

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

29th Meeting of the Standing Committee³
Gland, Switzerland, 26-28 February 2003

Report of the 29th Meeting of the Standing Committee

26 February 2003

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **The Standing Committee Chairperson, Gordana Beltram, Slovenia**, welcomed the delegates and observers to the meeting and expressed gratitude to her predecessor, Stephen Hunter of Australia, for his hard work as Chair in the previous triennium. She sought the advice and active input of the participants over the next three days and enumerated the important issues before the Committee.
2. **Jean-Yves Pirot** read welcoming remarks from **Achim Steiner, Director General of IUCN**, the Ramsar Bureau's host organization, stressing the achievements and challenges of the Convention, in particular in light of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and arguing that one of the greatest challenges lies in translating the growing body of policy and guidelines into practice. He paid tribute to Delmar Blasco's achievements during his tenure as Secretary General. (The text of Mr Steiner's statement is available at http://ramsar.org/key_sc29_statement_iucn.htm).
3. **David Pritchard** of BirdLife International welcomed the participants on behalf of the **four International Organization Partners (IOPs)** and stressed the IOPs' commitment to helping the Parties reach their common goal of implementing the Convention. (The text of the IOPs' statement is available at http://ramsar.org/key_sc29_statement_iops.htm).
4. **The Secretary General (SG)**, Delmar Blasco, welcomed the participants, particularly the newcomers to Standing Committee meetings but the old friends as well, and especially the permanent observer Parties, Switzerland and The Netherlands. He noted that, despite the heavy tasks involved in preparing SC meetings, the Bureau always enjoyed the opportunity to work face-to-face with the Parties.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

5. **Japan** stated that the COP and the SC should take ownership and be accountable for SC decisions, setting priorities carefully. Japan urged the Bureau to inform the members well in advance when setting the agenda, and made a number of suggested changes to the proposed agenda. He also suggested that some contact groups may be required in order to negotiate details prior to SC decisions.
6. The draft agenda, with the addition of an item 8 *bis* on the implementation of Resolution VIII.45, was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

7. It was noted that non-member Contracting Parties and the IOPs do not require admission as observers, and there were no other observers at this meeting.

Agenda item 4: Report of the Secretary General

8. **The SG** referred to DOC. SC29-2 and noted the need for SC29 to be held so soon after COP8, largely because of the urgency of getting under way with four key issues: STRP matters (membership and priorities), the national planning tool and National Report format, the Bureau's work plan for 2003, and preparations for COP9. He apologized if some of the SC29 documents might have seemed a bit hasty, but there was only the month of January to prepare them. The SG pointed out that as has always been done the draft agenda for this meeting was agreed with the Chair before circulation.
9. **The SG** referred to the part of DOC. SC29-2 containing reflections on the future of the Convention, based upon a retreat held by Bureau staff during 2002; this report was given to the preceding Standing Committee but, since Bureau staff are the only people engaged full-time in the work of the Convention, the reflections provide a particular perspective that might be useful to the new members as well.
10. **The SG** noted that the Bureau has been working hard at the task of finalizing the texts of the COP8 Resolutions, English and Spanish versions of which are now on the Web and available in hard copy; all but a few of the Resolutions are also on the Web in French, but the French hard copy is not quite ready for printing. The intention is to re-publish the Ramsar Handbooks series, including the handbooks which do and do not need to be revised based on COP8 results and with a few completely new ones. The first "Toolkit" of Handbooks was published in boxed hard copy format with the generous assistance of Spain and on CD-ROM by the United Nations University. It's intended that the new series will be published mainly on CD-ROM, with hard copies printed in-house on IUCN equipment and available only upon request. However, because of the unexpectedly large costs in publication of so many COP8 documents, the COP8 budget to cover the Handbooks has been exhausted – about 140,000 Euros will be needed to produce and distribute the Toolkit over the next triennium, and discussions are under way towards securing that sum.
11. **Spyros Kouvelis, the MedWet Coordinator**, expressed thanks to Mediterranean and other Parties for the achievements noted in DOC. SC29-2, invited all Parties to the MedWet/Com meeting to be held in Turkey 12-14 June 2003, and announced that MedWet will also be contributing to the Third World Water Forum (3WWF).
12. **Japan** approved of MedWet's work, since it is consistent with Resolution VIII.30, and requested the SG, before concluding a contractual arrangement with the Government of Greece on MedWet support, to consult with the Chair of the SC, as stipulated in that Resolution. **The Chair** assured Japan that the Greek MOC will be consistent with Resolution VIII.30 and that she will report.
13. **Japan** welcomed Ramsar participation in the Third World Water Forum and ministerial meeting and noted that both Resolution VIII.1 and the Bureau's comments on the draft ministerial declaration have been transmitted to the meeting organizers. He requested Ramsar participation in one of the subgroups of the Ministerial Conference and noted that the venues should be noted as Kyoto, Shiga, and Osaka rather than just Kyoto.
14. **The SG** noted that he and the Bureau's Dr Guangchun Lei will be participating in the subgroup and one of the ministerial roundtables and will be putting forward the Convention's views on water issues in a number of other events as well.

Agenda item 5: The Bureau's Work Plan 2003

15. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** introduced DOC. SC29-3 and its annex, which highlights Bureau actions called for in the Strategic Plan and the COP8 Resolutions.

16. **The MedWet Coordinator** noted that the June MedWet/Com meeting will adopt a MedWet work plan based upon the Bureau's work plan adapted to Mediterranean specificities.
17. **Austria** commended the practice of including estimates of required time for each of the planned activities and leaving, for example, 15% of time for unexpected tasks. The tasks outlined in the Bureau's draft plan seem too ambitious to be realistically attainable.
18. **The SG** reported that time allocations have not been made in the past and would doubtless add up to more than the time available. He suggested that the plan be seen rather as a listing of everything that in principle should be done if possible, providing a "framework" for acting when opportunities arise. Though it's likely that not all tasks can be completed, the plan can be seen as a way of authorizing the Bureau to respond to opportunities on these approved issues – if the plan were limited to those tasks that can be fit within time constraints, fruitful opportunities might be lost. History has demonstrated that Bureau staff will always work very hard to seize opportunities and achieve as much as can be.
19. **The DSG** added that much of the work of the Bureau is responsive to Parties' needs and requests as they arise, so that prior estimates of how many of these requests will be received would not be realistic. He reminded that the Bureau is increasingly overstretched, with more Parties, more sites, and more mandates, and it might be more helpful to the SC if the Bureau later reported on what it had been unable to accomplish.
20. **The SG** reiterated that much of the routine work, such as advising on the preparation of Ramsar Information Sheets for new or updated Ramsar sites and following up on Article 3.2 reports of problems at Ramsar sites, cannot be predicted in any way.
21. **The Regional Coordinators for Europe and for Africa** shared the unease at the long list of individual tasks in the Work Plan's annex and pointed to the first section for a sense of the regional priorities in working with the Parties. The itemized list should be seen as indicative.
22. **Spain** reiterated the need, concerning Europe and the Mediterranean area, for priorities on cultural aspects and the possibilities of a pilot experiment. He noted Spain's contribution of a secondment to the Bureau whose work has so far been concerned more with COP8 preparations and follow up, though he hoped that more of that work would soon be benefiting MedWet.
23. **Romania** called for a mechanism for assessing how the Resolutions will be implemented by the Parties, lest they remain just more paper.
24. **Ghana** expressed satisfaction at the Convention's recognition of the importance of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and its wetland action plan. He felt, however, that there is insufficient emphasis upon implementing national action plans and strategies. Ramsar has long emphasized the importance of developing National Wetland Policies but hasn't followed up; Ghana developed its national wetland strategy three years ago but it is gathering dust. The Bureau should help the Parties to secure funding for the implementation of their NWP's – only a few African Parties have NWP's and they should be assisted. Ghana stated:

"The African delegates have come to realize that if Ramsar can make progress in Africa we have to use existing structures. NEPAD is one such structure and luckily for us there is room for wetland activities in there.

To make an in-growth into NEPAD we believe that a Desk Officer should be designated to spearhead affairs. Fortunately for us we have had one personality in Africa who has followed NEPAD issues and tried to make a blend between the Ramsar Work Plan and that of NEPAD. It is therefore appropriate that we propose this personality to be the Desk Officer for Ramsar in

NEPAD. He does not have to physically be in the NEPAD secretariat but he must follow all activities of NEPAD and ensure that Ramsar inputs are available at the appropriate time, in the right substance, to NEPAD, taking opportunity for the international support and commitment to NEPAD.

We invite the SC, Bureau, IOPs and all bilateral development partners to work with us to make our vision a reality.”

25. **The MedWet Coordinator** clarified that cultural aspects are considered in all MedWet activities, with the assistance of the Spanish wetland centre SEHUMED. He noted that the Spanish secondment to the Bureau, Carlos Villalba, is in fact doing a lot for MedWet already, and his analyses of the National Reports have been invaluable.
26. **The Senior Advisor for Environment and Development Cooperation** outlined a number of the Bureau’s efforts on funding issues in Africa, especially in Tanzania and the Comoros, and its work on sustainable trade issues. He noted, however, that it has sometimes been hard to identify partners there, and the quality of proposals for funding assistance has often been weak. He offered continued assistance in strengthening that aspect.
27. **Ghana** clarified that he had not been referring to individual projects, but rather to holistic implementation of national wetland strategies. Few Parties have developed these and they deserve help.
28. **The SG** agreed that more attention should be paid to helping those few Parties, in Africa and throughout the world, that have successfully developed NWP. That’s a costly task, which the Bureau cannot fully undertake alone, but it can help to bring together partnerships which, if successful, might have a snowball effect.
29. **The Netherlands** made a number of points concerning 1) addition of the EU in the international cooperation paragraph of the priorities for Europe; 2) the wish that the new SG will continue the present SG’s commitment to the RIZA training courses; 3) addition of cooperation with the FAO on agricultural issues, as discussed at COP8; and 4) his country’s commitment to Africa’s wetlands and the need for African Parties to mainstream wetlands in their collaboration with donor countries.
30. **The DSG** reported on his recent talks with the FAO and the FAO’s positive willingness to work with the Convention.
31. **BirdLife International** queried an ambiguity under socio-economic issues which could suggest taking the Convention in an unwanted new direction: does “promoting sustainable trade” mean making existing trade in wetland products more sustainable, as embodied in the wise use concept, or promoting new sustainable trade in wetlands where no trade now exists. **The SG** indicated that there is no intention to promote new trade, only to help to make existing trade sustainable, especially in Ramsar sites.
32. **Japan** asserted that the tasks required by the COP in its Strategic Plan and Resolutions are clearly beyond the Bureau’s capacity. The COP did not set clear priorities, which shows a lack of COP ownership and accountability. Implementation of Resolution VIII.45 will provide a good tool for developing new Resolutions. Japan expressed concern at para 3(d) on developing synergies with MEAs, where the rationale is described as “in order to increase the profile of the Convention at the international level, as a means in turn to gain more recognition at the national level”. He suggested substituting: “in order to avoid duplication of work both at the international and national levels, and to establish effective coordination and cooperation among the related MEAs.

Synergies may include, where appropriate and in consultation with the Standing Committee, further development and implementation of joint work plans”, etc.

33. **Japan** noted that mention of sustainable trade is a new item not found in earlier Bureau Work Plans and wished for clarification of where it came from and why. Japan also reserved its position on the Ramsar Endowment Fund, about which there has been considerable disagreement.
34. **The SG** noted that Action 15.1.13 of the Strategic Plan calls for “establishment of effective mechanisms to encourage environmentally sound trade in wetland products, in particular from Ramsar sites, compatible with international trade agreements”. **BirdLife** suggested that the Work Plan’s language be amended to the wording of Strategic Plan Action 7.1.5.
35. **Austria** reiterated its request that the Work Plan 2003 be amended in Action 17.1.7 to include estimated time allocations for the tasks in Work Plan 2004, and that an analysis of the time spent on tasks in Work Plan 2003 be presented for the next SC meeting.
36. **The DSG** agreed but noted that past experience with time-recording suggests that it can be more time-consuming than the tasks themselves, and urged that a simple method of accounting for time spent in broad categories be preferred over exact tasks.

Decision SC29-1: The Standing Committee approved the Bureau’s Work Plan for 2003, subject to the amendments concerning sustainable trade, synergies with MEAs, and time allocations. (Document available at http://ramsar.org/key_sc29_report_annex1.htm.)

Agenda item 5 bis (formerly 12): Agreement with Panama on Ramsar Centre

37. **H.E. Ambassador Anel Beliz (Panama)** reported on the progress in preparations and securing funding for the proposed Centre and hoped that other Parties would also help in securing financial support. **The Regional Coordinator for the Americas** noted that a revised DOC. SC29-15 had been tabled which takes note (in the English version only) of Japan’s suggestions in earlier talks.
38. **The USA** called the proposed new Centre a very important step forward for the Convention, its first attempt at supporting training at the regional level. In the past the Convention has focused upon scientific and development issues with little priority for training, reaching out to the wetland managers themselves. The USA is prepared to discuss directing some of the resources of its joint USA/Ramsar “Wetlands for the Future” initiative to this new Centre.
39. **The SG** expressed enthusiasm for the Centre and regret that it has taken so long to bring the initiative to this point. He hoped that the SC would authorize him to sign the agreement, which will be very significant for the region. He noted that both the Panama Centre and the proposed Ramsar Centre in Iran would benefit Parties both in capacity building and in research as well.
40. **Argentina, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Papua New Guinea** very strongly supported the proposed Centre in Panama. **Canada** expressed willingness to discuss a modest financial contribution. **IUCN** noted that IUCN’s Mesoamerica office in Costa Rica views the Panama Centre as an essential part of its regional wetland policy and would be happy to offer its advice. **Spain** alluded to its training activities in Latin America and offered to explore collaboration with Panama.
41. **The MedWet Coordinator** offered MedWet’s advice in assisting this initiative and stressed the importance of having a Committee (like MedWet/Com) made up of participating Parties, with assured financial support from those Parties. He urged that that addition be made to Article XI of the MOC.

42. **Japan** welcomed this initiative and paid tribute to Panama's commitment and hard work, and called for further discussions of the wording of the MOC to ensure its conformity with Resolution VIII.30.
43. **The Netherlands** supported the initiative of Panama, but noted that the agreement should include the suggestions made by the MedWet Coordinator and Japan.
44. A contact group was established to refine the wording of the MOC for the Ramsar Centre for the Western Hemisphere.

Agenda item 6: Matters relating to the STRP

45. **The DSG** noted the COP's recognition of the great importance of the STRP and the large number of tasks assigned to it. He urged the SC to identify a few priority areas of work, some of which may lead to one or several outputs, rather than assigning specific outputs. He described the chicken-and-egg difficulties of costing STRP tasks, as found in DOC. SC29-4 addendum, and he noted that the Convention budget includes lines for the proposed STRP Support Service and STRP travel, but nothing for outsourcing substantive work.
46. **Japan** agreed that the STRP is vital for the Convention's implementation and noted that Resolution VIII.28 has strengthened the need for SC supervision of the STRP's work. He asserted that the tasks involving CEPA, emanating from Resolution VIII.31, are conditional upon funds from the Voluntary Fund for the Outreach Programme (Res. VIII.31, para.18), which do not yet exist; CEPA should thus be removed from the priority list. Japan urged that the STRP task (DOC. SC29-4, para. iv) to "identify key additional strategic issues" is beyond the mandate of the STRP and should be deleted.
47. **Ghana** noted that economic valuation of wetlands is an important priority not adequately covered in the STRP Work Plan and suggested adding it. **The DSG** observed that the Work Plan includes only those tasks mandated to the STRP by the COP, not all important issues; many issues can be addressed outside of the STRP framework.
48. **Japan** and **Canada** urged creation of a contact group to discuss further the STRP's priorities. **Canada** urged an emphasis on action and management activities and would like to see inclusion of programme evaluation, seeking guidance from the STRP on how well implementation of the Convention is progressing scientifically.
49. **The SG** noted that COP8 showed a strong feeling precisely that CEPA should be included in the STRP work to ensure that it is considered as a cross-cutting issue in all other considerations. Removing CEPA from the STRP priorities would not do justice to many Parties that have placed high expectations on the STRP work in this area.
50. **The DSG** recalled that the STRP's mandate to consider "strategic issues", identifying gaps rather than just reacting, and to advise the SC on issues not being picked up for future attention is taken *ad verbum* from Resolution VIII.28 on the STRP *modus operandi*.
51. A contact group was established, with Canada leading, to consider further the STRP's priorities for the triennium.

Agenda item 6.2: The STRP Support Service

52. **The DSG** outlined the history of the proposal, with the COP's recognition of the need for increased support for the STRP and its call for a tender offer to the IOPs, the Bureau's draft Terms of Reference, and the offer from Wetlands International and its draft budget.

53. **Doug Taylor, Wetlands International**, supplied the background to the present proposal, including reference to the background paper “Review of scientific and technical support”, etc., presented in early 2002, and the structure of the present proposal and budget. He assured the meeting that the Service is not intended to “own” the STRP’s work, only to serve as an enabling tool to facilitate its work and the quality of its work. A good part of that service will include assisting the STRP National Focal Points both in supporting the STRP and in drawing upon their own expert networks in-country, and another important part involves linking the STRP and its NFPs with other expert networks maintained by Wetlands International, IUCN, and others. He described the manner in which the provisional budget was arrived at.
54. **Japan** noted that the document SC29-5 Addendum with the proposal had been received too late to be examined adequately. He urged that this proposal be added to the mandate of the STRP Work Plan contact group for further reflection.
55. **Austria** pointed out that Resolution VIII.28, para. 9, does not require that the entire budgeted amount be committed at one time; the contractual arrangement could be made for, say, SFr 200,000, with the remaining 130,000 held back to see how events follow on.
56. **Switzerland** expressed concern that different organizations to which Switzerland contributes, like Ramsar, IUCN, and Wetlands International, should be making mutual payments to one another. He voiced confidence in these organizations and would not oppose the Service, but urged stronger coordination in future amongst funding for the organizations and conventions.
57. **The SG** urged that the situation be seen simply as support for the Ramsar Convention to supply an acknowledged need – the service could have been outsourced to any unrelated company, without question, but in this case Wetlands International happens to be best suited to supply the service. It does not amount to double support for WI.
558. Discussion ensued on the process by which, under the present Rules of Procedure, all of the STRP’s work must go to the COP in the form of technical resolutions approved by the Standing Committee. The only other source for technical resolutions is from Parties directly, at least 60 days prior to the COP.

Agenda item 8 bis: Issues arising from Resolution VIII.45

59. **Japan** noted that Resolution VIII.45 is a pivotal Resolution from COP8 and recommended a separate contact group to pursue it. VIII.45 calls for a general review of the effectiveness of the process of forming Draft Resolutions, a review of the effect of the Convention broadly, preparation of a report for COP9, and identification of “technical” tasks. He called for new Subgroup to implement this, with a continuous intersessional effort with financial requirements. He dissuaded from tasking the STRP with this issue, as it is already overburdened.
60. **Canada, Iran, Argentina, and The Netherlands** supported the creation of an intersessional Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 to work by e-mail, with meetings if appropriate and feasible. **The USA** offered to chair the Subgroup and provide staff support, and possibly help with meeting(s) if needed. The USA also noted that, at COP8, some suggestions were made for the organization of COP9 and hoped that the Subgroup on COP9 would take those into account.
61. **Austria** reported that the Court of Auditors of the Austrian Parliament has made a seven-year study of the Department of Environment’s implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The Netherlands reported a similar audit a few years ago, which turned out to be useful, especially for focusing attention on providing national resources to the Convention’s implementation. **Japan**

reported that former STRP member Dr Makoto Komoda has already made a study of national implementation of some Resolutions from Kushiro COP5.

62. **The Chair** invited the regions to select their representatives to the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45, at least one from each region but more if wished, and invited the IOPs to choose a representative as well.

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Agenda items 6.3 and 7 in closed session

63. The Standing Committee members met in closed session throughout the morning in discussion of the selection of members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and of the new Secretary General.

Agenda item 7: Designation of the new Secretary General

64. **Slovenia**, Chair of the SC, announced the SC's decision to offer the post of Secretary General to **Dr Peter Bridgewater** and indicated that he has accepted that offer.

Decision SC29-2: The Standing Committee determined to offer the position of Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands to Dr. Peter Bridgewater.

65. **The SG** stated that, although all of the short-listed candidates were extremely strong nominees, he commended the SC on its excellent choice. Having worked very hard for the Convention for eight years, he was very pleased to be turning the Bureau over to someone like Dr Bridgewater.
66. **The DSG** welcomed the Committee's excellent choice and pointed out that once before, in the UK, he had had the opportunity to work with Dr Bridgewater as his boss and was very happy to have another opportunity to work with him.

Agenda item 6.3: Election of STRP members, Chair, and Vice-Chair

67. **The Islamic Republic of Iran**, Vice-Chair of the SC, reported that the Committee had thoroughly discussed the nominees for the next STRP, as well as their areas of expertise in relation to the tasks to be requested of the STRP for the next triennium, and announced the Committee's decision regarding selections.

Decision SC29-3: The Standing Committee agreed to invite the following experts to become members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) until the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties:

Africa: Mr Manikchand Putto (Mauritius), Dr Heather MacKay (South Africa), and Prof Steven Njuguna (Kenya)

Asia: Dr Cui Lijuan (China), Prof Ho Sinn-Chye (Malaysia), and Mr Najam Khurshid (Pakistan)

Europe: Prof Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium), Mrs Tatiana Minaeva (Russian Federation), Dr Maria-José Viñals (Spain), and Mr David Stroud (United Kingdom)

Neotropics: Dr Jorge Jiménez Ramon (Costa Rica) and Prof Teresita Borges (Cuba), with Prof Francisco Daniel Rilla Manta (Uruguay) to be added with the accession of the next Party from that region

North America: Dr Francisco Contreras Espinosa (Mexico)

Oceania: Dr Max Finlayson (Australia)

The SC selected Dr Max Finlayson to serve as STRP Chairperson, and Dr Heather MacKay to serve as Vice-Chair.

Agenda item 12: Establishment of a Ramsar Centre for the Western Hemisphere (see para. 37-44 above)

68. **H.E. Ambassador Anel Beliz (Panama)** announced that the contact group had reached agreement on the text of the memorandum between the Government of Panama and the Ramsar Bureau, as found in DOC. SC29-15 Rev. 2, and if it could be endorsed by the SC at this time, it could be translated into Spanish and both versions formally signed on the last day of this meeting.
69. **Argentina** pointed out that the group had decided to delete the word “involved” from Article XI, which was agreed.

Decision SC29-4: The Standing Committee endorsed Revision 2 of the proposed agreement between Panama and the Ramsar Bureau on the establishment of a Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere, to be based in Panama.

Agenda item 8: Format for National Reports

70. In introducing DOC. SC29-7, **the SG** noted the need for urgency, in order to distribute the final National Planning Tool/NR formats to the Parties in time for them to submit their national targets by 30 June 2003 in accordance with Resolution VIII.26. The NR format includes all of the actions in the Strategic Plan and COP8 Resolutions. He mentioned that the Bureau has sought to keep the format “simple” without being “simplistic” and observed that reporting on the implementation of a complex Strategic Plan requires some complexity in the instrument. He noted that the format, prepared by Carlos Villalba, working with the Bureau through the generosity of Spain, strives to be user-friendly through layout and the use of colors and clearly stated items. The NR form is meant to be a living document for planning, not just a template for last-minute reporting.
71. **Carlos Villalba** explained that for ease of use the format is in plain text and the design intends to be simple not only for the Parties' use but also to facilitate inputting the information into the COP9 National Reports Database, now being developed together with the format. The database will also provide a more comprehensive analysis of implementation at global and regional levels based on COP9 reports.
72. **Uganda** suggested that space be provided for a summary overview of what has happened over the triennium and urged that there be more opportunity to offer a cumulative sense of actions over past years as well as merely during the past three. **The SG** agreed that a space for a summary for readers would be a good idea (preferring that it be optional since the Bureau does not require that for its analysis) and suggested that the text fields that accompany each question should be used to provide cumulative context. **Carlos Villalba** also pointed out that cumulative analyses can be made of COP9 reports by using COP8 reports information (now in the COP8 National Reports Database) as a baseline, and eventually by using them both for study and comparison of COP10 reports.
73. **BirdLife International** inquired about the request made in Resolution VIII.26 para. 19 that the STRP should prepare a series of key indicators on Strategic Plan implementation to be used as part of the NR format. **The SG** explained that if STRP comes up with useful indicators, they will be transmitted to the Parties to help complement their reporting, but the format itself will not be changed.

74. **Argentina** pointed out that the need for some adjustments could become evident after implementation and made suggestions on guidance for the Parties on the scale of priority-setting needed. **The SG** cautioned that a trial period would not be practical once the format has been adopted; Argentina clarified that she had not suggested a 'trial period'. The SG applauded the suggestions on the scale of priority-setting, which he asked Argentina to provide to the Bureau. He assumed that the level of priority is intended for the Administrative Authority, which must consider its own levels of priority in light of national, provincial and other levels of priority as well. Argentina suggested that the issue of priority, as well as guidance on the use of indicators in the report section, be clarified in the cover letter accompanying the report format document on circulation.
75. **The UK** offered to share its experience in developing the reporting instrument, if there is still time for input.
76. **Japan** urged that the NR format be kept simple, especially for the benefit of Parties for which the Convention's three working languages are not native, and questioned whether all of the actions need to be reported on. **The SG** observed that the actions called for by the Strategic Plan and the Resolutions all have the same legal status and thus all must be represented; he pointed out that it is up to the Parties to decide which actions they can or wish to address.
77. **Armenia** suggested inclusion of an endorsement form for official submission of the completed NRs and that summary overviews not be optional. **The SG** specified that the Bureau needs a covering letter from the head of the AA and an electronic version of the completed NR – whether or not paper copies are used by the Parties or submitted with the electronic versions is not important for the Bureau. If Parties wish to add a summary overview for the public, they will be welcome to do so.
78. To queries from **Papua New Guinea** and **Mexico**, the **SG** and **Carlos Villalba** indicated that the English NR format could be ready for distribution on CD-ROM, diskette, and paper within a month, the other languages a bit longer.

Decision SC29-5: The Standing Committee adopted a National Planning Tool and National Report Format based on the model presented in DOC. SC29-7 and with the benefit of the suggestions made during the discussions.

Agenda item 8 bis: Implementation of Resolution VIII.45 (see paragraphs 59-62 above)

Decision SC29-6: The Standing Committee established a Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 to work intersessionally by correspondence, and by meetings if needed and feasible, and to be composed of: Morocco (Africa), Iran and Japan (Asia), Austria and Romania (Europe), Argentina (Neotropics), the USA (North America) as Chair, with a representative from Oceania to be named after consultations in the region, and BirdLife International representing the International Organization Partners.

Agenda item 9: Preparations for Ramsar COP9

79. **The SG** referred to DOC. SC29-8 and observed that, with Resolution VIII.45 covered, four issues remain. 1) Dates of the COP: the Bureau recommends late in 2005, for a number of reasons; 2) Bureau costs: suggestions have been made for cost-cutting, but he cautioned that little savings would be possible; 3) the MOU with the Government of Uganda, which must be finalized soon; and 4) the establishment of a Subgroup on COP9 to oversee progress.
80. **Uganda** conveyed the greetings of the Honorable Minister of the Environment, who again expressed his gratitude for the Parties' confidence in Uganda. He made a presentation of the many

organizational steps already under way and described the next steps to come. He noted that much more needs to be done and welcomed support – material, technical, and moral – from the other Parties. To **Ghana's** query about infrastructure, he described Kampala's main conference centre, built in 1975 with seating for 1,700 and adequate additional rooms, and noted that certain modifications were being planned to assure its suitability for the COP.

81. **The USA** promised to ensure that the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 will work in close coordination with the Subgroup on COP9, particularly on the question of the number of days for the COP.
82. **Spain** offered to contribute its experience from COP8 and agreed with the need for coordination on Resolution VIII.45 issues.
83. **Ghana** suggested that the next SC meeting be held in Kampala in order to assess progress and show support. **The SG** explained that that could not be covered from the Bureau's budget, especially because of the cost of providing travel for up to ten needed members of the secretariat in addition to the supported delegates.
84. **Iran** suggested that, if a full SC meeting would be prohibitively expensive, a small team from the SC could visit the venue, e.g., 8-9 months prior to the COP. He also supported the November 2005 dates.
85. **Uganda** expressed agreement in principle with a date in November 2005 but noted that, because of national elections to be held in March 2006, for which campaigning usually begins in January, his government would need to think the precise dates over more thoroughly.

Decision SC29-7: The Standing Committee decided that COP9 should be held in the last quarter of 2005 and agreed to await further discussions with Uganda before setting specific dates.

86. **Japan** wished to confirm that the mandate of the Subgroup on COP9 would be to deal with paras. 1-3 of DOC. SC29-8, on COP dates, and paras. 9-15 on securing required funding, as well as with a request from the Subgroup on Finance that the Subgroup on COP9 consider ways of reducing the Bureau's costs for the COP.

Decision SC29-8: The Standing Committee named the following Parties to serve on the Subgroup on COP9: Uganda (as Chair) and another to be named, for Africa; Japan for Asia; Spain for Europe; Nicaragua for the Neotropics; the USA for North America; one to be named for Oceania after consultations in the region; representatives of the International Organization Partners; and the Secretary General *ex officio*.

87. **Uganda** said it would welcome advice on fundraising and invited the new Subgroup on COP9 to meet briefly before the end of SC29.

Agenda item 10: Financial matters

88. Concerning item 10.1 on income and expenditures for 2002, **the Secretary General** drew attention to Revision 1 of DOC. SC29-9 and said that he regretted to have to issue corrected figures. He had had doubts earlier about the figures but no time to investigate; when Japan requested costs for COP8, however, the Bureau discovered that many COP8 costs had been charged to the core budget instead. The new result showed a provisional surplus of 134,617 in the core budget. He then explained the provisional estimate for exchange rate loss, which results when Convention receipts kept in US dollars are seen at the end of the year to have lost value against the Swiss franc. He noted that this exchange rate loss is largely a paper loss, since most of those assets

kept in US dollars will also be spent as dollars, but this is shown as a loss in books kept in Swiss francs.

89. To suggestions from **Mexico** and **The Netherlands** about how this vulnerability to exchange rate loss might be avoided, **the SG** explained how the Reserve Fund was set up by Resolution VI.17 and described the difficulties in maintaining the Convention's accounts entirely in dollars, since most expenses (e.g., salaries) are paid in francs as part of IUCN's rules. He noted, for example, that the USA's contribution to core is converted immediately to francs to help with operating expenses, whereas its contributions to the Wetlands for the Future are kept in dollars. IUCN rules prohibit "playing" with currency markets to find the best values. There are also good interest rates in dollar accounts but negligible interest in Swiss franc accounts.
90. **Canada** (Chair of the Finance Subgroup) reported on the Subgroup's meeting and on its considerations about the way in which any deficit or surplus should be dealt with – in the latter case, with two options considered: applying the surplus to a Bureau project or keeping it in the Reserve Fund provisionally. The Subgroup noted the provisional financial report received from the Bureau and looked forward to viewing the final report.
91. In response to the Subgroup's Report, **Japan** wished to make a statement in response to two options mentioned in the previous paragraph dealing with any surplus:
- “The Japanese Government considers that the appropriate financial decisions and management are key to the credibility of the Convention. We the members of the Standing Committee have the responsibility to abide by the financial rules set by the COP and to carefully oversee the financial management of the Ramsar Bureau.
- The question before us touches upon a basic financial principle, the principle that the triennium budget of the Convention, including the expenditures and income from our contributions, must be decided by the Conference of the Parties. The Standing Committee has the authority only to manage the finances within the budget adopted by the COP.
- In our view, and in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Financial Administration, the surplus accumulated at the end of the previous triennium and the use of such surplus in the new triennium must be approved by the COP, and not by the Standing Committee. This is why, in paragraph 8 of the Terms of Reference, there is no provision as to the transfer of surplus from the third year of the previous triennium to the first year of the new triennium. The authority to approve such surplus at the end of the previous triennium and to use that surplus in the next, new triennium is the prerogative of the COP.
- The COP did not authorize to use the surplus. Therefore, Option 1 as reflected in the report of the Subgroup on Finance could not be an option for the Standing Committee.
- Madame Chair, in our view, the practical needs may provide exceptions to the rules, but they may not override the fundamental principle behind those rules.”
92. **Ghana** indicated that he did not understand Japan's position very well. If the COP has to agree upon how money is to be used and one must wait three years for a decision, what happens in the meantime? Should worthy wetland projects go unfunded? The COP wishes the Standing Committee to make those practical decisions in its name, within the outline of its policies.
93. **Japan** responded that in other conventions the COP always discusses how to use surpluses. At COP8 the Parties did not have adequate information about surpluses and thus did not discuss the issue. So, according to the financial rules, one would have to wait until the next COP.

Decision SC29-9: The SC noted the provisional report on income and expenditure for fiscal year 2002 and requested the Bureau to circulate to the Subgroup on Finance the draft audited accounts for this fiscal year as soon as they become available.

Agenda item 10.2: Ramsar Bureau budget 2003

94. **The SG** observed that the Bureau's budget for 2003, 2004, and 2005 have already been approved directly by the COP in Resolution VIII.27 and do not require an SC decision.
95. **Canada** reported on the Subgroup on Finance's recommendation that the budget for 2004 and 2005 be brought to the SC for decision.

Decision SC29-10: The Standing Committee determined that Bureau budgets for 2004 and 2005 should be brought before it for approval, with information on any changes that may have occurred in relation to the forecasted income, including information on overheads on projects and any additional revenue from new Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 10.3: *Modus operandi* for the Ramsar Endowment Fund

96. **Canada** reported that the Subgroup had found much enthusiasm for the REF established by Resolution VIII.29, and impatience to get it running, but had discovered that there were still a lot of concerns about the *modus operandi* among some Parties. The Subgroup recommended that either itself or a new group discuss the issue further and try to reach a conclusion this year.
97. **Mexico** urged that a separate group be formed to pursue the matter. **Argentina, Romania, Iran, and Spain** preferred that the Subgroup on Finance continue this work, with a schedule of concrete deadlines. **WWF** urged that the matter be pursued at the present meeting, so that this important initiative, already approved by the COP, need not be put off for another year.
98. **Canada** suggested that the Subgroup on Finance try to resolve the outstanding issues by e-mail and, if that should prove impossible, a meeting might be needed.
99. **The SG** supported that plan but observed that it was possible that consensus might never be achieved on this issue. He reminded the SC that although Ramsar has always preferred to proceed by consensus, the Rules of Procedure do provide for majority vote. He urged that, if consensus should not be forthcoming, the SC be prepared to vote on the matter, rather than fail to carry out its mandate from the COP in Resolution VIII.29.
100. **WWF** endorsed Canada's suggestion, if a decision can't be taken at this meeting, but urged that a schedule of specific dates be established, with a clear determination of how the SC's decision will be taken.
101. **The USA** appreciated the SG's comments but drew attention to Ramsar's proud history of never having had to bring matters to a vote, except once on a procedural issue in 1996. He felt that Parties were acting in good faith in trying to bring the Endowment Fund to reality and urged further discussion, but was opposed to bringing the issue to a vote.
102. **The Chair, Argentina, and Canada** agreed that the process should be established at this meeting. Argentina, Canada, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, and Romania are presently members of the Subgroup and more members would be welcome for dealing with this issue.
103. It was decided that the Subgroup will meet immediately after the close of the session and bring back a proposal the following day with a firm plan for resolving the issues.

Sad news

104. **The USA** sadly conveyed the news of the death of **Prof Peter Bacon of Trinidad and Tobago**, an esteemed wetland scientist who has been a close friend of the Ramsar family for many years. The USA paid tribute to highlights of Prof Bacon's career.

28 February 2003

Signature of agreement between Panama and the Ramsar Bureau

105. With the endorsement of the Standing Committee, Decision SC29-4 above, an agreement was signed by **Delmar Blasco**, Secretary General, and H. E. Ambassador **Anel Enrique Beliz G.**, Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, "for the creation and functioning in Panama of the Regional Ramsar Center for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere". [English text, http://ramsar.org/key_panama_center_e.htm; Spanish text, http://ramsar.org/key_panama_center_s.htm]

Agenda item 10.3: *Modus operandi* for the Ramsar Endowment Fund

106. **Canada**, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, reported that the Subgroup had agreed that there was no need to revisit matters agreed earlier and had worked out a proposal for bringing the REF *modus operandi* forward by 31 May 2003. If agreement is reached, implementation of the REF can then commence.
107. **Spain** asked about the process if the SC should still not be in agreement with the revised draft. **The SG** indicated that the SC could then either consider it again at its next meeting (January 2004) or bring the issue to a majority vote. **Japan** reiterated the USA's feeling that consensus should be preferred over any vote.

Decision SC29-11: The Standing Committee approved a timetable for further work on the *modus operandi* for the Ramsar Endowment Fund whereby the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance will receive suggestions on the proposal prepared by the Bureau (document SC29-11) until 31 March 2003, circulate to the Subgroup a compilation by 10 April, and oversee the Subgroup's attempt to arrive at a consensus final draft for transmittal to the Standing Committee Chair by 31 May 2003, after which the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance will seek guidance from the Chair of the Standing Committee on how to proceed further on the issue. Participants include the Subgroup members (Argentina, Canada, Ghana, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Romania) plus Armenia, Austria, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, U.S.A., and WWF.

Agenda item 10.4: Fundraising for the SGF, the REF, the Voluntary Fund for the Outreach Programme, and the work of the STRP

108. **The SG** explained that the Bureau will solicit and evaluate project proposals from eligible Parties and circulate to potential donors those proposals that meet technical standards. He said that the Bureau will prepare a proposal on activities based upon the Convention's CEPA Programme and circulate that to potential donors as well. Concerning the STRP's work, once priorities have been set, support will be sought for those, but fundraising for the REF will have to wait until the *modus operandi* has been established. To **Romania's** question, he indicated that a strategy for REF fundraising would not be developed until after it was certain that the Fund will become operational.
109. **Islamic Republic of Iran** noted that the SGF is very important for developing countries and countries in transition, and he expressed regret that donations have not reached the target set by

previous Resolutions by the Parties. He suggested that other donors be approached besides the OECD countries.

110. **Spain** announced that it will be participating for the first time in supporting the SGF with \$20,000 for a project on coastal wetlands in Cuba, and hopes to increase its support in the future.
111. To **Papua New Guinea's** question, it was announced that the usual project proposal deadline of 31 March has been extended exceptionally for this year to 31 July 2003.
112. **Japan** announced that the SFR 100,000 pledged for the SGF at COP8, out of the voluntary contributions made by Japan in previous years and being held by the Bureau, has now been transferred to two projects in Sri Lanka and Mauritius; there is a small amount left over which Japan expects to be used also for the 2002 SGF cycle.

Agenda item 10.5: Operational Guidelines for the SGF for 2003-2005

113. **Canada** reported that the Subgroup on Finance had recommended that the new Operational Guidelines, slightly revised from 2000-2002, be adopted as found in document SC29-13.

Decision SC29-12: The Standing Committee endorsed the revised Operational Guidelines for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund to be used for the period 2003-2005. (Available at http://ramsar.org/key_sgf_guide.htm)

Agenda item 10.6: Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Greece concerning the MedWet Coordination Unit

114. **The Secretary General** confirmed that the draft MOU is now being considered by the Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works of the Hellenic Republic and that as soon as it is agreed it will be submitted to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee for her approval, as foreseen in Resolution VIII.30.

Ghana's statement concerning a desk officer for Ramsar and NEPAD

115. **Ghana** was asked to elaborate upon its earlier suggestion and provided this further clarification. "Resolution VIII.44 established formal links between Ramsar and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) – specifically, para. 11 directed the Bureau to develop synergy between implementation of the Convention and NEPAD, and para. 7 requested the Parties to provide support to implement the Resolution. Ghana's proposal implies that either the Standing Committee or the Bureau request the Government of Kenya to designate Mr Anderson Koyo of the Kenya Wildlife Service for that purpose and to provide him with office facilities and support. The Government should be asked to continue to pay him and provide office logistics.

Ghana further suggested that the Desk Officer's terms of reference should include:

- 1) Coordinate Ramsar / NEPAD activities in Africa;
- 2) Ensure that Parties implement Resolution VIII.44 in conjunction with the Strategy and Action Plan for NEPAD;
- 3) Make inputs of Ramsar into the NEPAD processes;
- 4) Provide linkage with other programmes like AMCEN, AMCOW, etc.;
- 5) Provide feedback to African Contracting Parties and the Bureau;
- 6) Follow up on NEPAD issues;
- 7) Identify areas in NEPAD for action and possible sources of funding, etc.

The Bureau's terms of reference should include:

- 1) Provide technical support;

- 2) Assist in mobilizing resources to implement Resolution VIII.44;
- 3) Assist in implementing pilot projects;
- 4) Help raise the profile of this office to development partners through the established Ramsar partners and IOPs.

The Desk Officer and the Bureau would identify requirements and approach development partners for support, and the International Organization Partners in the region would provide technical, financial, and other support as they find necessary and are able to.”

116. **The Regional Coordinator for Africa** supported Ghana’s proposal by noting that Bureau staff is not sufficient to follow up all NEPAD issues. Following the adoption of NEPAD by the African Union in 2002 as the programme for sustainable social and economic development in Africa, wetland conservation and wise use is now included in the Environment Initiative of NEPAD, as a thematic area under the overall environmental strategy and action plan. Subsequently, a workshop was convened by the Ramsar Bureau and UNEP in Valencia just prior to COP8, chaired by Anderson Koyo, on further developing the Plan of Action to implement Africa’s Wetland Management Strategy under the Environment Initiative. Taking into account that a number of pilot projects will soon be selected by the African Ministerial Council on Environment (AMCEN) in collaboration with the African Ministerial Conference on Water (AMCOW) for the initial implementation of the NEPAD Environmental Initiative, UNEP and Ramsar convened a meeting in early February 2003 in Nairobi for the preparation of pilot project proposals. The Desk Officer suggestion endeavours to fill a gap by proposing a liaison officer for effective communication between the NEPAD bodies, the Ramsar Bureau, and others who are contributing to the future implementation of the wetland component of NEPAD.
117. **The SG** welcomed Ghana’s proposal warmly, urged the Standing Committee to pursue it, and pledged his own collaboration in bringing the matter forward.

Decision SC29-13: The Standing Committee noted the statement made by Ghana on the desirability of a desk officer to act as a liaison between Ramsar and NEPAD and instructed the Bureau to follow the matter up.

Agenda item 6.1: Priorities for the STRP Work Plan 2003-2005

118. **The DSG** introduced Revision 1 of SC29-4 on SC guidance to the STRP on its priorities and highlighted the significant amendments that had been made, including a higher priority for assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention and a somewhat reduced priority for CEPA issues.
119. **Canada** reported on the contact group’s work and its recommendation that the current revision of SC29-4 be adopted.
120. **Argentina** queried whether the mention in para. 11 concerning a review of the process of preparation of the drafting of technical Resolutions does not overlap with the mandate of the newly-formed Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45. **The DSG** explained that the STRP is asked only to provide input to the Subgroup’s review, which would be valuable since the STRP normally does the actual drafting. **The SG** suggested that the wording be clarified from “assisting the Standing Committee in its review”, etc., to “preparing draft Resolutions relating to matters addressed by the STRP and providing advice to the Standing Committee’s Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45”, followed by the phrase concerning key indicators.

Decision SC29-14: The Standing Committee approved the revised “Advice from the Standing Committee concerning the priorities for the STRP Work Plan 2003-2005”, with

the agreed new wording for para. 11 (available at http://ramsar.org/key_sc29_report_annex2.htm).

Agenda item 6.2: Establishment of the STRP Support Service

121. **Canada** reported that the contact group recommended adoption of the revised terms of reference for the Support Service (DOC. SC29-5, add. 1, rev. 2) and that the SC instruct the Bureau to proceed with agreeing a contract as soon as possible, with the advice of the STRP, for up to 70% of the approved budget line, with 30% to be reserved for use as the nature of the work unfolds over the triennium.
122. **The DSG** explained that the intent is to provide flexibility in how to respond to the STRP's needs. He noted that if the service is to assist the STRP's first meeting, it must begin as soon as possible in order to provide advice on experts to that meeting; developing the National Focal Points network must also get under way promptly. At the same time, it is desirable to leave for the STRP the possibility of defining its own needs as they evolve, so it is envisaged that 30% of the budget should remain uncommitted in case amendments to the contract or new contracts seem worthwhile.
123. **Wetlands International** commended the contact group for its constructive recommendations but expressed doubts about the intent of the four new paragraphs under para. 6 in the terms of reference. Particularly, the wording of para. 6 *quater* concerning additional contracts could imply another contractor in addition to the initial provider of the service, which he felt would not be workable – despite the agreed need for flexibility, he urged against including the possibility of additional contractors.
124. **The DSG** explained the contact group's sense that flexibility must be preserved to accommodate the STRP's evolving work, and a number of changes to the wording were suggested.
125. **BirdLife International** confirmed that all of the IOPs understood the need for flexibility but felt that introducing the possibility of additional contractors would change the nature of the service that had been proposed, and could lead to fragmentation of the services provided. He urged that the amendments be introduced in para. 6 and that a further paragraph be added specifying the circumstances under which additional contracts might be thought appropriate.
126. **Japan** observed that the governments are not providing money to Wetlands International, but rather to the STRP. The intent of the flexibility clause is that if the STRP members or chair feel they have to change the entity providing the service, this should be allowed; they should not be constrained by a prior contract. He argued that the SC does want to keep open the option of going to another entity or NGO if the STRP should feel that is necessary, and thus retaining 30% of the budget is essential.
127. **Wetlands International** indicated that a major concern is the potential for damage to the relationship between the IOPs and the Parties and a compromised relationship between the IOPs and the STRP. Ideally, the STRP should decide what it needs and then seek an offer for that service, but the timing does not allow that. WI offered to withdraw its proposal for offering the support service so that the Bureau and IOPs could work to help the first STRP meeting, and only then would an offer be sought to provide a structured service on a firmer basis for the rest of the triennium, thus avoiding conflicts between relationships.
128. **The DSG** stressed the need to be clear about the very important role of the IOPs in the Convention's work. He noted that if the matter were left for the first STRP meeting to determine, there might still be a need for a smaller contract in order to support that first meeting, which he felt was a doubtful proposition.

129. **Canada** summed up that the objectives were 1) speed, in order to get a contract in time to provide support for the first STRP meeting, and 2) flexibility, so that STRP could have some freedom to make its own determination of its needs, and thus committing 70% for the service and retaining 30% for additional issues that might be identified leaves flexibility for working with the contractor, as appropriate.
130. **The DSG** suggested the addition of “if agreed as necessary” following “additional contracts” in para. 6 *quater* and reminded that this would be a collaborative process among the Bureau, the IOPs, the STRP, etc. **Canada** and **Wetlands International** agreed with this amendment.
131. **Japan** reiterated its appreciation for the IOPs’ collaboration as a vital part of the Convention’s work and looked forward to continued collaboration. But he observed that the Convention and the IOPs are different entities and cannot be considered as if they were the same, as in some matters they may have different points of view. He suggested that there should be compromise on both sides. The Parties, who contribute to the core budget, need to be responsible for its use, which in this case is to help the STRP. Since it is a new initiative, it is preferable to dedicate 70% at first and see if the STRP receives the service that is sought for it. Like the DSG, Japan expects to continue to commit the entire 100% to the same contractor, since the IOPs have the needed expertise, but it is prudent to avoid committing to that before one sees how the work progresses. He agreed with the DSG’s proposed wording.
132. **Wetlands International** suggested that the contract be made conditional upon a restructured budget after the STRP’s first meeting.

Decision SC29-15: The Standing Committee adopted the proposal for establishment of the STRP Support Service and terms of reference, as shown in DOC. SC29-5 add.1 rev.2 and as amended during the meeting, and instructed the Bureau to conclude contractual arrangements in line with those terms. (Document available at http://ramsar.org/key_sc29_report_annex3.htm.) **The Committee also confirmed the dates of the first STRP meeting as 8-11 April 2003.**

Agenda item 11: Review of other COP8 Resolutions

133. **The Chair** reported that, as no further COP8 Resolutions were found to require discussion, DOC. SC29-14 has not been produced.
134. **BirdLife International** drew attention to Resolution VIII.22 concerning Ramsar sites which cease to meet or never met the Ramsar Criteria, specifically para. 8 which requested the Standing Committee to prepare guidance for COP9. BirdLife offered to assist in that task.

Decision SC29-16: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau, in collaboration with interested Parties and IOPs, to prepare a report on the request in Resolution VIII.22 para. 8, on Ramsar sites which cease to meet or never met the Ramsar Criteria, for consideration by the next SC meeting.

Agenda item 13: Dates of the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee

Decision SC29-17: The Standing Committee established the dates of its next meeting as 13-16 January 2004, in Gland, Switzerland.

Report of the Subgroup on COP9

135. **Uganda** reported on the first meeting of the Subgroup, which focused its attention on fundraising issues. The Subgroup urged Uganda to develop a clear budget, in order to assist donors' decisions, and to make COP9 a highly visible event within the country. Uganda thanked the Bureau, the SC, and the Parties for their support and promised to make the COP9 dates known as soon as possible.
136. Concerning COP9 dates, **Austria** pointed out that CBD's COP will be held in January 2006.
137. **The SG** said that he and Peter Bridgewater would try to arrange a visit to Kampala soon and would invite SC members to accompany them, especially members of the Subgroup on COP9, though financial support would not be possible. He noted that work must be progressed soon on a visual identity for the COP and on a theme, based on the STRP's priorities, as it is important to be able to demonstrate to potential donors why the COP will be an important meeting.

Agenda item 14: Report of the meeting

138. **Japan** requested that, in a break with the SC's practice of authorizing the Chair to approve the last day's draft report, the last day's notes be circulated to the SC members for comment.

Decision SC29-18: The Standing Committee adopted the first two days of the meeting's report, with minor amendments, and instructed the Bureau to circulate the draft last day's report to Standing Committee members and observers for comments within a fixed deadline.

Agenda item 15: Any other business

139. **Japan** drew attention to a very serious matter for the Convention: the Standing Committee must find a way to express its sincere thanks to the Secretary General for his eight years of devoted service, and Japan requested the Chair to find a way to do that.
140. **The Chair** paid tribute to Delmar Blasco for having made the Convention what it is today and presented him with a bouquet of flowers. The delegate from Japan personally produced a bottle of sake from his home prefecture of Okayama as a way of honoring the Secretary General's tenure with the Convention.
141. **The SG** expressed his appreciation for this tribute – he indicated that he had enjoyed his time with the Convention immensely and has met many new friends and devoted people. He said that working within the Ramsar family restores one's faith in humanity. He also felt that it was the right time to leave, after eight years, to make way for a newcomer with a new vision and new ideas. He said it was a privilege to have been able to work with so many good people, especially in the Bureau, and asserted that all of them have been responsible for the Bureau's achievements. He congratulated the Standing Committee on its choice of Peter Bridgewater as his successor.
142. **The Chair** closed the meeting with thanks to the Standing Committee members and other participants, to the very helpful interpreters, and to the Bureau staff for all of their work in the preparations and progress of the meeting, especially to Annette Keller and Mireille Katz for their tireless help with the logistics and to the rapporteur.