

Report of the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee

SC members present: Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Bahamas, Canada, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Morocco, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Romania, Slovenia, Uganda

SC permanent observers present: Netherlands, Switzerland; BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International, WWF International

Agenda item 1: Welcoming remarks

1. **The Chair (Dr Gordana Beltram, Slovenia)** welcomed the participants to the first Ramsar COP to be held in Africa. She thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of documents and hard work since the 31st meeting (SC31) in June 2005, and she thanked the government of Uganda, Paul Mafabi, and the Speke Resort for their work in providing facilities and for their hospitality.
2. **Uganda** welcomed the participants on behalf of the National Organizing Committee.
3. **The Chair, BirdLife International,** and the **Secretary General (SG)** suggested additions to the draft agenda. The agenda was adopted by consensus.

Agenda items 2 and 3: Preparations for the COP and review of the COP9 programme

4. **The SG** described the opening ceremony and other COP-related matters and drew attention to the innovation that for this COP there will be three side events sponsored by all of the International Organization Partners (IOPs) covering key themes of the meeting. He described the Technical Sessions and noted the logistical constraints upon the work of any contact groups caused by the shortage of rooms and difficulty of transport. He noted that following discussions of the draft Kampala Declaration in both the Technical Session and the ministerial dialogue, the Conference Committee will decide whether and in what form to bring it forward to the COP.
5. **Uganda** reported that nearly everything is in place for the COP. The ministerial dialogue is set for 12 November and confirmations have been received from 13 ministers. Some 55 exhibitions will be mounted by about 35 presenters, and the tent will also include a children's area and a craft village of local wetland creations. He reported that there is still a deficit in financing but that the Ministry of Finance is taking the final steps now. He announced that it is expected that the President of the Republic will open the first plenary session on Wednesday, so extraordinary security precautions will be in effect and guidelines for participants will be distributed.
6. **Uganda** indicated that the ministerial dialogue will be focused primarily on the draft Kampala Declaration but there will also be a general presentation on the expected outcomes of COP9 itself.

Agenda item 4: Election of the President and Vice-Presidents

7. **The SG** invited Uganda to nominate the president for the COP and **Uganda** put forward Minister Otafiiri, Minister of Water, Lands, and the Environment, and his delegates to serve.

Decision SC32-1: The Standing Committee agreed to recommend to the COP under Agenda item V that Minister Otafiiri be welcomed as President of the COP, and that Australia and Mexico be appointed Vice-Presidents.

Agenda item 5: Appointment of the Credentials Committee

8. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** explained the important role of the Credentials Committee in ensuring that the delegates are appropriately authorized to speak for their governments. He noted that the Secretariat will be represented by Ms Ursula Hiltbrunner of IUCN, and he listed individuals from one Party in each region whom the Secretariat would propose for recommendation to the COP for appointment. He nominated individuals from Benin (Dr Maman-Sani Issa), Thailand (Ms Nirawan Pipitsombat), Switzerland (Ms Nathalie Boesch), Peru (Ms Cynthia Cespedes), Canada (Mr Ken Brock), and Palau (Ms Alma Ridep-Morris). Australia indicated that Palau might not now be able to attend the COP and, if so, another Party would be identified at the Oceania regional meeting to serve in Palau's place.

Decision SC32-2: The Standing Committee agreed to recommend that the COP appoint the proposed delegates to the Credentials Committee, subject to confirmation by the Conference Committee following consultations at the regional meetings.

Agenda item 6: Establishment of COP9 Committees

9. **Canada**, as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, noted that the core of the COP Committee on Finance will be the existing Subgroup and its task will consist of 1) consideration of the level of support for the Convention from the Parties and 2) discussion of the allocations made within that proposed budget.
10. **The DSG** proposed that, as in the past, the Committee be widened by inviting other Parties from each of the regions to serve on it, and he suggested Algeria, Nigeria, China, Albania, Colombia, the USA, and Australia (if those Parties are agreeable), with the SG and Paulette Kennedy from the Secretariat.
11. **Japan, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK** (and subsequently **Bahamas**) indicated their wish to be members of the Committee on Finance as well. **Namibia** wished to add another member from Africa following consultations in the regional meeting. **Canada** noted that it will be largely an open meeting in any case.

Decision SC32-3: The Standing Committee agreed to recommend that the COP appoint Albania, Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, China, Colombia, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA, and a further African Party, to join the existing Subgroup on Finance to form the COP Committee on Finance.

Agenda item 7: Establishment of contact groups

12. **The DSG** explained the purpose of contact groups in resolving issues and achieving consensus on the texts of draft Resolutions. He noted the need for focus given the constraints on rooms and times for meeting and the wish to avoid overlapping meetings that would inconvenience smaller delegations. The procedure would be that, as the COP considers draft Resolutions (DRs), if significant divergences of views appear the President may invite interested Parties to form a group, which would normally be open to all participants but could go into a closed session of Contracting Party delegates if the group or its chair find that desirable. The Secretariat has been identifying potential lead Parties and additional experts who are knowledgeable and capable chairpersons whom the President can call upon for assistance, and senior Secretariat staff will be available to facilitate any such groups. The groups should finish their discussions by “Documents Day” (“Excursions Day”), Sunday 13 November, if possible, so that their results can be prepared for distribution, but they can decide to forward bracketed text where consensus has not been possible.

Agenda item 8.1: Draft Resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties

13. **The SG** recounted that DR20, submitted by Japan, was introduced in concept to SC31 and the text was submitted not long afterward. Subsequently, four more DRs were submitted by the deadline established by the 60-days rule of the present Rules of Procedure and are new to the SC. Three of those involve scientific and technical issues and have not been through the STRP process, but for two of them, at the request of the SC Chair, the views of the STRP have been solicited via the STRP Support Service Web site. He noted that DRs 21, 23, and 24 are more or less free-standing, but DR22 links closely with proposals already on the table in DR1 Annex B.
14. **The DSG** recalled that, in anticipation of the proposed revisions to the Rules of Procedure, the Subgroup on COP9 requested Parties to submit their DRs in time for consideration by SC31. In general, feedback from the STRP and the Secretariat’s view suggest that the DRs could have been much improved if there had been sufficient time for discussion.

Draft Resolution 22

15. Concerning DR22 on recognizing the cultural values of wetlands, **the DSG** noted that the STRP comments raised many issues, but overall, the respondents felt that as currently drafted the DR would not be helpful and could slow progress on this issue. He summarized the STRP’s comments concerning certain unclearities and parallel terminology, but suggested that modifications might provide a way forward.
16. **WWF International** requested that a clarification be made to point 3 to the Secretariat’s note on DR22, which is misleading, and welcomed the formation of a contact group to address the issues of overlapping between DR22 and DR1 Annex B.
17. **Argentina** indicated a number of areas requiring comment and improvement and suggested that any contact group should be convenient for smaller delegations. **Australia** saw considerable room for improvement in the language of DR22 and welcomed additional discussion of both DRs. **The SG** pointed to the complexity of melding one DR with a

portion of another and suggested that the Secretariat be charged with trying to produce a revised document, blending elements of both, for the COP to focus upon, bringing in the concerns of the STRP and SC. The Conference Committee could then agree this revised DR to bring forward to the COP.

18. **Australia** recalled that a Technical Session will be considering related issues and room should be left for adaptation of the DR following those discussions. **BirdLife International** suggested that the new document should include a digest of the STRP comments as well as the new DR. **New Zealand** urged that a new composite DR would be more helpful than simply a revised DR22.
19. **Samoa** thanked the Parties for the discussion of the issues of traditional values and wetlands and hoped that a way could be found to integrate the two draft proposals. **Argentina** expressed a preference for a redrafted DR22 including elements of Annex B. **The SG** reserved judgment on the best way to approach the drafting problem until after reflection, but promised a document for the Conference Committee's consideration by Wednesday or more likely Thursday.

Decision SC32-4: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a new document incorporating and blending relevant elements of DR1 Annex B and DR22, including a digest of the STRP's comments on DR22 and with some flexibility to allow for incorporation of relevant results of the Technical Session discussions.

Draft Resolution 24

20. Concerning DR24 on national systems of protected areas, **the DSG** reported that the STRP's comments were generally not supportive, chiefly since the STRP is suggesting an overall review of the RIS as part of its work plan for the next triennium. Questions were raised by the STRP about how to map the IUCN categories against Ramsar values and whether there is any added value to including IUCN categories in addition to the RIS information on all conservations measures taken.
21. **Argentina** indicated the wish to provide comments but would prefer to bring them up in the regional meetings first.
22. **WWF International** explained that the purpose of the DR is to meet the concerns of smaller countries about having to respond to several MEAs concerning the CBD's 2010 loss-of-biodiversity targets. The CBD is proposing indicators based around the IUCN categories, and thus linking the Ramsar RIS to those would help to harmonize those responses, and the RIS changes would be simple to make.
23. **Australia** supported the DR but expressed concerns about the perceptions of Ramsar and wise use implied there, as the issue cuts to the core of protected area management.
24. **The SG** noted that he has been in discussions with the chair of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and felt it would be important to seek IUCN's views on the proposed DR. He felt that the linkage with the CBD is automatically assured by our Joint Work Plan. He saw no reason not to adopt DR24 but felt that existing mechanisms meet the situation already.

25. **Argentina** reiterated support for the general principle but not the DR's language and reserved the right to bring up further points later.

Decision SC32-5: The Standing Committee determined to bring DR24 forward for the COP's consideration, acknowledging that some Parties have indicated that they will have further comments to make about it.

Draft Resolution 23

26. **Switzerland** introduced its DR on Ramsar and Antarctic wetlands, which is based in Switzerland's interest in high mountain and glaciated areas and wetlands associated with them. Switzerland indicated that a new text has been prepared to be substituted for the existing one.
27. **Argentina** argued that protection of Antarctic ecosystems is adequately regulated by other mechanisms, such as the Antarctic Treaty and the Madrid Protocol, which are more demanding regimes. Though the Madrid Protocol does not mention wetlands, neither does it exclude them. Argentina wished for additional time to review the new version.
28. **Australia** expressed reluctance to support the DR but suggested that if it should go forward it should be readied as quickly as possible in order to allow time for consultation with capitals.

Decision SC32-6: The Standing Committee agreed to accept Switzerland's revised text as Revision 1 of the draft Resolution that the COP will consider. The Secretariat was asked to see to its translation and distribution via the Documents Centre and Ramsar Web site.

Draft Resolution 21

29. **The DSG** explained that Samoa's DR on cross-biome planning related directly to CBD processes and noted that the COP will have the benefit of comment on that from a representative of the CBD.
30. **WWF** explained that the intent of the DR is to respond to the concerns of governments of limited means about the demands of the various MEAs, and noted that the DR asks the COP to endorse an approach to harmonization, not the specific document mentioned. That document is available on the Web and the address was announced to the Ramsar Forum some time ago. The aim is to achieve harmonization for simpler implementation of both conventions. **Papua New Guinea** and **Australia** expressed support for the DR.
31. **Argentina** inquired whether the technical content in the DR has been considered by the STRP, to which **the DSG** replied that there had not been sufficient time to solicit the STRP's views. He noted that the DR has potential implications for the STRP's future work and that there has been some discussion with the CBD Secretariat on the matter. He said that the SC was not being asked to endorse the DR or otherwise.

Decision SC32-7: The Standing Committee agreed that draft Resolution 21 should be brought forward to the COP for its consideration.

Agenda item 8.2: Revisions to draft Resolutions submitted by the Standing Committee

32. **Australia** provided background to the proposed DR8, Rev. 1, on regional initiatives, which at the time of SC31's consideration had not been considered by the subsequent Oceania regional meeting. Australia indicated that the proposed revisions include a cross-reference to DR13 concerning securing the salary of the outposted Oceania regional officer based in Samoa in the core budget proposals, presently paid by a project funded by Australia, the USA, and WWF International.
33. **The Netherlands** and **Argentina** inquired about the budgetary implications of the proposed revisions. There was discussion of these implications, and it was noted that the regional officer's salary was included in the core budget line for Secretariat salaries and that the raising of the assessment category for the Oceania regional initiative proposal would only mean that it would be eligible for future funding if subsequent SC meetings should decide to grant it, not that it would automatically receive such funding. It was said that there would be no change to the overall "funding envelope" in the proposed DR13 budget at all.
34. **The SG** noted that the stationing of a regional officer in the region has proved to be cost effective and extremely valuable.
35. **The Netherlands** noted that SC31 had made a thorough analysis of the proposals and asked what arguments would be advanced for subsequently changing the priorities established by that analysis. **Australia** explained that the regional initiative proposal can now be looked at more carefully, following the regional meeting, which was held later than it should have been, whereas if the proposal were to remain in Annex B it would be effectively shelved until the following triennium. **The SG** noted that advancing DR8, Rev. 1 to the COP does not prejudice the discussions in regional meetings or the plenary. **The Netherlands** explained that his inquiry had to do with the fact that transparency in decision-making on regional initiatives is of the utmost importance if these initiatives are to be included in the Convention's core budget.

Decision SC32-8: The Standing Committee agreed to bring DR8, Rev. 1, forward for the COP's consideration and requested the Secretariat to have it translated and distributed as quickly as possible.

Agenda item 8.3: Avian flu

36. **The DSG** explained the present situation vis-à-vis public concerns about the outbreak of H5N1 avian flu and the feared pandemic, as well as the claims being made about the possible role of migratory waterbirds in transmission. He suggested that the COP could consider these issues and, if it wished to, adopt a draft Resolution under the "emerging issues" rule. He urged that the Convention, which has its origins in concern for migratory waterbirds and their habitats, should express a clear view on what is known about that role and about what should and should not be done about it. He noted that the IOPs' and other experts on waterbirds are present and could be very helpful. He suggested that the COP

could either adopt a new DR (e.g., on wetlands and health) or incorporate text into a widened DR10 on natural disasters.

37. **The Netherlands, Nicaragua, Wetlands International, BirdLife International, Romania, and Belgium** agreed on the urgency of the issue and the need for a separate DR, both to provide guidance against hasty preventive measures and to show as a matter of principle that the Convention can respond quickly and helpfully, in concert with other international fora. **New Zealand** suggested that other birds besides migratory waterfowl should be considered as well.
38. **Japan, Australia, and the USA** agreed on the urgency of the issue but expressed concern that the Convention might be exceeding its mandate, and could not support the idea of a DR without consulting their capitals. There was also the idea that a statement from Ramsar might overlap with those of more appropriate instruments like CMS and the AEWA MOP3 resolution.
39. **The DSG** recalled that the original title and focus of the Convention concerned migratory waterbirds and their habitats and that speaking out about threats to them, including all wetland-dependent birds, would seem to be well within the Convention's purpose, especially as CMS and AEWA are more limited in certain ways. He felt that multiple statements from the MEAs should not be seen as overlapping but rather as putting out a common message. He felt that the Convention would not be taken seriously if it did not say something about a compelling issue so close to our purpose. He noted that CITES is close to Ramsar on this issue and is presently representing Ramsar at WHO meetings in Geneva.
40. **The Chair** summarized the expressions of strong support for a COP Resolution and collaboration with other bodies on the issue, as well as the doubts about the Convention's mandate and the need to consult with the capitals. She outlined a possible decision to move the matter forward.

Decision SC32-9: The Standing Committee urged the Parties to consult with their capitals if necessary on the general question of a COP Resolution on the avian flu and migratory waterbirds issue, and at the same time informal discussions can begin among interested Parties and organizations on the form that such a DR might take. Any draft text that could emerge from those discussions will be considered by the Conference Committee for possible presentation for the COP's consideration.

Agenda item 9: Opening ceremony and social functions

41. **The SG** reviewed again the COP programme concerning the opening ceremony and first plenary session.

Agenda item 10: Conference Committee

42. **The Chair** reviewed the Rules of Procedure concerning the Standing Committee's role during the COP as the Conference Committee, meeting for an hour each morning to discuss the progress of the COP and any anticipated problems that might arise.

Agenda item 11: Small Grants Fund allocations

43. **The DSG** reviewed the state of funding support for this year's SGF allocations and the regular procedure by which the Secretariat has evaluated the proposals and prepared recommendations for the SC's consideration. As the SC has determined in the procedures it has established, A1 projects are those with top-rated, ranked evaluations for which there is sufficient funding in hand, whereas A2 projects are those which are only slightly less well rated but for which there is not yet sufficient funding. The A2 list forms a reserve list for funding in the order of priority if additional funds should become available. The B, C, and D lists are for less well-rated proposals and those that are not recommended at all.
44. **Armenia** asked the Secretariat to make every effort to find alternative sources of funding for the good quality projects that cannot be supported directly through the SGF because of lack of funds.

Decision 32-10: The Standing Committee approved the proposals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Suriname, Tajikistan, and Brazil for immediate funding and the proposals from Jordan, Cape Verde, and Ukraine for the A2 reserve list in the event that additional funding should become available.

Agenda item 12: Any other business: Ramsar Advisory Missions

45. **BirdLife International** expressed strong support for the Ramsar Advisory Mission as a mechanism by which the Convention is able to provide practical help to the Parties in the management of their Ramsar sites, which are in many cases Important Bird Areas as well. He was pleased to present the Secretary General with a cheque from the BirdLife partner in Britain, the RSPB, for £3,000 in support of RAM missions.
46. **The SG** expressed gratitude for this generous support, especially as it shows that the RAM is valued, indeed needed, by many Parties. He said that the RAM distinguishes Ramsar as a Convention that is able to provide clear technical help to the Parties.

Agenda item 12: Any other business: Crane Bank proposal

47. **The SG** reported that the Crane Bank has offered to finance a 3-year programme that would provide travel and subsistence funding to young wetland professionals from around Africa to enable them to come to Uganda for periods of, e.g., a fortnight to gain experience working with the Wetlands Inspection Division. The Secretariat would not be directly involved in it but recommends that the SC should accept the offer.
48. **Uganda** indicated that the W.I.D. would be happy to participate in such a programme and that it would be important for Africa. **Namibia** expressed gratitude to the Crane Bank and the W.I.D. for this initiative.

Decision SC32-11: The Standing Committee accepted with gratitude the offer by the Crane Bank to fund a capacity-building programme for young African wetland professionals to be seconded to Uganda's Wetland Inspection Division, and it committed the incoming Standing Committee to develop rules for the programme at its 34th meeting in spring 2006.

Report of the meeting

49. **The DSG** indicated that the draft report will be distributed tomorrow. Amendments can be passed directly to the rapporteur or to a senior member of the registration staff clearly marked for the rapporteur.