the extent to which they might make expansion of the Ramsar Criteria desirable.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (ii): Guidelines for the designation of under-represented wetland types

160. **The DSG** and **Spain** noted the background to the drafting of the proposed document and reported on the Subgroup's recommendation that it be adopted.
161. **Japan** expressed the view that the guidance was not very practical and that the document should be shortened.

Decision SC26-16: The Standing Committee approved the Guidelines document on peatlands, mangroves, coral reefs, and wet grasslands for transmittal to COP8, with the proviso that it should be shortened and sharpened as appropriate.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (iii): Guidelines for the designation of mountain wetlands

162. **The DSG** recounted the evolution of the draft document from the symposium, sponsored by France and WWF's Living Waters Programme in March 2001 and supported by the Evian Project, at which the guidelines were first drafted.
163. **Armenia** called for further work on the definition of mountain wetlands.
164. **The USA** urged that, in light of the vigorous discussion on that point within the STRP, the Panel should be given another opportunity to study the present draft.
165. **The Chair of the STRP** reported that the earlier version was discussed by the Panel, with particular attention to the definition and to the implied expansion of wetland types, and the STRP did not endorse that version, and has not seen this version.
166. **Canada** pointed out inconsistencies amongst various paragraphs and called for a clearer definition of mountain wetlands: phrases like "perhaps including glaciers" are too imprecise. Canada felt that much more work is needed.
167. **Switzerland** reported on its recently completed inventory of internationally important wetlands which included glacial forelands and alpine alluvial plains. He suggested that his office could provide expert advice on this aspect of the definition.
168. **Costa Rica** drew attention to the "Year of High Altitude Basins" and suggested that this parallel process should be studied.

Decision SC26-17: The Standing Committee determined to send the proposed Resolution and guidelines back to its originators, France and WWF, with a request that the concerns about the definition of mountain wetlands and other issues be addressed prior to the Subgroup on COP8's meeting in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (iv): The Ramsar Sites Database and official and unofficial site data

169. **The DSG** described Wetland International's present efforts to redevelop the Ramsar Sites Database (RSD) to make it more flexible and accessible. The RSD now holds only officially submitted data (from RISs, National Reports, and the like) – there is the potential to increase its value and utility by linking it to "unimpeachable" data from other sources, e.g., Wetlands International's waterbird census. The Bureau suggested that it present a draft Resolution and Wetlands International background paper to the Subgroup meeting in May.
170. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup recommended adopting this suggestion but stressed that the unofficial data must be rigorous and authoritative.

Decision SC26-18: The Standing Committee approved the preparation of a paper and draft Resolution on the possible admission of unimpeachable unofficial data to the Ramsar Sites Database.

Agenda item 12.3 (d) (v): The Ramsar Data Gateway

171. **The DSG** described the Data Gateway project, under development within a NASA-sponsored project by the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network

(CIESIN) of Columbia University, New York, USA, in cooperation with Wetlands International and the Ramsar Bureau, intended to provide Web-based access to Ramsar sites data for the public. A work-in-progress test site is available at <http://sedac.ciesin.org/ramsardg>, and the Bureau requested that the SC approve the idea that CIESIN be invited to demonstrate the Gateway at COP8. The Gateway will help to raise the profile of Ramsar sites for a wider public.

Decision SC26-19: The Standing Committee agreed that the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) should be invited to make a presentation of the Ramsar Data Gateway at COP8.

Agenda item 12.3 (e) (i): New Guidelines on management planning

172. **The DSG** reported that the STRP, having been requested to update the Convention's Management Planning Guidelines (1993), especially with regard to several emerging issues, realized that more substantial revision would be required. The present document SC26/COP8-14 is the result of a great deal of work by the STRP and invited experts, but some have noted that additional text is needed on the relation of site-based management planning to wider basin-level planning, consideration of mosaic wetlands in addition to discrete wetlands, and further evaluation of features other than ecological.
173. **Spain** reported the Subgroup's recommendation that the document be approved and that, given its importance, it be translated and circulated for comment prior to the Subgroup's meeting in May.
174. **Armenia**, noting the importance of the issue, requested the addition of a practical case study on writing a management plan. The DSG noted that the Global Biodiversity Forum, which will precede the COP8, could bring in case studies on this issue.

Decision SC26-20: The Standing Committee approved the draft New Guidelines on Management Planning, subject to the inclusion of further text concerning the relationship between site-based management planning and wider basin scale planning and mosaic wetland systems, as well as elaboration of the guidance on evaluation of features other than ecological character, for translation and circulation to the Parties for comment in advance of the Subgroup on COP8's meeting in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (e) (ii): Guidelines for global action on peatlands

175. **The DSG** recounted the long history of the Global Action Plan for Peatlands (GAPP) document over recent years and described the manner in which it has been brought through the STRP review process, chiefly by Wetlands International, the International Peat Society, and the International Mire Conservation Group. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup recommended that the present document be adopted for transmittal to COP8, with the addition of a definition of peatlands at the beginning.

Decision SC26-21: The Standing Committee adopted the draft Guidelines for global action on peatlands for transmittal to the COP, with the addition of a definition of peatlands at the beginning.

Agenda item 12.3 (e) (iii): Resolution on the report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD)

176. **The DSG** recalled COP7's request for STRP involvement in the WCD process and recounted the developments since then. Spain reported that the Subgroup recommended finalization of the proposed draft Resolution and its annex.
177. **IUCN** reported on the progress of the IUCN independent assessment of the WCD report, involving a task force of 14 experts. Its report is available on the IUCN Web site.

Decision SC26-22: The Standing Committee approved the finalization of a draft Resolution and STRP annex which summarizes the WCD report and its recommendations in the Ramsar and wetland context, for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 at its meeting in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (e) (iv): Resolution on invasive species

178. **The DSG** reported that the STRP feels that the CBD's guiding principles (or guidelines) on this issue, as seen in the SBSTTA6 Recommendation VI/4 tabled at this meeting, are appropriate for Ramsar use but require additional guidance specifically for wetland managers. Since there is other guidance available, a "guide to guidance" is also being drafted by IUCN in collaboration with GISP and the CBD, and the Bureau recommends that this too should become a formal COP8 paper. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup recommended finalization of these documents for May 2002.
179. **India** requested that, given the seriousness of the invasive species issue, the Bureau give some guidance on this matter.
180. **The DSG** noted that the purpose of the STRP's guide to guidance is to bring a range of available information and contacts to the attention of the Parties. In the meantime, the Bureau will provide India with some contacts worth investigating for help.
181. **Argentina** urged careful analysis of control systems since they may have a greater impact that the invasive species themselves.
182. To **Switzerland's** question about the possibility of the CBD's COP6 failing to adopt the guiding principles, it was suggested that, since the STRP has already found the present document suitable, it could readily be drawn upon to develop Ramsar guidelines.
183. **The UK** expressed approval of the content of the guiding principles and the linkage with the CBD's process. She suggested that it would be more effective to implement the adoption of codes of practice for different sectors, e.g., agriculture, horticulture, fish farming, etc. She urged that regulation and intervention will work better if well targeted, and said that this should be combined with substantial efforts in education and training in order to raise awareness of this serious issue.

Decision SC26-23: The Standing Committee approved the finalization of a draft Resolution and additional Ramsar guidance on the use of the proposed CBD Guiding Principles [Guidelines] on this matter for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 in May 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (f) (i): Guiding principles on the cultural aspects of wetlands

184. **The Secretary General** pointed out that DOC. SC26/COP8-18 is only a skeleton, to which people are presently working to add a body. He solicited additional comment so that the document will be as rich as possible in the range of cultural expressions to be considered.
185. **Costa Rica** urged that ethnology and ethnography-related issues be added to item 10 in the document and that the definition in item 10.4 be reworked.

Decision SC26-24: The Standing Committee approved the finalization of the Guiding Principles on cultural values for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 at its meeting in May 2002.

186. Having concluded consideration of COP8 products, **the Chair** recalled WWF's proposal for the reorganization of the Technical Sessions (TSs), which included proposals for changing the titles of the sessions.
187. **WWF** explained its view that the COP's TSs are a little too inward focused upon wetland site management, and that with a little revision they could present an outward-looking up-to-date appearance in terms of global priorities on sustainable development and poverty alleviation, water and river basin management, climate change, and improved efficiency of multilateral institutions. WWF presented a proposal for such a reorganization.
188. **The SG** shared WWF's concern with the present presentation but recalled that all Ramsar COP TSs must be oriented around a concrete output – the time at a COP is too expensive just for discussion only, however important. The first draft agenda has already been revised to account for work that cannot be done and additional work that has been done, and thus, the content of the TSs could be revised once more. It seems perfectly possible to rethink the TS titles and to some extent their organization, but this needs careful attention to the products that should emerge from each of them.
189. **Norway** agreed with the need for further discussion and for change where feasible, and **the Chair** suggested that this issue be revisited on the morrow, after an evening's reflection.

Agenda item 12.3 (g): Wetland restoration

190. **The DSG** provided background and drew attention to the STRP's restoration Web site, now live on the Ramsar site largely through the work of STRP observer Bill Streever representing the Society of Wetland Scientists. **Spain** reported the Subgroup's views of the document and urged that paragraph 14 be placed before 10.

Decision SC26-25: The Standing Committee approved the Principles and guidelines for wetland restoration for transmittal to COP8, with the Subgroup's recommended alteration.

Agenda item 12.3 (h): Incentive measures

191. **The DSG** reported that the required resources were not found to complete the requested work, and the STRP has drafted a resolution for COP8 calling for further study of this issue. Argentina proposed to add in paragraph 7 of the draft Resolution, after the words “remove perverse incentives”, the words “such as taxes and subsidies”.

Decision SC26-26: The Standing Committee adopted the proposed draft Resolution, with additional wording by Argentina, for transmittal to COP8.

Agenda item 12.3 (i): Possible changes in the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS)

192. **The DSG** noted that as part of its ongoing role in reviewing the RIS, the STRP suggested adding a section on biogeographic region and the scheme used to determine that, improved guidance on suitable maps, and improved clarity in the Explanatory Note and Guidance. Wetlands International is preparing these revisions for the Subgroup’s meeting in May. The STRP also recommended a more thorough review of the RIS structure for harmony with other Ramsar instruments, but that is for the future.
193. **Spain** reported the Subgroup’s approval, with the addition of new text on more quantitative data about ecological character to be included and the possibility of having two different RISs, one for designation and another for updates.
194. **The UK** noted that point 2a on biogeographic regions needs further study and a global framework on biogeographic regions.

Decision SC26-27: The Standing Committee approved the drafting of a Resolution by STRP on recommended changes in the Ramsar Information Sheet for consideration by the Subgroup on COP8 at its meeting in May 2002.

Agenda item 12 (j): The San José Record

195. **The DSG** supplied background and explained that listing on the record would be for sites with good management plans that are well implemented, not just for those with good plans, and not necessarily only for pristine sites. A site could be listed on the San José Record for good management as well as upon the Montreux Record because of threatened change.
196. **France** suggested that the Administrative Authorities be involved in the pre-nomination phase.

Decision SC26-28: The Standing Committee adopted the proposal for a San José Record for transmittal to COP8, with the addition of France’s suggestion that the Administrative Authorities be involved in the pre-nomination phase.

Agenda item 12 (k): The *modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

197. **Uganda, Chair of the Subgroup on the STRP**, reviewed the Subgroup’s conclusions as found in DOC. SC26-27 and made several suggestions, principally that tasks mandated to the STRP should be costed and prioritized, with funding sources being suggested if possible, and that links should be forged to other scientific networks, such as the Specialist

Groups of Wetlands International. The Subgroup urged that ways should be found to increase funding for the extremely under-resourced STRP, and it proposed a schedule of meetings for the next triennium that would combine the economies of e-mail communication with the advantages of face-to-face meetings.

198. **The USA** stressed the importance of the STRP's work and applauded the Subgroup's suggestions.
199. **Wetlands International** described the intentions implicit in the draft terms of reference for the "Review of scientific support and synergies" (DOC. SC26-27 addendum), and the SG suggested several changes in wording for the sake of clarity. A new Subgroup on the STRP will examine options for strengthening the STRP's links.
200. **Argentina, Canada, the Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, and the UK** volunteered to join the existing Subgroup, and it was not felt that the previous chair of the STRP would be needed any longer. As there are no resources for meetings, the Subgroup will communicate by electronic means and if necessary through teleconferences.

Decision SC26-29: The Standing Committee approved the revised *modus operandi* for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, as well as the draft Resolution accompanying it, and the Terms of Reference for the review of STRP's links with other science networks. (Annex I)

201. In reply to several questions, **the SG** pointed out that the new *modus operandi* would not enter into force until adoption by the COP, so that the former practice of calling for STRP nominations from the Parties and preparing a list for the COP's consideration will have to be followed. If COP8 adopts the Resolution, the STRP members will be chosen by the first Standing Committee meeting thereafter, in February 2003 – if not, COP8 will need a slate of nominations to choose from during the COP. The SC must be prepared to replace all of the STRP members, in case the COP does not accept the plan to carry half of them over each triennium. The call for nominations will go out at the time of the formal invitations to the COP, in February or March 2002.

Agenda item 12.3 (I): Unpaid Contracting Party contributions

202. After the **Secretary General's** introduction to the issue and the draft Resolution, **Japan** recalled that in the SC's 25th meeting his government had expressed concern and called for the greatest care in considering sanctions for dues in arrears. He noted that there is no guarantee that, even with sanctions, arrears will be paid, so while the effectiveness of the idea is doubtful there are possible negative consequences: the sanctioned Party may feel aggrieved, reduce its commitment to wetlands, and distance itself from the treaty. Japan indicated that DOC. SC26/COP8-24, para. 5b concerning suspension of the right to vote might raise legal questions, since the Convention contains no provision for suspending the right to vote provided in Article 7.2 and since, he believed, Resolutions are without legally binding effect. Japan urged that each Party's ministry's legal department should examine this question.
203. **Japan** further indicated its feeling that paragraphs 6, concerning arrangements to be made with Parties in arrears to achieve a "clean slate", and 7, concerning special arrangements for Parties experiencing severe economic conditions or natural disasters, are unclear. He

felt that if it was intended that the Party's arrears should be reduced or exempted, the Government of Japan could not accept that. He urged that the issue be taken up again at future SC meetings after the delegates have received legal advice.

204. The **Executive Secretary of the UNEP/CMS African-Eurasian Migratory Waterfowl Agreement (AEWA)** inquired whether precedents from other conventions had been studied and suggested that positive approaches to the problem of unpaid dues might be more effective than negative ones.
205. The **SG** noted that the proposed draft resolution reflects the decision of SC25 and that there were no reservations made to the minutes of that meeting. He recalled that some CPs had felt that it was unfair that others were not paying their contributions, sometimes from a lack of willingness rather than from inability to pay. The fact that there has frequently been no reply at all to invoices and reminders indicates that there is sometimes a lack of commitment even to trying to pay. The suggested sanctions plan is employed by IUCN and has resulted in members paying up their arrears prior to congresses in order to preserve their right to vote. The measures suggested in paragraph 7 concerning severe conditions and natural disasters are exactly the same approach used by the United Nations and were added to the original proposal at SC25 by Iran. Concerning reduction or exemption, the SG noted that in the event of disasters or wars it may sometimes be evident that the Party in question will never be able to pay up its arrears, however hard it may try to; paragraph 6 permits this situation to be resolved to the best possible extent and the Party to be restored to good standing in the Convention. The procedure would be that, in these exceptional cases, the SC could recommend to the COP that an exception should be made and the sanctions should not apply for that meeting of the COP for that Party because some other solution had been found.
206. **The SG** indicated that the principles of equity require both that all Parties should pay their contributions in order to demonstrate their commitment and that there should be a clause for dealing with circumstances in which they cannot do so.
207. Concerning the right to vote, **the SG** suggested that there is a precedent in the Credentials Committee's decisions upon which Parties will be voting members of each COP, and that good practice should not be bound too strictly to the Convention text alone, especially where it is silent.
208. **Norway** indicated that the example of the Credentials Committee was not quite analogous, since the Committee does not determine a Party's right to vote, merely whether the individuals present duly represent their Parties. He too felt that there might be legal questions involved in suspending the right to vote and suggested that paragraph 5b be deleted, leaving the other two sanctions.
209. **The Philippines** said that in a hierarchy of laws it is not clear that a Resolution would ever be higher than the treaty text, even when the latter is silent, and also urged the deletion of para 5b. In the case of the UN, the denial of the right to vote as a sanction is written into the UN Charter.
210. **The SG** reminded that the suspension of the right to vote is more symbolic than practical in Ramsar's case, since there has never been a substantial vote.

211. **Armenia** urged that paragraph 5b be deleted from the draft Resolution but that 6 and 7 be retained.
212. **The Chair** proposed that a Contact Group seek to redraft the Resolution and find a way forward, and invited Armenia, Japan, Norway, the Philippines and any other interested delegations to join that group.
213. **Japan** said its government has basic differences over paragraphs 6 and 7 and doubted that its rejection could be resolved by redrafting. He sought further comment on the idea of exemption from dues and whether there are precedents in other conventions.
214. **The SG** noted that arrears have been waived before, when the Convention went over to an accruals system of accounting in 1995.
215. Subsequently, **Japan** reported back on the discussions of the Contact Group and said that a consensus was reached supporting Japan's contention that the issue of sanctions for unpaid contributions requires further consideration and that the SC is not ready to adopt a draft Resolution on this matter.

Decision SC26-30: The Standing Committee determined that the issue of sanctions for unpaid contributions should not be taken forward at this time and that further discussions would be left for the future.

Agenda item 12.3 (m): The draft Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008

216. **Paul Mafabi (Uganda), Vice-Chair of the SC**, summarized the findings of the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan's meeting, in which amendments were offered both to the draft Resolution and to the 4th draft of the SP, greater clarity and simplification were urged in Section I, and the inclusion of an executive summary was rejected. It was urged that "Using the Plan" be removed to an annex. The Subgroup suggested that the 21 "themes" or areas of work be prioritized and that issues concerning agriculture should be made more visible. The specific targets in Section III should be removed and included in the Convention's Work Plan. The Subgroup proposed that the 5th draft be finalized by the end of December and circulated to the Subgroup until mid-January, then produced in the three languages in an attractive format and circulated in March 2002 to the Parties as the final draft for consideration at COP8. The Subgroup's proposed new table of contents is contained in its report, DOC. SC26-28.
217. **Japan** supported the need for simplification; she noted that the East Asian Subregional Meeting had discussed the need to translate the SP into local languages and requested funding from the Bureau to translate this and other documents. She felt that all COP8 documents should be simple and clear with practical contents, which would be more helpful to CPs and reduce the work of translation and implementation.
218. **Argentina** expressed reservations about new wording added to the draft Resolution by the Subgroup concerning "food and water security" and "agricultural influence and impacts". As these have not been examined by Argentinean authorities, Argentina could not support these additions at this time.

219. **Mexico** also said that it could not support these additions until they have been studied by authorities at home.
220. **France** called for simplification and greater clarity and sought clarification on the process of further amendments in line with the Subgroup's recommendations.
221. **The DSG** indicated that the great majority of changes sought were minor and editorial, though there was a difference of views about the references to trade in wetland products and a possible Ramsar label. He suggested that these passages be bracketed rather than deleted.
222. **France** urged that the passages be bracketed, since the WSSD may be discussing the same matters.
223. **The Philippines** called for the opportunity to circulate the proposed amendments to other ministries and sectors of the government.
224. **Wetlands International** explained that WI and IUCN have requested the additional wording on agricultural and urged, given the importance of the issue, an expert intervention in the COP8 plenary sessions.
225. **Argentina** objected that taking such a decision at this time would prejudice the Parties' decision on whether agriculture is an important issue. Argentina inquired as to the process by which SC members will review the fifth draft.
226. **The DSG** explained the Subgroup's suggested timetable, by which the Bureau circulates the fifth draft to Subgroup members at the end of December (though, he suggested, it could be circulated to all SC members at that time instead) with two weeks for comment and their inclusion, following which this final draft would be circulated to all Parties in an inexpensive but attractive format for their preparation of comments to be brought to COP8, with an invitation for the Parties to use the draft SP to prepare their national targets and inform the Bureau by 31 August so that global targets can be constructed from them.
227. **The SG** noted that the Bureau could afford to supply, e.g., 50 copies per country in order to facilitate cross-sectoral consultation. The COP will establish a Subgroup on the SP to work throughout the COP, but at that stage late suggestions of drastic changes will be very unhelpful, and uncalled for, since the document will have been available for comment for two years already. To prevent many CPs arriving at the COP with new ideas, they should do their work in a timely manner; thus far in the drafting process, despite several opportunities, only 17 Parties have offered comments.
228. **WWF** suggested that under Theme 10 targets should be sought, not only for the number of Ramsar sites, but for the total surface area as well. In planning its assistance to the Convention, WWF is targeting 250 million hectares.
229. **The DSG** recalled that the targets should be part of the Work Plan, based on the Strategic Plan, rather than in the SP itself. He noted that the wording of the SP's objectives will have to be harmonized with the wording of the final versions of the Resolution adopted on the last day of the COP.

230. **Slovenia** supported the Subgroup's recommendation for more emphasis upon agricultural issues; her country is seriously considering submitting a draft Resolution on agriculture and wetlands.
231. **Trinidad and Tobago** indicated that, at 24 pages, the implementation section of the SP needs to be much more user-friendly.
232. **Argentina** urged greater emphasis upon horizontal technical cooperation and expertise.
233. **The UK** supported Slovenia's call for emphasis upon agriculture. The UK has placed its environmental and agricultural departments more closely together in one ministry and would be glad to see greater emphasis in the SP on promoting more sustainable agriculture.
234. **The SG** doubted the wisdom of moving the "Using the Plan" section to an annex and felt it would be more useful at the beginning of the implementation section.
235. **The Netherlands** reported that it has combined nature management and agriculture in the same ministry for some 15 years and is now considering associating itself with Slovenia in submitting a draft Resolution on this issue.
236. **The Chair** summarized that the Parties have another opportunity to comment on the draft at the time of submitting their national targets by 31 August, and that there is a preference for circulating the fifth draft to all SC members in late December. He suggested that the new wording in the draft Resolution be bracketed and the delegates should consult with their governments on these matters between now and the mid-January deadline for further comment.
237. **Argentina** urged that all other new matter proposed for the draft SP by the Subgroup should also be bracketed. **The Chair** and **the SG** suggested that bracketed passages for which doubts have been resolved by mid-January can be unbracketed at that time.
238. **Mexico** called for another round of discussion so that all Parties may be given an opportunity to express their views. If comments are made directly to the Bureau, Parties will not be aware of what other comments may have been made.
239. **The SG** explained that, while the draft Resolution can wait for the May meeting of the Subgroup on COP8, the draft SP needs to be circulated in March in order to allow Parties time to reflect upon it and fix their national targets. If the draft SP must await further discussion in May, there will be too little time left for stakeholder consultations within the Parties.
240. **Japan** pointed out that the draft SP will not be adopted until the COP, but that establishing national targets, which will create obligations on the Parties, must be based upon consultations held following the adoption of the SP and Resolutions at the COP.
241. **The SG** urged that Parties send "tentative" national targets based upon the draft SP, since its most significant aspirations will probably remain in the adopted version. CPs can merely skip those areas with which they have problems, if necessary. This process is an

improvement over COP7's attempt to establish global targets for the Convention arbitrarily; by this means, global targets can be built from the Parties' own choices for their national targets and will thus help the CPs feel more commitment toward them.

242. **Argentina** urged that all bracketing remain until COP8, when all Parties will be able to make their comments equally. Matters of reorganization and stylistics need not be considered, but all new issues presently being added, about which there has not yet been any discussion, should be bracketed. **France** seconded this suggestion.

Decision SC26-31: The Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to implement the recommendations of the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan and produce a fifth draft, with square brackets round all new issues, for circulation to the Standing Committee by the end of December, with comments to be returned by 15 January 2002. After incorporation of comments received, the Bureau should produce the sixth draft in the three languages for circulation in an attractive format to all the Parties by mid-March, with the brackets retained. The Parties should be asked to provide their tentative national targets to the Bureau by 31 August 2002 to allow time for a new document for COP8 which includes global targets. The Committee expressed gratitude to the Subgroup for its work.

Agenda item 12.3 (n): The Convention's Work Plan 2003-2005

243. **The SG** explained the Bureau's view that it will make more sense to draft the proposed Work Plan at the last moment before COP8 when a clearer vision of the state of the draft Strategic Plan and its targets has been obtained.

Decision SC26-32: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to establish a draft Convention's Work Plan 2003-2005 for the consideration of COP8 following the receipt of comments and tentative national targets on the draft Strategic Plan on 31 August 2002.

Agenda item 13: The Bureau's Work Plan 2002

244. **The DSG** noted that there has not been time to revise the structure of the draft Work Plan since SC25, but indicated that in the coming year the major part of the work of all staff will be devoted to preparations for the COP. Most other tasks are ongoing and unchanged, but less Bureau staff time will be available for these. He recalled that SC25 requested an achievement report on the preceding year and drew attention to the annex to the Secretary General's report (DOC. SC26-2).
245. **WWF** commended the Bureau's draft Work Plan but expressed concern at the lack of engagement of South Pacific states in the Convention, apparently due to their lack of staff capacity, the cost of membership, and an unmet need to demonstrate the relevance of the Convention to coral reefs. WWF appreciates the investment made by Australia over the past six years in funding Wetlands International's attempts to engage the South Pacific states but noted that, given the lack of new accessions in that period, Australia is seeking new methods for achieving accession.
246. **WWF** urged the SC to encourage greater success for the Convention in the South Pacific region by 1) inviting Parties with overseas territories in that region to designate one or

more coral reef Ramsar sites; 2) inviting those Parties to ascertain whether they can provide resources to the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) to advance the work of the Convention and report to COP8; and 3) inviting Australia to consult with nations in the region to explore new mechanisms for encouraging the accession of states in Oceania and report to the Subgroup meeting in May in case a resolution on the matter should be needed for COP8.

247. **The Chair, representing Australia**, welcomed WWF's proposals.
248. **France** sought to assure WWF of France's efforts to promote the Convention in its overseas territories but noted that the Government must do so while also respecting the competencies of the authorities there. Concerning paragraphs 33-34 on the need for international collaboration in the European region, she drew attention to France's efforts at collaboration and thanked the Bureau's Regional Coordinator for his assistance with these.
249. **Japan** requested that the mention of a Trust Fund in paragraph 4(d) of the draft Work Plan be bracketed and suggested including in paragraph 26 on capacity building the addition of wording like 'including the submission process for the SGF'. **The Philippines** supported this suggestion.
250. **AEWA** expressed the hope that the proposed AEWA/Ramsar joint work programme will be finalized by early January and noted that it will have an impact upon the Bureau Work Plan.
251. **Costa Rica** drew attention to the Bureau's MOU with the UNEP Cartagena Convention and urged that the Convention participate more in the Caribbean region within that context, perhaps thus influencing non-Parties towards accession.
252. **Tanzania** suggested that the need for policies and capacity building in institutions responsible for wetland and water management, paragraph 12, should omit mention of water management, since these institutions, which are often separate ministries from those dealing with Ramsar, might object to Ramsar's advice. **The Netherlands** said that it was important that capacity building not be focused only upon wetlands but that the wetlands and water sectors be integrated in capacity building, and suggested rephrasing the text to clarify that the reference is to capacity building only and not policy making. **The Regional Coordinator for Africa** noted that, because the Convention is becoming increasingly involved in water issues, the Ramsar guidelines on water allocation will be useful, not only to the wetlands sector, but to other sectors as well.

Decision SC26-33: The Standing Committee approved the Bureau's Work Plan for 2002, with the amendments proposed by Japan. The Committee welcomed WWF's suggestions for increased attention to the South Pacific region, noting France's caution about constraints in influencing overseas territories and Australia's intention to follow up on the suggested actions.

Agenda item: Further business concerning planned Technical Sessions for COP8 (paragraphs 187-189 above)

253. **The SG** drew attention to WWF's tabled DOC. SC26-24 addendum 1 in which proposals were offered for a rearrangement and retitling of the Technical Sessions (TSs). Expressing sympathy with the objectives of WWF's suggestions but recalling the constraints upon too much reorganization at this time, he explained the suggestions made by the Contact Group in DOC. SC26-30 for a reorganization and retitling of Sessions that would preserve the focus on necessary outputs and commitments. He noted WWF's suggestion of a TS slot devoted to a summary of the results of the WSSD but noted that such a summary is intended for a high-level intervention in the first plenary, where the results will receive more visibility.

Decision SC26-34: The Standing Committee approved the revised agenda for COP8 Technical Sessions as shown in DOC. SC26-30 (Annex II).

Agenda item: Further business concerning the draft Resolution and guidance on Articles 2.5 and 4.2 (paragraphs 98-105 above)

254. **The Chair** explained the revisions to the draft Resolution and guidance arrived at after considerable constructive negotiation by the Contact Group and recommended adoption of DOC. SC26/COP8-1 Revision 2 for transmittal to the COP. He wished to record his gratitude to the members of the Contact Group for their constructive efforts.

Decision SC26-35: The Standing Committee adopted Revision 2 of DOC. SC26/COP8-1 on interpretation of "urgent national interests" under Article 2.5 and compensation under Article 4.2 for transmittal to COP8 (Annex III).

Agenda item 14: Report of the Subgroup on Finance

255. **Armenia, Chair of the Subgroup**, reported that the Subgroup met four times over 9 ½ hours in rather difficult but constructive sessions. He drew attention to the Subgroup's report, DOC. SC26-26 and its addendum.

Agenda item 14.1: Audited accounts for FY 2000 and status of the Reserve Fund

256. **Armenia** reviewed the Subgroup's recommendations on this matter and noted that Japan had pointed out that for an expenditure of SFr 4,000 from "Japan Voluntary Contributions for 1997-99" the Bureau had not sought authorization, but the Government of Japan was prepared to accept the explanations and authorize the expenditure *ex post facto*.

Decision SC26-36: The Standing Committee received the Bureau's audited accounts for fiscal year 2000 and noted the status of the Ramsar Reserve Fund.

Agenda item 14.2: Review of 2001 core and projects income and expenditure

Decision SC26-37: The Standing Committee noted the review of core and projects income and expenditure for 2001.

Agenda item 14.3 (i): Approval of Small Grants Fund project proposal

257. **Armenia** reported the Subgroup's recommendation that the A1 list be approved and that, in order to account for geographical equity, seven projects be ranked in a specified order in

the A2 list for any resources which may still become available in this SGF cycle. He noted that both lists reflect WWF's and Wetlands International's willingness to fund additional projects from Algeria, Bulgaria, Belarus, and the Slovak Republic.

258. **WWF** stated that it is prepared also to fund the A1 project from Morocco and seek further funding for others. This generous offer moved Syria from the A2 to the A1 list and helped to ensure regional equity.

Decision SC26-38: The Standing Committee approved funding for all Small Grants Fund proposals on the A1 list in DOC. SC26-11 and for the proposals on the A2 list in the order shown in DOC. SC26-26 if further funding should become available. The Committee expressed its thanks to WWF and Wetlands International for their support for an additional five project proposals and for their attempts to secure assistance for others.

Agenda item 14.3 (ii): Proposal to establish a Trust Fund to resource the Small Grants Fund

259. **Armenia** noted that despite the COP's several Resolutions calling for resourcing the SGF with US\$1 million per year, the fund has declined every year from a peak of SFR 1 million in 1998. The Subgroup emphasized the importance of the SGF as a funding mechanism and noted the Bureau's view that the uncertainty of annual funding levels is a source of great frustration to the eligible Parties. The Subgroup urged that the Trust Fund proposal be circulated to the Parties for comment and that the Bureau subsequently prepare a report for a meeting of the Subgroup on Finance to be held in May 2002.
260. **The AEWAs secretariat**, which has been asked to set up a small grants fund, suggested that given similar objectives the suggested Trust Fund could be set up in such a way as to cover both Ramsar and AEWAs.
261. **Japan** suggested that the Trust Fund Proposal document be sent to other institutions as well, for similar feedback.

Decision SC26-39: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to circulate the document "Proposal to establish a Trust Fund to resource the SGF" to all Parties and other appropriate institutions by 14 December 2001 inviting comments by 15 March 2002, and to prepare a report based upon these comments, including the prospects and risks involved in establishing such a Trust Fund, to be considered by the Subgroup on Finance at a meeting to be held on 15 May 2002 in conjunction with that of the Subgroup on COP8. The Committee authorized the Subgroup on Finance to submit a recommendation to Ramsar COP8, if considered appropriate after the consultation with Contracting Parties, on establishing a Ramsar Trust Fund to resource the SGF.

Agenda item 14.4: Report on practices of other environment-related conventions concerning delegate support

Decision SC26-40: The Standing Committee decided that, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties, the allocation

of funds by the Bureau for sponsored delegates to Ramsar meetings shall be as follows:

- a) funds should be directed first to one delegate from each Ramsar Contracting Party in the UN list of Least Developed Countries (LDCs);
- b) additional funds should be allocated to one delegate from Contracting Parties that are developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- c) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from LDCs; and
- d) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Agenda 14.5: The Bureau's budget for 2002

262. **Armenia** drew attention to the Bureau's proposed budget for 2002 as shown in DOC. SC26-14 and reported the Subgroup's recommendation that it be approved, as well as the Bureau's suggested method of invoicing in May 2002 for 2003 based upon the 2002 budget, using the UN scale applicable for 2003, to be accounted for following determination of the 2003 budget by COP8.

Decision SC26-41: The Standing Committee approved the Bureau's budget for 2002 as presented in DOC. SC26-14.

Decision SC26-42: The Standing Committee authorized the Bureau to send out the invoices for the 2003 contributions in May 2002, based upon the 2002 budget but using the UN scale applicable to 2003. After the approval of the 2003 budget by COP8, if the difference to be paid by a Contracting Party is more than 10% (upwards or downwards) with respect to the invoiced amount, a revised invoice should be issued in January 2003. If the difference is less than 10%, the adjustment should be made in the invoice corresponding to the 2004 contributions, which should be sent out in May 2003.

Agenda item 14.6: Proposed budget for 2003-2008 for recommendation to COP8

263. **Armenia** recalled the Bureau's two proposed alternative budgets found in DOC. SC26-15 and described the Subgroup's long deliberations on the issue, noting that some delegates indicated that they did not have authorization to make decisions about any budget increases. Wishing, however, to be responsive to the Convention's needs, the Subgroup followed the suggestion made by Mexico that a 2%-inflation 3%-growth budget be proposed as a "tentative budget as a basis for further consultations" (shown in DOC. SC26-26 Addendum) and adopted WWF's suggestion that other unfunded items should be left in the budget as zero line items, so that members, with the assistance of the Subgroup Chair, could explore other possibilities for funding those needs.
264. **Armenia** reported that the Subgroup also recommended that the Bureau be requested to prepare a short paper comparing the Ramsar's budget with those of other conventions, and that the Subgroup on Finance be authorized to adopt a budget at its meeting in May 2002 for proposal to COP8.

265. **AEWA** drew attention to budget line 2a) concerning an increase in order to come nearer to the real costs incurred by Wetlands International for the operation of the Ramsar Sites Database and wondered why, since Wetlands International is presently running a deficit, the Convention should not pay the full real costs of the RSD.
266. **The SG** observed that fitting the real RSD costs into the Convention budget would be very difficult and would raise the question whether the Database could not more economically be maintained at the Bureau instead.
267. **Wetlands International** cautioned against confusing the deficit issue with the operation of the RSD. He pointed to the added value that Wetlands International brings to the Database, the costs of an increasing volume of inquiries, and the expense of developing the Web version, but noted that the close partnership between the two organizations is the greatest value. He felt that the outlook for addressing the deficit issue was quite reasonable.
268. **WWF** welcomed the Subgroup's proposal for a 5% per year increase, in order to begin to address the many demands on the Convention to do more for wetland conservation, and urged the Parties to adopt that proposed budget. Given WWF's view that Ramsar is the most effective and least well-funded environmental convention of its type, he also welcomed the proposal that a comparative study be made between the budgets of Ramsar and similar conventions. WWF remained concerned, however, that key functions of the Convention remain unfunded in the proposed budget, including the cost of holding meetings of the COP. He felt that the Bureau's proposed post of Freshwater/STRP Support Officer was essential and requested the Committee, the Subgroup, and the Bureau to seek voluntary donations towards that post from Parties that have demonstrated an interest in global water policy.
269. **The Netherlands** supported the 5% increased but noted that not all costs are fully taken care of. He suggested that the Subgroup on Finance should take into account the findings of the Subgroup on STRP Support to see if additional costs may need to be included in the budget. He further noted that work on the waterbird census and population estimates, which is used by Ramsar and other institutions, is not covered in this budget, and suggested the formation of a users' group to define the institutions' needs in this regard, offering The Netherlands' help in facilitating a meeting. This would help to place the Convention's core work into the budget.
270. **The MedWet Coordinator** commended the Subgroup, especially Japan and the USA, for its ideas concerning MedWet and noted that initial agreement had been reached on the concept of regional initiatives. MedWet is serving as a laboratory for the regional initiatives concept within Ramsar.
271. **France** inquired whether the proposed budget line 9a) on the costs of the COP includes support to the delegates. **The SG** clarified that this covers only the Bureau's costs for translation, copying and distribution of documents, consultants, travel and subsistence for staff, translators, and interpreters, publication of proceedings, etc., totaling some SFr 810,000 (as listed in DOC. SC26-15). He noted that the proposed budget amounts related to the COP will be carried forward from 2003 and 2004 for use for COP9 in 2005 and that the amounts add up to about SFr 500,000, leaving the rest to made up in some other way.

272. **Argentina** expressed unwillingness to accept any draft Resolution involving any increase in allocations but offered to assist in drafting. **The SG** recalled that the decision would be to accept the proposed budget “as a basis for further discussions”.
273. **The USA** suggested that the described use of the proposed budget line on “support for STRP Working Group” should be altered from conducting their “meetings” to their “business”. The USA indicated that in the interests of achieving a broad consensus on budget issues prior to COP8 it had tried to be flexible, but in light of the intervention from WWF the USA must now reconsider its support for the proposed tentative budget and expects a debate at the COP.
274. Concerning zero budget line items, **France** suggested that if the budget line for delegate support, which was funded in the “ideal” proposal, remains unfunded in the proposed budget and must be financed from other sources, it should be removed. **The SG** observed that other conventions have a core budget line for delegate support, but **France** felt that in principle zero line items should be deleted. **The USA** suggested that, given the present status of the budget debate, a lengthy list of other important items could also be added with zero allocations, and urged that zero line items be removed. **The SG** explained that the intention had been to highlight which important items remained unfunded in the budget, but offered to include that information in the accompanying text instead. **Mexico** agreed that accompanying text should spell out the importance of those issues in order to increase the possibility of encouraging voluntary funding for them.
275. **Japan** indicated its wish to reserve its position on the proposed budget and stated that it would reconsider its support for the tentative budget because of the intervention made by one of the International Organization Partners.

Decision SC26-43: The Standing Committee accepted the tentative core budget for 2003-2005, as shown in DOC. SC26-26 Addendum, as a basis for further discussion, with the removal of line items with zero allocations. The SC agreed with WWF’s suggestion that voluntary support be sought for the proposed Freshwater/STRP Support Officer and agreed to consult with the Subgroup on STRP Support about any possible additional needs.

Agenda item: Use of the official languages

276. **The SG** apologized to the interpreters for the faulty wording in tabled DOC. SC26-29 and drew attention to their corrective document also tabled. He recalled that the SC has long had a problem with languages and the cost of interpretation, and noted that the frequently employed resort to consecutive and whispered interpretation, usually by Bureau staff members, has never been questioned. The use of all three official languages has many times been requested, but had never been possible, until in 1999 the SG realized that the Bureau’s decreasing telephone costs would permit simultaneous interpretation (which costs about SFr 15,450 per SC meeting) in the SC plenary sessions. He noted that the Rules of Procedure (Rule 26.7(c)) say that there is no requirement to provide interpretation in working group sessions, not that it cannot be provided. The SG expressed his view that interpretation has been very beneficial in ensuring full access to the SC’s deliberations to those delegates for whom English is not a working language.

277. **The USA** thanked the interpreters for their work and expressed pleasure that the SG had been able to find the means to provide interpretation. The USA indicated that translation and interpretation services should not be based on ad hoc circumstances, rather that there should be a policy and resourcing for it. He suggested that the Subgroup on Finance should look again at the budget lines and make a recommendation to the Committee.
278. **Togo** expressed the frustration of the delegates from West and North Africa, who represent overwhelmingly francophone CPs, at not being able to follow and contribute fully to the discussions. He thanked the Bureau for providing interpretation in the plenaries and supported the suggestion that the Subgroup study a permanent place for interpretation in the budget. **France, Algeria, and Argentina** also supported the regular provision of interpretation at SC meetings. **Costa Rica** endorsed the motion to seek a permanent place for interpretation in SC meetings and paid tribute to the Bureau for initiating this improvement to the solidarity of the Convention.
279. **Spain**, too, supported the suggestion of a permanent place for interpretation at SC meetings and urged that it be provided for the planned Subgroup meetings in May 2002 as well, for which Spain generously offered to bear the costs.
280. **Japan** supported the suggestion that the Subgroup on Finance consider this as a policy matter. He indicated that Rule 53.1 of the Rules of Procedure, which establishes that interventions in one official language shall be interpreted into the other two (in plenary sessions), and Rule 26.7(c), that interpretation for working groups shall not be a requirement, should be the starting place.
281. **The SG**, recalling the decreased costs of telephone calls since the widespread use of e-mail, indicated his belief that if the present budget level for Bureau operating costs is maintained the provision of interpretation in SC plenary sessions can be assured for the next triennium. The SG admitted that he had been taken aback by Japan's objection to consecutive interpretation by Bureau staff in the Subgroup meetings and he wished to have assurances that that assistance to delegates will be allowed to continue in future.

Decision SC26-44: The Standing Committee requested its Subgroup on Finance to study further the question of a permanent place in the budget for interpretation in SC plenary sessions and expressed its appreciation to Spain for its generous offer to provide funding for interpretation at the meeting of the Subgroup on COP8 in May 2002.

Agenda item 15: Selection procedure for the new Secretary General

282. **The Chair** recalled that the Secretary General's contract ends on 31 July 2003 and a new SG should be on board by about 21 July. The Chair circulated a draft timetable and process as DOC. SC26-16 in which a first SC selection panel would pursue the process up to the shortlisting of candidates by the time of COP8, and a second selection panel, drawn from the newly-elected SC, would conduct interviews in February 2003 and present its recommendations to the immediately subsequent SC meeting.
283. **Canada** suggested that there might be only one selection panel, selected from CPs rather than from Regional Representative members of the SC, which could carry on both before

and after COP8. After considerable discussion of this suggestion, Canada withdrew the proposal.

284. **The USA** urged that the procedure be amended so that all Contracting Parties would be encouraged to identify candidates and invite them to apply, rather than just SC members (para. 5); that all selection panel members offer input on the evaluation form, rather than just the Chair; and that it be specified that all applications should be circulated by the SG to the panel members.
285. **Armenia** wondered about the effect of some nominees coming from the same countries as selection panel members, to which **the Chair** replied that this would not be unusual and normally in a merit selection process selection panel members would have to distance themselves.

Decision SC26-45: The Standing Committee established the procedure and timetable outlined for the selection of a new Secretary General in DOC. SC26-16, subject to the three amendments suggested by the USA. The first selection panel will consist of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SC, the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, and the SG (*ex officio*), and the following Regional Representatives: for Africa, Algeria; for Asia, still to be decided; for Europe, France; for the Neotropics, Argentina; for North America, Canada, with Oceania represented by the Chair of the SC. Canada will continue to represent the North American region in the second selection panel as well.

Agenda item 16: World Wetlands Day 2002

286. **The SG** described the materials that have been in distribution since October and hoped that all Parties would organize WWD activities at national level. There has been a very large demand for the materials and the staff have been working hard to keep up with it; he hoped that supplies would not run out, since it is unlikely that resources could be found to reprint them. He acknowledged the financial support provided by the Danone Group through the Evian Project, but noted that, since that project runs out in 2002 and Evian funds for 2002 have been earmarked for COP8, this support will not be available for World Wetlands Day 2003.
287. **The SG** noted that 2003 is to be the International Year of Freshwater and suggested that Ramsar adopt this as its theme for WWD2003, thus associating WWD with this UN effort and becoming one of the first activities of the year in this regard.

Decision SC26-46: The Standing Committee agreed that the theme of World Wetlands Day 2003 should be associated with the United Nations' International Year of Freshwater.

Agenda item 17: Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award

288. **The SG** reported a dearth of good nominations and urged the SC to consider nominating worthy individuals, agencies, NGOs, or projects. There is a risk of harm to the image of the Convention if the Award must be declared vacant or conferred upon candidates not of the highest quality.

Agenda item 18: Subgroup on COP8 meeting in May 2002

Decision SC26-47: The Standing Committee scheduled the meetings of the Subgroup on COP8 for Gland on 15-17 May 2002 and the Subgroup on Finance for 15 May.

289. **IUCN** made an intervention on behalf of the partners of the Global Biodiversity Forum, which has an MOU with the Ramsar Bureau, requesting that the GBF preceding COP8 be integrated into the Subgroup on COP8's agenda and preparations.

Agenda item 19: The Standing Committee's 27th meeting

290. The **SG** explained that SC27 will cover any leftover issues prior to the COP and go over all of the practical issues of the COP itself, including choosing chairs for the COP and its committees. The SC will then become the Conference Committee, chaired by the Chair of the SC rather than by the Conference Chair and Vice-Chair, who will however be part of the Committee. The meeting will take place on the Sunday before the COP begins, so members are invited to arrive by Saturday, 16 November, at the latest, or attend the GBF on Friday the 15th.

Agenda item 20: Adoption of the report of the meeting.

Decision SC26-48: The Standing Committee adopted the report of the first two days of the meeting, subject to editorial amendments to be passed directly to the rapporteur, and delegated the Chair of the Standing Committee to approve the report of the third day on the Committee's behalf.

Agenda item 21 (a): Any other business: Ramsar and the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi

291. **The SG** explained the background to the World Exposition and noted that he has accepted in principle the invitation of the Government of Japan addressed to the Convention, if sponsorship can be found to provide for mounting and staffing the Ramsar stand for the six months' duration of the exposition.
292. **Japan**, as the Exposition host, welcomed Ramsar's consideration of participation and offered to facilitate contacts with potential sources of sponsorship.

Decision SC26-49: The Standing Committee endorsed the Convention's participation in the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi, Japan, March-September 2005, if sponsorship can be found to cover the costs and a partnership can be established, mainly with Japanese institutions, for staffing the Ramsar stand.

Agenda item 21 (c): Requests for International Organization Partner status

293. **The SG** reported the requests from the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger Basin Authority and the state of the provision of supporting documentation, and recalled that the role of the SC is to make a recommendation for the COP's approval.

294. **The Regional Coordinator for Africa** provided background on the extensive working relationships that have been ongoing among these two bodies, the Bureau, and the WWF Living Waters Programme.
295. **Algeria** praised this excellent initiative but suggested that the requests be examined in greater depth when the supporting documentation is complete.
296. **WWF** provided further background and added its support to the requests, but suggested waiting until all documentation had been received before proceeding further.
297. **Uganda** inquired about previous applications for Partner status and about the procedure for applying, to which **the SG** reported that Ducks Unlimited, the only other applicant, has completed an MOC with the Bureau, as urged by SC25, to allow a trial period of cooperation. The procedure, he said, is simple: an organization need only apply, providing clear indications of how it meets the criteria in Resolution VII.3, and the SC decides whether to recommend to the COP that the application be approved.

Decision SC26-50: The Standing Committee expressed its interest in and appreciation for the applications for International Organization Partner status from the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger Basin Authority and urged that they develop memoranda of cooperation with the Bureau to allow for a period of closer formal relations, which could subsequently lead to IOP status.

Agenda item 21 (d): Progress with the Programme of Joint Work between Ramsar and the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme

298. **The DSG** explained the rationale and progress of the joint programme with MAB, which in its first phase will chiefly involve joint secretariat actions concerning common sites and objectives. He drew attention to the Joint Web Site between MAB and Ramsar, and noted the intention to expand the MOC to UNESCO so as to encompass World Heritage, MAB, and other UNESCO instruments.

Decision SC26-51: The Standing Committee accepted the Programme of Joint Work between the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme and the Ramsar Convention.

Agenda item 21 (e)

299. Attention was drawn to DOC. SC26-31 which reports substantial outcomes from the International Conference on Freshwater held in Bonn 3-7 December, which forms part of the preparations for the WSSD, and to information concerning the 3rd World Water Forum.

Decision SC26-52: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to make the materials on the International Conference on Freshwater and the 3rd World Water Forum available to the Contracting Parties.

300. **Uganda** informed the Committee that Uganda is pleased with the progress in fulfilling the vision of the Convention, especially in Africa, and expressed his country's pleasure in being associated with it. He announced that the Government of Uganda is presently

considering offering to host COP9, which if it were to take place would be the first Ramsar COP in Africa, in recognition of the Convention's tremendous growth in Africa and the developing world. **The Chair** acknowledged with appreciation this announcement.

301. **Argentina** reiterated that it is preparing a regional strategy based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan and hopes to discuss this further at the planned subregional meeting in June 2002. He drew attention to the need to have COP8 documentation ready in plenty of time for consideration at that meeting. He urged that time be allocated at COP8 for regional caucuses and thanked the Chair of the SC for his brilliant conduct of the present meeting.

Agenda item 22: Closing remarks

302. **The Chair** thanked the skilled and good-humored interpreters for their work and thanked the Ramsar Bureau staff members for the high quality of the meeting logistics, documentation, and organization, and for their assistance and service during the meetings despite their few resources; he singled out Annette Keller for thanks for having seen to all of the logistics for the participants. He said that the high quality of the Bureau's teamwork is a great credit to the Secretary General. He noted that Ramsar meetings are always friendly and productive and he thanked the participants for their good-humored and dedicated labors. He said that the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention is due not only to the Bureau but also to the Standing Committee members as well.