

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
34th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 10-13 April 2006

Decisions of the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee

SC members present: Austria, Bahamas, Benin, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gabon, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Malawi, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Thailand, Uganda, United States

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

Agenda item 4: Report of the Secretary General

Decision SC34-1: The Standing Committee requested the Secretary General to follow up on Resolution IX.15, para 27, with requests that the Parties concerned report on their actions in response to those recommendations, and that he report on their responses to SC35.

Agenda item 5: Report of the IOPs' meeting

Decision SC34-2: The Standing Committee noted the report of the February 2006 IOPs/Secretariat meeting and encouraged the Secretariat and IOPs to institutionalize similar meetings on an annual basis. The SC urged the IOPs to establish direct contacts with the Parties' National Focal Points and to collaborate with one another when more than one is located in a Party, and it encouraged the Parties to include local officers of the IOPs in their National Ramsar/Wetlands Committees. The SC also urged SC members to explain the role of the IOPs in Ramsar to other officials in their governments. The SC urged the IOPs to assist the Parties, where appropriate, in implementing the Ramsar/CBD Joint Work Plan, and it invited the IOPs to report regularly to the SC on their relevant activities.

Agenda item 6: Establishment of working groups

Decision SC34-3: The Standing Committee accepted the nominations for the Management Working Group of Malawi, China, Bahamas, Samoa (to be confirmed), Switzerland, and the Russian Federation, Japan, and WWF and BirdLife as primary contacts for the IOPs. They will join the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the most recent and present Standing Committees, the Chairs of the most recent and present Subgroup on Finance and STRP, and the Secretary General *ex officio*, as stipulated in Resolution IX.24. The Secretary General was requested to solicit further members from any interested Parties. The Working Group's *modus operandi* will be established at its first meeting.

Decision SC34-4: The Standing Committee determined to end the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 so that its mandated tasks may be taken up by the Secretariat, the STRP, and a new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan, requested regular reports on the fulfilment of Resolution VIII.45, and instructed the Secretariat to prepare a digest of the

unfulfilled tasks of the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 and the manner in which they are being taken up.

Decision SC34-5: The Standing Committee created a new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan to advance the drafting of a Convention Strategic Plan for 2009-2014 and supervise the development of a new National Report format for COP10 reporting. The membership will consist of the Vice Chair of the SC (Bahamas) as Chair; Benin, Islamic Republic of Iran, Georgia, Ecuador and the USA for the regions, and the representative from Oceania to be confirmed; BirdLife International for the IOPs; and Japan and the UK as observers.

Decision SC34-6: The Standing Committee constituted a new Subgroup on COP10, with the Republic of Korea as chair, and including Kenya, Thailand, Austria, El Salvador, and the USA, and the Oceania member to be confirmed, Uganda (COP9 host country), with Switzerland as an observer and Wetlands International acting as the primary contact for the IOPs.

Decision SC34-7: The Standing Committee accepted the proposal by the Republic of Korea that the dates of Ramsar COP10 will be 28 October to 4 November 2008.

Agenda item 7: Convention and Secretariat Work Plans

Decision SC34-8: The Standing Committee approved the Convention Work Plan 2006-2008 to be trialed and reflected in the next Strategic Plan, instructed the Secretariat to revise the Convention Work Plan 2006-2008 to include elements agreed at this meeting of the SC and the Secretariat Work Plan 2006 with staff/cost estimates and further specifics, both documents to be circulated to the SC for comment with a three-week period for reply. The SC requested a report on progress on the Annex 3 tasks for the next Standing Committee meeting.

Agenda item 8.1: Action plan on water-related processes

Decision SC34-9: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to revise the proposed Action Plan on IWRM, incorporating the Committee's suggestions, and incorporate the Action Plan into the Convention Work Plan and make it available intersessionally.

Agenda item 8.4: Review of COP decisions

Decision SC34-10: The Standing Committee welcomed the offer of RSPB to provide time for David Pritchard to undertake, with Secretariat help, an analysis of all Ramsar COP decisions with a view to identifying conflicting advice or policy, redundancies, and superseded mandates, reporting these to the STRP for evaluation, perhaps to IUCN's Environmental Law Centre for legal review, and to the SC for proposal to COP10. This decision is conditional upon the SC's out-of-session agreement on Terms of Reference and a time line for the completion of this task.

Agenda item 8.5: Legal status of the Secretariat

Decision SC34-11: The Standing Committee encouraged a consultative process with the missions of Ecuador, Gabon, and the Islamic Republic of Iran to assist the Secretariat in

moving forward in its efforts to resolve the legal status of the Secretariat and requested a report to SC35, at which time the desirability of creating a working group will be revisited. The SC instructed the Secretary General to write to the Director General of UNESCO to request a more expeditious reply to the Convention's inquiry.

Agenda item 8.6: Establishment of an Oversight Panel for CEPA activities

Decision SC34-12: The Standing Committee approved the establishment of a CEPA Oversight Panel in accordance with the Terms of Reference, membership, and modus operandi outlined in DOC. SC34-11, welcomed the additional nominations for its membership, and called for a first meeting to be held in 2006.

Agenda 10.1: Themes for World Wetlands Day

Decision SC34-13: The Standing Committee adopted the World Wetlands Day general themes of "Wetlands and Fisheries" and "Wetlands and River Basin Management", with titles based on these themes to be worked out in due course.

Agenda item 10.2: The Ramsar Advisory Board on Capacity Building

Decision SC34-14: The Standing Committee requested the Chair to respond positively to the proposal from the government of the Netherlands and to ask the Advisory Board to clarify its title and link with the CEPA Oversight Panel.

Decision SC34-15: The Standing Committee stressed that the terms of Resolution IX.23 on highly pathogenic avian influenza should be followed by all Contracting Parties, especially in relation to issues of killing wild birds and the destruction or substantive modification of wetlands, and that the Parties should take a fully integrated approach to managing avian influenza risks.

Agenda item 12.1: Review of core and projects income and expenditure

Decision SC34-16: Concerning the 2005 surplus reported in DOC. SC34-17, comprising CHF 135,000 exchange rate gain and CHF 21,000 2005 budget surplus, and recognising that the COP9 approved budget for 2006 includes a CHF 36,000 charge on the reserve fund, the Standing Committee 1) authorized a transfer of funds from the 2005 surplus to cover the CHF 36,000 deficit in the 2006 core budget, and 2) approved that the remainder of the 2005 surplus should remain in the unrestricted Reserve Fund, so as to form a contribution towards the 12% of budget in reserve funding anticipated by COP7.

Concerning an intervention by the IUCN Director General on the implications of the cap of 13% of core funding placed by COP9 on the delivery of IUCN hosting and financial support contracts from the Secretariat, the Standing Committee noted the issues raised concerning separating the costs of financial services delivered in relation to core budget and project budget issues, and requested the Secretary General and the IUCN Director General to resolve and report intersessionally to the Standing Committee on these matters.

Agenda item 12.2: Ramsar Secretariat budget for 2006

Decision SC34-17: Concerning core budget income and expenditure to date for 2006, the Standing Committee agreed that it saw no problems with the income and expenditure report and noted the budget report provided by the Secretariat.

Agenda item 12.3: Operational Guidelines of the Small Grants Fund

Decision SC34-18: The Standing Committee approved the draft SGF Operational Guidelines 2006-2008, subject to the inclusion of an amended text to paragraph 3 of the Operational Guidelines to read as follows:

“3. In line with the criteria established for SGF eligibility by COP6 Resolution VI.6, all countries and overseas territories on the List of Aid Recipients established by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), effective from 2006 for reporting on 2005, 2006 and 2007 (as available in Section G of these guidelines) shall be eligible for receiving assistance from the SGF. In practical terms this means that all developing countries and those overseas territories included in the OECD DAC List provided in Section G of these guidelines have access to the fund.”

And to amend Stage II Section C of the assessment form to reflect the structure of the new OECD DAC list.

The SC also agreed that:

- a) the most up-to-date OECD DAC List of Aid Recipients should continue to be used *mutatis mutandis* as applying to Ramsar Contracting Parties and their overseas territories, and other countries that are eligible for accession, for eligibility for the Small Grants Fund as established by Resolution VI.6;
- b) the Secretariat, when allocating assistance for participation at Ramsar meetings, should use the OECD DAC list in the following order of priorities, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties:
 - i) Least Developed Country (LDC) Contracting Parties;
 - ii) Other Low Income Contracting Parties;
 - iii) Contracting Parties which are Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories; and
 - iv) Contracting Parties which are Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories.
- 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 other eligible countries in order of priority as in b) above.

Agenda item 12.4: Strategy for improving the status and resourcing of the SGF

Decision SC34-19: Considering the need to further explore and find innovative mechanisms for better resourcing the SGF (DOC. SC34-19), the Standing Committee decided to: 1) express thanks to those countries which have provided, and continue to provide, support to the Ramsar SGF through their voluntary contributions; 2) urge the Secretary General to continue as a matter of priority to find innovative ways and means of securing continuing and additional funding for the Ramsar SGF, including working with

key partners, especially the Convention's International Organisation Partners (IOPs), to consider establishment of collaborative SGF initiatives; and 3) request the Secretary General to undertake intersessional discussions on this matter, and report on progress to the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 12.5: Parties with arrears in payments of contributions

Decision SC34-20: Having considered the options for encouragement and/or potentially punitive measures provided in DOC SC34-20, the Standing Committee decided to:

- i) request the Secretariat to produce timely and easily readable statements of contributions, including all unpaid portions, for Contracting Parties in arrears;
- ii) request Contracting Parties experiencing difficulties in meeting their financial contributions to propose a plan to provide for the payment of contributions in arrears within a limited period, and to deadlines agreed with the Secretariat;
- iii) instruct that in assisting Contracting Parties to develop such a plan, the Chair of the Standing Committee, the Standing Committee regional representatives, and the Secretary General should make contacts, through diplomatic channels, with those Parties having arrears to plan settlement of their outstanding contributions;
- iv) instruct the Secretary General to undertake discussion on resolving these matters with the diplomatic representation in Switzerland of those Contracting Parties in arrears;
- v) instruct the Secretariat to continue exploring practices applied by other conventions; and
- vi) treat points i-iv above as part of a formal review process, to be communicated annually to the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 12.6: Financial arrangements for MedWet and other regional initiatives

Decision SC34-21: Having considered the matters raised in DOC. SC34-21 and DOC. SC34-21 Addendum, the Standing Committee decided to:

- i) confirm approval of a core budget allocation of CHF 20,000 to the implementation of the "Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands";
- ii) establish the process for allocation of core budget funds for 2007 to approved regional initiatives as set out in paragraph 16 of DOC. SC34-21, as follows:
 - a) approve, in principle, an allocation of 2007 core funds to each of those regional initiatives receiving such funds in 2006, with amounts to be allocated based on requests from each initiative, and otherwise similar to those in the 2006 allocations.
 - b) agree that final approval of 2007 and 2008 allocations be subject to:
 - i) confirmation or otherwise by each regional initiative by 31 October 2006 that they are requesting core funding for 2007 and 2008, and the amounts requested; and
 - ii) for 2007, receipt by the Secretariat not later than 15 January 2007, and transmitted to the Subgroup on Finance, of a satisfactory financial report on the use of the 2006 funds allocated. This would be in line with the terms of paragraph 14 of Resolution IX.7.

- c) Depending on the dates set for the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee, the approvals of core budget allocations to regional initiatives for 2007 be made at that meeting, if it takes place in early 2007, or by electronic circulation to the Subgroup on Finance and then Standing Committee in early 2007.
- iii) urge the Secretariat to continue to provide assistance to the MedWet Coordination Unit in seeking to resolve its cashflow problems consequent on delayed receipt of agreed country annual contributions, and
- iv) strongly urge those Contracting Parties entering into commitments to financially support regional initiatives approved as operating in the framework of the Convention, to make these payments in a timely manner.

Agenda item 12.7: Ramsar Sites Information Service

Decision SC34-22: Having considered the matters raised in DOC. SC34-22, the Standing Committee decided to: 1) note the report provided by the Secretariat on developments of the Ramsar Sites Information Service; 2) encourage the Secretariat and interested organizations to undertake further work to consider development of a cost-effective consortium approach to the future delivery of the Service, including with all IOPs, UNEP-WCMC and others; and 3) request the Secretariat to keep the Standing Committee informed of progress on these matters.

Subgroup on Finance – Other business

Decision SC34-23: The Standing Committee welcomed the establishment of the Crane Bank Ramsar Award and warmly thanked the Crane Bank for its support to the Convention by strengthening its implementation in Africa.

Agenda item 11: Secretary General matters

Decision SC34-24: The Standing Committee agreed to extend the contract of the Secretary General and congratulated Dr Peter Bridgewater on the job well done so far, and it noted that there seemed to be merit in the idea of aligning the tenure of the SG with the triennial cycle of meetings of the Conference of the Parties. The Committee tasked the Management Working Group to examine reports from IUCN's Human Resources office on the exact period of contract extension that seemed sensible and the possibilities of aligning the term of the SG's appointment with the cycle of the COP, and to report back to SC35 on these matters, and it requested the Management Working Group to agree a mechanism for conducting the Secretary General's performance evaluation.

Agenda item 13: Dates of the next Standing Committee meeting

Decision SC34-25: The Standing Committee set the dates of its 35th meeting for the week of 12-15 February 2007 and agreed to keep 16 February open until the development of a more detailed agenda of business can determine whether or not it will be needed.

Agenda item 14: Adoption of the report of the meeting

Decision SC34-26: The Standing Committee adopted the first two days of the draft report of the meeting and authorized the Chair of the Committee to approve the final day on its behalf.

