

Report of the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee

First day, 3 June 2008

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Paul Mafabi (Uganda), Chair of the Standing Committee (SC)**, welcomed the participants to this most important meeting of the SC, which is charged with making the final preparations for the documents to be considered at the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10). He acknowledged the Secretariat's efforts in drafting the documents for SC consideration. He cited a number of important issues on the agenda, including the legal status of the Secretariat; wetlands and climate change; extractive industries; wetlands and agriculture, food security, biofuels, and rising food prices; the frequency and timing of COPs and regional meetings; the long-term financing of the Convention and Small Grants Fund (SGF); and taking advantage of other ongoing initiatives in Africa and Asia. He said that the success of the COP will largely depend upon what we produce this week.
2. **Mark Smith (IUCN)** welcomed the participants on behalf of the IUCN Director General and noted that this is an important year for Ramsar, and for IUCN as well, as its World Conservation Congress will be taking place in Barcelona just two weeks before COP10. He observed that this is a year of intense public attention to conservation, and that people and governments are looking for answers – thus we must seize the opportunity to push sustainability to the top of the public agenda. He noted that the diversity of important issues covered in the Ramsar draft Resolutions (DRs) demonstrates that water and wetlands are at the very heart of all of them, and that Ramsar has a pivotal role to play. The Convention and its implementation must be connected to wider dialogues, not only on water and biodiversity, but also on climate, health, poverty, and energy.
3. **Mark Smith** noted that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment laid down a marker that the contributions of ecosystems to human well-being are in danger of being lost. Reducing those threats is not simple, but good policy choices are available, and both the Ramsar and IUCN meetings will be vital forums for getting those messages across. He looked forward to seeing Ramsar move to the centre of key global debates on sustainable futures, and he invited delegates to participate in the World Conservation Congress in October.
4. **Mark Smith (IUCN)** also welcomed the participants on behalf of the five International Organization Partners. He noted that a number of high profile global issues have been making headlines recently and dominating international policy debates, and he said that it is vital that water policy and water management be able to respond effectively to these long-term drivers of change. The IOPs urge the Parties to seize the opportunity by ensuring that COP10 demonstrates that the Convention is an integral part of the global policy framework. He indicated that Ramsar must be able to shape global responses that are compatible with wetland conservation and wise use or risk being overtaken by events, and

said that the proposed DRs show that Ramsar can play a constructive role in ensuring that policy choices will be sustainable ones. Ramsar Parties have an opportunity to fulfill their treaty commitments and ensure that the benefits of wetland services are incorporated into responses to current global challenges.

5. **Mark Smith** stressed the urgency of backing sustainable solutions with multisectoral strategies and urged Ramsar authorities to work with their colleagues in the climate, energy, and development sectors. He also urged that we turn dialogue and policy into effective action – the draft Strategic Plan offers strategies but we must look for opportunities to go further and more quickly by demonstrating best practice in the management of river basins and coastal zones. He pledged the IOPs’ support to the Parties in shortening the distance between policy and action, and he noted that the IOPs will be organizing a set of “IOP Supporting Events” at the COP to highlight the interrelationships between wetlands and climate change mitigation and adaptation and between wetlands, biofuels, and agriculture. He urged the Convention to continue to reach out and help shape better global environmental governance by coordinating with other MEAs and developing coordination with the UNFCCC. The IOPs look forward to seeing COP10 become a platform for Ramsar to position water and wetlands at the heart of global action.
6. **The Secretary General (SG)** welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of ensuring that developing countries are enabled to participate fully in COP10 – he thanked Hungary, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland for their contributions for sponsored delegates and encouraged other Parties to come forward. He thanked the Republic of Korea for building a good relationship with the Secretariat; he thanked the STRP for its work, the IOPs for their contributions, and the staff for their commitment and teamwork. He welcomed Ms Nathalie Rizzotti, our new project officer for the Danone/Evian Initiative, and Ms Jiyoung Hwang, our COP logistics liaison seconded from Korea, and he introduced the new MedWet Coordinator, Mr Adnan Budieri. He thanked Switzerland for speaking up for wetlands at the 16th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.
7. **The SG** enumerated the important issues to be discussed, including the timing of the next COP, the legal status and the staff and structure of the Secretariat, the core budget, partnerships with the business sector, regional initiatives, and most importantly how the Ramsar guidelines are being used. He noted that payment for ecosystem services, the ongoing dialogue with the GEF to facilitate Ramsar Parties taking advantage of funding opportunities, the “water footprint” of business companies, and a number of ongoing strategic planning processes in Africa, Asia and Europe are additional issues to be addressed. He said that Ramsar is relatively the least well-known of the global conventions, though it is the most experienced and most effective, and it is also the smallest despite the growing numbers of Parties and sites. He said that Ramsar must become an “integrator of partnerships” in order to extend the Convention’s influence into the Parties and to civil society as a whole.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

8. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** explained that the COP9 Credentials Committee recommended an amendment to the Rules of Procedure, and this will be circulated for later discussion during the meeting.

9. The agenda, with that addition, was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of Observers

10. It was noted that non-member Parties and the IOPs do not require admission, and only Dave Pritchard, assisting the Secretariat, and Carl Bruch, a legal consultant, need to be admitted. The observers were admitted by consensus.

Agenda item 4: Preparations for the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

11. **The Republic of Korea** thanked the Secretariat and noted that the four-member Secretariat logistics team visited in April and expressed satisfaction with the preparations. He explained the progress of preparations to date. The visa issue is a challenging one but the government is taking the necessary steps: Participants from Parties that do not have a Korean mission will be able to obtain a visa upon arrival. He urged everyone to pre-register as soon as possible and to seek help in the event of any visa problems. An official Housing Bureau has been established and participants can book accommodations on-line or by fax, and again he urged everyone to do so as early as possible. Exhibition space and side event facilities will be available. Eight complimentary full- and half-day excursions will be offered on documents day and a variety of other programmes before, during, and after the COP will be available. He invited everyone to visit Korea and learn about its culture.
12. **The SG** thanked the Republic of Korea for the hospitality shown to him and the logistics team during their visits. He said that Korea will soon launch its COP Web site and the Secretariat will post key COP information on the Ramsar Web site in mid-June. He urged everyone to pre-register as early as possible. He thanked Korea for having seconded Ms Hwang to assist the Secretariat.
13. **Malawi** inquired about the cost of visas on arrival. **Korea** noted that making visas available on arrival for participants from countries with no Korean mission is an extraordinary service, but he could not yet specify the cost; it will be noted on Korea's COP Web site.
14. To inquiries, **Korea** explained that talks are still continuing with the Secretariat about the Opening Ceremony – there will be the COP flag hand-over, some high-level speeches, and five minute interventions from IOPs and major organizations, as well as a “children’s declaration” and the conferring of the Ramsar Awards and Evian Special Prize. There are pros and cons to having a ministerial segment, but as it could help raise awareness of Ramsar, Korea is ready to talk with the Secretariat and SC about that possibility.
15. **The SG** explained that ideally the Convention would subsidize as many participants from the developing world as possible, but traditionally the objective is to fund two participants from each developing country that is Party to the Convention. If contributions are insufficient, however, that might have to be reduced to only one delegate.
16. **The DSG** explained that in the ensuing discussions of draft Resolutions (DRs) participants proposing a change in text should provide that in writing to one of the Regional Assistants, who will photocopy it, return the original, and give the copy to Dave Pritchard, who will keep track of amendments to the documents.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Management Working Group (MWG)

17. **The Chair** noted that the report of the MWG's Monday meeting has been distributed.

Agenda item 5.1: Establishment of an MWG Transition Committee (DOC SC37-1)

18. **The DSG** explained a few minor amendments proposed by Switzerland.

Decision SC37-1: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the establishment and operations of an MWG Transition Committee, as amended.

Agenda item 5.2: The legal status of the Secretariat (DOCs SC37-2 and SC37-2 add.1)

19. **The Chair** summarized the MWG's discussions of the SG's progress report and Switzerland's response to it and noted that the SG estimated that some CHF 50,000 would be needed to obtain further expert advice.
20. **Mr Carl Bruch** of the Environmental Law Institute in the USA made a presentation of the preliminary results of his study of the problems and three potential options proposed to him by the Secretariat and independently summarized in DOC. SC37-2. He explained the situation for a number of similar secretariats that exemplify the three proposed solutions of 1) an improved relationship with IUCN and the host country Switzerland, 2) the status of an independent international organization, and 3) incorporation into the United Nations system in some way. He noted that, according to the wording of Article 8.1, becoming an independent organization would likely require an amendment to the Convention text. He drew three overall conclusions – that no option would solve all of the perceived problems, that some options would solve more problems than others do, and that some problems will likely never be solved – and said that his full analysis will be ready by the end of July.
21. **El Salvador** inquired why the Basel Convention was to be included in the study, and **Mr Bruch** noted that it is administered by UNEP and of comparable size with Ramsar.
22. **Gabon** noted that the legal status issue is ongoing but no decisions are being made, and he urged that a decision should be made soon, especially for the sake of the non-European staff members. He reported that the African SC members have been working on this issue independently and have had discussions with the German government, and have some proposals to offer. He expressed surprise that there has been no mention of the German document and insisted that the Convention cannot keep avoiding these issues.
23. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** thanked Mr Bruch and requested that his PowerPoint presentation be made available. He suggested that the need for amendment of the Convention meant that Option 2 is no longer feasible.
24. **Benin** thanked Mr Bruch for the high quality analysis. He noted that one of the constraints is whether a convention signed by sovereign states can ever come under the administration of an NGO. He felt that only the third option seems feasible and that it should be considered before the next COP. He said that all are agreed on the need for a strong Ramsar Convention, which must not lag behind the other MEAs, so the UN option deserves more consideration.

25. **Austria** thanked Mr Bruch for his insightful presentation and explained that the legal services of the Austrian Foreign Affairs Office offered this opinion concerning the second option:

“The establishment of the Ramsar Secretariat as an independent International Organization entails the setting up of an intergovernmental negotiation committee (INC) for the purpose of negotiating an international treaty (statutes etc.) for Ramsar. In the worst case this would mean a process of negotiations for several years. The currently well functioning Secretariat would be occupied with this process, and would, in its current form, not be able to continue substantive work on other important matters. Such a process also includes the danger of re-opening all established procedures, formalities, and even the content of the Convention etc, and would bear substantial financial implications. In addition, after finalising this cumbersome negotiation process, all countries wishing to participate would need to ratify the treaty again, which again might take another couple of years before the treaty becomes fully operational again.

“Such a procedure would also contradict current efforts in the context of enhancing international environmental governance, where the aim is a more coherent (instead of a fragmented) institutional framework for international (UN) environmental activities. There are easier and more cost-efficient ways for finding solutions for the problems raised in the background document (travel visa, work permits etc.), where Switzerland as the host country could be helpful and instrumental in solving some of the issues.”

26. **Austria** indicated that he has been informed that the United Kingdom supports the first option of instructing the Secretariat to continue negotiations with IUCN and Switzerland to improve the present relationship.
27. **Germany** welcomed the interest expressed by the African members of the SC to consider relocating the Secretariat to Bonn and noted that Bonn is an excellent site as the Secretariat could achieve considerable synergies with the 17 UN agencies and numerous NGOs in the field of sustainable development already located there. These plans would therefore be in line with current efforts to strengthen synergies among all MEAs. She noted that on the basis of the request of the African countries a meeting took place in Bonn and an assessment was drawn up by the Federal Foreign Office and Environment Ministry. The German government is empowered to grant certain privileges and immunities to international governmental organizations established through international agreements, and it is willing to review whether these provisions could be applied to Ramsar as part of negotiations.
28. **Germany** indicated that a letter giving general information on legal, organizational and financial issues was sent to the Secretariat and circulated to SC members. If that were to meet with SC approval, the Environment Ministry would begin drawing up a concrete offer as a fourth option for consideration at COP10.
29. **Switzerland** noted that the Secretariat’s paper had been circulated prior to consultations about the 10 March meeting with Swiss authorities, and he reviewed the Swiss response as embodied in DOC. SC37-2 add.1. He clarified matters concerning the Swiss fiscal

agreement with IUCN granting tax-free status to non-Swiss employees (whereby the IUCN/Ramsar practice of withholding an equivalent sum is not part of the agreement), the access of Ramsar family members to the Swiss employment market, visa procedures for people entering Switzerland, and the fact that Switzerland's hosting agreement with the UN would apply equally to Ramsar, too, if the Convention were to integrate with the UN system. He drew attention to a number of potential disadvantages for Ramsar staff if the Convention were to join the UN, including lost access to Swiss employment upon leaving UN employment and loss of Swiss social security (etc.) arrangements. He said that Switzerland does not favor any option but feels that Option 1 would be fine, 2 would be difficult but possible, and 3 would be easy to implement in Switzerland.

30. **Switzerland** expressed surprise about contacts taken between some SC members and one Contracting Party about relocating to Bonn, because there was no mandate from the SC or the COP to investigate that option. He noted that according to contacts taken, the Geneva mission as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Party had no knowledge of this affair.
31. **Germany** noted that the letter alluded to has been agreed with the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.
32. **The USA** welcomed the information provided by Switzerland and noted that none of the options provides a "quick fix". She noted that Option 1 seems to be the only feasible one and saw no need for further study of the others. She observed that, despite SC requests, there has been a lack of focus in the Secretariat's efforts to negotiate an improved situation with IUCN, and she foresaw in the other options potential unintended consequences, in terms of loss of operational capacities and financial and logistic implications, and perhaps new administrative obstacles – she feared that the highly effective implementation of the Convention could be lost, and she urged that any further study should be more focused on actual problems, especially with IUCN, and the USA offered to assist in resolving them.
33. **Japan** thanked Mr Bruch and the Secretariat and noted that some of the problems cited are not directly related to the implementation of the Convention. She urged continued discussions with IUCN and Switzerland with a strong focus on resolving problems directly related to implementation, and requested that all pros and cons should be presented in a document for COP10. Japan called for more detail on the positive results of remaining with IUCN.
34. **The Republic of Korea** urged that COP10 should discuss the steps forward to reaching a decision on these matters at COP11 and dissuaded the Parties from wasting energy now and distracting us from implementation of the Convention.
35. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** recalled that the mandate to the Secretariat was to consult on 'transforming' the legal status and its implications, and that 'transferring' the Secretariat was not part of that mandate. He felt that the UNEP option was feasible but, giving their staffing requirements, perhaps inconvenient (as we like our present Secretary General). He urged that we should await the outcome of negotiations with IUCN, since the Secretariat is presently well placed and well served. He encouraged serious negotiations with IUCN, further investigation of the UNEP option, and no decision before we learn the outcome of those.

36. **China** emphasized that the option selected for the legal status of the Secretariat should be beneficial to better implementation of the Convention. She noted the SG's appreciation of China's efforts in improving the visibility of the Ramsar Secretariat by inviting the SG to participate in and address the high-level meeting co-hosted by China and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
37. **Ecuador** noted that the problem is that the Secretariat does not exist legally and said that the Secretariat is one of many IUCN programmes and that diminishes the visibility of the Convention.
38. **Gabon** welcomed the discussion as an indication that matters are beginning to move forward. He said that we should not rely on the mandate of Resolution IX.10 since we haven't been able to move forward, and he noted that the African SC members, who want the Convention to grow and evolve, seem to have got things moving forward at last.
39. **The Chair** read out the mandate in Resolution IX.10 para 9, which instructed the SG to report to COP10 on the outcome of investigations.
40. **Carl Bruch** noted that his analysis does not address relocation, as that was not part of the terms of reference. He invited the SC to instruct him about any particular additional issues it would like his study to include.
41. **The SG** reported that he has consulted with IUCN, UNEP, UNESCO, and Switzerland as requested and apologized that there had not been sufficient time to invite comment from Switzerland on the results of their meeting. Despite repeated efforts, there has been no productive response from UNESCO or UNEP [but cf. para. 158 below]. He felt that we now need an external expert view and additional information, especially on cost implications of the three options. He reported that we have sought offers for social schemes from two Swiss companies and, though responses are incomplete, it is clear that we cannot replace the current system fully. The SG urged that we drop Option 2 and concentrate on investigating Options 1 and 3. He noted that further meetings with IUCN are planned for just after the SC meetings.
42. **The USA** questioned whether, if after all of these approaches from the Secretary General there has been no response from UNEP and UNESCO, we should pay someone else just to try again.
43. **Iran** queried whether contracting power such as the CMS has arranged in Germany could be arranged with Switzerland. **The SG** noted that the contractual arrangement is not actually a major problem for us, since we have delegated power from IUCN – rather the problem is that a few Contracting Parties do not recognize that. **Carl Bruch** noted that the CMS's contracting ability comes from being administered by the UN and he would like to compare that with the delegation of powers from IUCN.
44. **The DSG** drew attention to the difficulties involved in amending the Convention text, which requires a request for a COP by 1/3 of the Parties, adoption of the amendment by 2/3 of the Parties, and subsequent ratification by 2/3 of the Parties. The Regina Amendments took seven years to gain sufficient ratifications to enter into force in 2004.

45. **The Chair** noted that the discussion seems to be focusing on Options 1 and 3 and that there has been inadequate analysis of Option 1. He urged prioritizing the issues into short- and long-term problems and found that there is so far no consensus on the matter.
46. **The SG** explained the difficult actuarial studies still required if we are to compare the present status with, for example, calculating staff costs by moving into the UN staff grading system. **The DSG** noted that, unlike other secretariats, we have no legal advisor on the staff.
47. **The USA** noted that the required additional costs apply only to studying the UN option and, in the absence so far of any voluntary contributions, those resources would be unavailable until after the COP's adoption of a new budget. Thus, the first step should be to explore the "status quo plus" Option 1, which has no costs attached to it, and then the COP can decide whether additional funding should be provided for the study of the UN Option 3.
48. **Switzerland** questioned what more Switzerland could do to improve Option 1, since all concerns have already been met, but as to Option 3, he urged that the Secretariat must insist on answers from IUCN, UNEP, the UN in Geneva, etc., and Switzerland is ready to help with that.
49. **The DSG** indicated that as the Secretariat continues discussions with IUCN we will go back to Switzerland for further consultations as needed.
50. **Japan** supported the USA's view that we should first explore thoroughly the improvement of the status quo option with IUCN and Switzerland.
51. **Benin** urged that we need to consider Options 1 and 3 in depth and propose a solution for a COP10 final decision. He said that if we cannot propose a solution for COP10, we should at least bring both options for a decision there.
52. **The Chair** argued that, if there were sufficient resources, we could do a full analysis before COP10, but without those resources we must prefer a two-step process, starting with a continued more focused discussion with IUCN and Switzerland, especially on short-term problems, and taking account of the clarifications by the Swiss authorities, and continued pressure for information from UNEP, so that we can come to COP10 with a clear understanding of what is possible under the current structure.
53. **Switzerland**, reiterating the clarifications of some issues, expressed willingness to continue discussions on any further outstanding issues.
54. **Gabon** argued against closing off any options at this stage (except for Option 2) and wished the record to show that Gabon would not be happy about looking at only Option 1 at this point. We should be investigating both Options 1 and 3.
55. **The DSG** and **Switzerland** urged that the SC decision should note with concern the absence of adequate responses from UNEP and others and call for a better response. [It was subsequently determined that UNEP had responded on 26 February; cf. para. 158 below.]

Decision SC37-2: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to continue more focused discussions on all three options to the extent possible as far as funding is available. (See also Decision SC37-16 below.)

Agenda item 5.2: Facilitating the work of the Secretariat (DOC. SC37-3 rev. 1)

56. **The DSG** indicated that the intention of this DR is to encourage the Ramsar Administrative Authorities (AAs) to influence other sectors of their governments to treat Secretariat staff as representatives of an important intergovernmental treaty to which they are a Party. He noted the amendments suggested by Switzerland.
57. **Gabon** and **Cameroon** queried the legal status of this DR and whether it would be binding on Parties.
58. **Switzerland** suggested adding that the DR should encourage Parties to intervene in intergovernmental organizations of which they are members so that the Ramsar Secretariat will obtain the appropriate status that it needs, and he suggested that “travel documents” should be specified as visas.
59. **Gabon** felt that the DR has no reason for being, since the Parties should be solving the legal status problem and not just agreeing to facilitate the staff.
60. **Switzerland** noted that the added sentence was helpful in Swiss efforts to ensure that the Secretary General gained full access at CSD-16, and she noted that all of us are ambassadors of this Convention.
61. **The USA** suggested a rewording of para 4.
62. **Carl Bruch** explained that the nature of Resolutions by convention COPs is a matter of active scholarly debate – they are often binding on the Secretariats, but not generally on others. However, such a Resolution does send a message and help to improve the visibility of the Secretariat – it is not binding, but it can help in making the argument.
63. **Cameroon** expressed satisfaction with this explanation, that the DR is making a suggestion to Parties and not obliging them. **The Chair** said that it would be an important commitment by the AAs to take action. **Bahamas** suggested that it would help if the Secretariat began to correspond directly with the Foreign Offices of the Parties.
64. **The DSG** noted that the DR would do no harm and might well help on some occasions. He suggested additional text. **The SG** explained that one could not take this Resolution to the consulate and expect instant results, but it serves as a reminder for our AAs of their commitment to support the Secretariat.
65. **Namibia** questioned the intention of the phrase “high profile at meetings” and **the SG** explained that we need to get an opportunity to explain our views in high level segments and that is not always automatic. **The Chair** suggested that the DR should include mentions of the CSD, ECOSOC, etc.
66. **Kenya** questioned whether this DR would really add value, since the AAs will always be helpful anyway. The solution would be greater synergy with the other organizations.

67. **Gabon** felt that the DR would not solve the problems that African delegates face in getting visas. **Cameroon** queried whether these interim steps would be binding and recounted his own difficulties in obtaining a visa for a Ramsar meeting. He felt that the DR would be pointless unless legally binding and that we need binding solutions rather than interim measures.
68. **Ecuador** noted that any binding nature of Resolutions depends upon the governments incorporating them into law, by presidential decree, statute, etc.
69. **The SG** reiterated that just because it is not binding does not mean that it is not useful – the Convention has no enforcement mechanism but it does indicate a commitment on the part of the Parties.

Second day, 4 June 2008

Decision SC37-3: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on facilitating the operations of the Secretariat, as amended.

Agenda item 5.3: Frequency and timing of the COPs (DOC. SC37-4)

70. **The Chair** explained that there are four parts to the DR: 1) changing the timing of the COPs from ca. November to May-June every year; 2) changing from a 3- to a 4-year cycle for the COPs; 3) holding regional meetings midway between COPs and enhancing their importance; and 4) permitting rotation of the venues of SC meetings, resources permitting. He invited Austria to provide further detail.
71. **Austria** recalled fruitful discussions of the DR at the European regional meeting and the MWG meeting on Monday. He noted that the amended DR gives more prominence to regional meetings, which presently have no formal terms of reference, as opportunities to assess implementation progress midway through the COP cycle, and he explained that the SC venue option would not be obligatory but would depend upon hosts or contributors assuming the costs of moving nearly the whole Secretariat to the meeting.
72. **Austria** reviewed the arguments provided in the document and calculated that the financial savings of the 4-year COP cycle would be about 25%, though these would not be real savings since no funding is provided for COPs in the core budget. He estimated the additional costs of rotating the venue of SC meetings at about CHF 82,000 per year.
73. **Samoa** felt that if regional meetings were to be held two years before each COP, issues might develop in the interim, and there would need to be a means for updating.
74. **The Netherlands** and **Slovenia** drew attention to the need to synchronize Ramsar COPs with major meetings of other bodies and urged that COP11 should be scheduled for 3 ½ years after COP10, at which time the decision could be made whether to go to a 4-year cycle thereafter, after consulting with the other biodiversity-related conventions. **Slovenia** supported the proposal on regional meetings and expressed willingness to consider the rotating SC venue proposal.

75. **Kenya** supported the rotating SC venue, which would bring greater publicity in other regions, but argued that the host countries should contribute to the additional costs. He felt that the COP should be held every three years in the northern summer and should be scheduled in consultation with other MEAs. He feared that if regional meetings have no budget allocated for them the African countries might be disadvantaged as potential hosts.
76. **Argentina** argued that the COPs should remain on a 3-year interval, which gives the opportunity to follow up on work and regularly consider important technical and financial issues. He agreed with the need to strengthen the regional meetings.
77. **The USA** noted that the 4-year COP cycle would leave more time for the Secretariat to focus on the business of the Parties, as preparing for each COP is an enormous preoccupation, including the necessity of fundraising some CHF 3 million. She said that the Ramsar Convention is very conservative with its budget and so we must use the Secretariat's time most effectively. Noting the importance of regional meetings, she felt that more time could be devoted to them as well; they don't get the attention they need, and we could concentrate on making them more significant, perhaps even adding something to the core budget for them.
78. **The USA** argued that an important challenge for all conventions is the checks and balances in their governance, and for Ramsar the SC is the real watchdog, the implementing arm of the Parties, that makes the Convention so effective. The first SC meeting for new SC members is a learning experience, and it is only by their third and last year that members are sufficiently informed and involved – by adding a 4th year into the COP and SC cycles, we would be empowering SC members to make the SC work better.
79. **Ecuador** observed that we need to recognize that we have a new set of challenges, some positive and some not. The 4-year cycle would enable Parties to implement the Resolutions more effectively – Ramsar excels at producing guidelines and Resolutions but there is not always enough time to implement them. The work of the STRP would be facilitated, as it would have more time to progress its growing workload.
80. **Uruguay** understands arguments in favor of rotating SC venues through the regions to raise the Convention's profile but feared that many observer Parties would be unable to participate as they are frequently represented through their Geneva missions, and thus preferred that the SC continue to meet in Gland. Uruguay preferred the 3-year cycle for COPs.
81. **Switzerland** suggested establishing a table of pros and cons for the COP's consideration and urged further thought about changing the terms of reference for regional meetings, with attention to budgeting and to the standing of their recommendations. She wondered whether an additional round of regional meetings might later be thought necessary. She expressed doubt about rotating the SC venues, partly because we would lose the possibility of representation through the Geneva permanent missions to the UN, but also because we might find it difficult to refuse hosting offers even from countries with insufficient resources to cover their additional costs. There might well be greater logistics and cost problems than we foresee and more time required for the Secretariat to prepare for them. Switzerland remained reluctant to support some of these issues.

82. **WWF** felt that the 4-year cycle would be attractive because of the huge workload involved in the preparation of each COP. He argued that it would have to be clear that countries offering to host an SC meeting would need to cover the costs, but still felt that more staff time would be needed to prepare it.
83. **The Republic of Korea** called for more information on the pros and cons before deciding on this important issue.
84. **Wetlands International** called for more than just practicalities in the table of pros and cons – we are seeking more visibility in the global debates and need to weigh any possible loss from a prolonged period between our major meetings. She urged caution in moving towards a greater regional focus at the expense of our presence in global debates and called for an analysis of that sort of issue.
85. **Brazil** feared that some developing countries would not be able to host an SC meeting and we would thus be creating an imbalance between developed and developing countries. Brazil offered text for two amendments.
86. **China** said that COPs are of great benefit especially to developing countries as they provide a platform for them to be updated on global wetland conservation progress and to conduct information exchange and capacity building. Rotating SC meeting venues is a good idea that could promote exchange among various Parties, but the difficulties and costs of organizing such meetings also have to be taken into account.
87. **The DSG** noted that Spain moved COP8 to the northern autumn for its own reasons and a COP Resolution would not be necessary to move the COPs back to the May-June period. He suggested that the SC could itself decide to schedule COP11 for 2 ½ or 3 ½ years after COP10, but cautioned that 2 ½ years would be far too short a time for the Secretariat. If 3 ½ years is decided, suitable adjustments would have to be made to other documents under consideration, such as the Strategic Plan, CEPA Programme, and budget proposals.
88. **The Czech Republic** welcomed the idea of rotating the SC venues but felt that, though many Parties would be willing to host the SC, not many would be able to cover the costs. The regional meetings are excellent opportunities to exchange experiences on implementation and discuss regional issues. She agreed that COP11 should be scheduled for the May-June period in 2012, i.e., 3 ½ years after COP10.
89. **The Chair** summarized that the members would like to have more information on the pros and cons of both the 4-year COP cycle and the rotating SC venue proposals. **Switzerland** urged that two tables of pros and cons be provided, one on each of those proposals.

Decision SC37-4: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the frequency and timing of COPs and SC meeting venues, as amended, and it requested the Secretariat and Austria to further develop the background part of DOC. SC37-4 as a COP information paper.

90. **Argentina** argued that given the importance of this issue it should be decided at the COP 10. **Switzerland** argued that it would be important for budgeting and other reasons to

decide now when COP11 will take place. **Ecuador** preferred scheduling COP11 in 2012, 3 ½ years after COP10. **Slovenia** urged that we specify “the first half” of 2012, rather than May-June, in order to provide flexibility in synchronizing with other major meetings and meeting the potential host country’s needs.

Decision SC37-5: The Standing Committee decided that the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties should take place in the first half of 2012, 3 ½ years following COP10, and instructed the Secretariat to adjust budget proposals and other time-delimited documents for COP10 to take account of this decision.

Agenda item 5.4: Future Secretariat structure and staffing (DOC. SC37-5).

91. **The DSG** provided background on the issue and indicated that Decision SC36-15 endorsed the SG’s proposals “in a general sense”. DOC. SC37-5 provides the additional information requested by SC36.
92. **Japan** welcomed the additional information but noted that the proposed senior staff has not been simplified, as called for by SC36. **The SG** noted that the SC added the post of Science Coordinator and he hoped that the SC would endorse the proposal for a Regional Affairs Coordinator. **The DSG** dissuaded from going back to reopen issues decided by SC36 and argued that the staff diagrams in SC37-5 reflect exactly what was called for by SC36.
93. **The USA** recalled that SC35 endorsed a temporary reorganization because of the situation under the SG at that time. In SC36 discussions, the Parties did not want new mid-level management structures, and that included the temporary position of a coordinator for regional programmes. He felt that the regional programmes should be strengthened under the level of the Senior Regional Advisors (SRAs), and he expressed surprise at the different interpretations of the SC’s intent.
94. **Brazil** agreed that SC36 was not in favor of more management-level positions and felt that the coordinator of regional programmes would duplicate the work of the SRAs. It would be preferable to consider more technical personnel rather than more management-level staff.
95. **Ecuador** recalled the MWG’s discussion of the need to include one staff member to deal with the UN and the MEAs and another for the private sector and NGOs, and he urged creating these two new positions. Concerning the regional coordinator, he noted the need to strengthen the regional teams and coordinate their efforts.
96. **Switzerland** agreed with the USA that the quick fix was meant to be temporary. She felt that the SRAs are very important and there might be too few of them, and she urged the Parties to consider seconding staff to the Secretariat. She suggested that, if it is too much for the DSG to coordinate regional affairs, that responsibility could be moved to the SG, who knows that aspect of the Secretariat’s work very well. She urged that we need more regional staff, perhaps with two regional advisors for each region.
97. **Benin** argued that the SC did not ask for a complete rethinking of staff structures. He noted that SC36 discussed the need for more regional support, and he pointed out that Africa has twice the number of Parties now with no increase in staff to assist them. He felt

that the partnership coordinator's role should be the responsibility of the SG and DSG, with no new posts.

98. **China** observed that the internal bodies of the Secretariat should be restructured with a principle of economy and cost-effectiveness. Noting the importance of enhancing collaboration with other organizations, she urged that establishing partnerships will benefit fundraising and contribute to the implementation of the Convention by various Parties. China supported setting up a new staff of partnership development and recruiting staff to initiate that work at an early stage.
99. **The Chair** pointed out the need to harmonize the interpretations of what happened at SC36 and asked the interested parties to discuss that and report back later. [See Decision SC37-17 below.]

Agenda item 6: Financial matters

100. **The USA, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, drew attention to the report of the Subgroup's Monday meeting. **Paulette Kennedy, the Finance Officer**, explained that the 2007 audited accounts have still not been provided by IUCN's auditor but are promised in about two weeks. She indicated that the year ended well and the surplus has been added to the Reserve Fund, which will soon reach its full 12% of budget level.
101. **The USA** summarized the Subgroup's considerations on the four proposed budget options, as seen in DOC. SC37-7 rev.1, noting that the Subgroup called for additional explanations and some recalculations, and reported that the Subgroup recommended transmitting all four budget proposals to the COP with those additional items.
102. **The Finance Officer** explained that she used the official 2.9% inflation rate to calculate zero real growth for 2009 and would do the same for 2010 and 2011. It was agreed that calculations should be made for all four budget proposals for 2012 as well.
103. **The Czech Republic** felt that the SC should be disappointed at the number of Parties whose contributions are in arrears. She urged that a suitable remedy should be found and proposed that it should include three points: 1) no Parties in arrears can be elected to the Standing Committee; 2) Parties with arrears since 2003 can only have one sponsored delegate to the COP; and 3) Parties with arrears since 1984 can have no sponsored representatives to the COP.
104. **Japan** agreed that the Secretariat's workload has increased significantly but urged that the solution should be to re-examine the work priorities, and thus Japan supported zero nominal growth.
105. **Benin** suggested that the SC should submit only 2 realistic proposals instead of all four and felt that we have sufficient information to agree on only two.
106. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** noted that Iran usually supports zero nominal growth but in this case, since it will be impossible to carry out the COP's mandates otherwise, Iran would support zero real growth if there is no better option.

107. **China** observed that the DR's call for all Parties to pay their contributions by 1 January would be impossible to fulfill for countries with a different fiscal year. **The Subgroup Chair** invited China and the Finance Officer to find a form of words together that would meet that situation. **The Netherlands** indicated that we need to define what "arrears" means.
108. **The USA** and the **Republic of Korea** argued that all of the budget proposals should be on the table at the COP. **The Chair of the Subgroup** suggested that the number of proposals could be reduced from 4 to 3 by omitting the least practical of the four alternatives, which would be the 11% increase proposal. **Benin** reminded the SC that we do have an ambitious plan of action and that the Secretariat has been asked to do a great deal, and that we are agreed on the need to support the regional initiatives – he said that we all worry about budget increases, but these objectives do need money. He pointed out that Ramsar has a low budget compared to other MEAs and asked whether, with nearly 160 Parties now, we can really consider zero growth. **Benin** urged that the SC send to the COP only the 4% and the 11% proposals, taking the 4% as the starting point and considering the 11% as well. **Austria** supported keeping all four proposals on the table for the COP.
109. **China** suggested that the text should define contributions in terms of the Resolution instead of alluding to the UN scale. **The DSG** asked China to consult with the Finance Officer about why the Convention has always defined contributions by reference to the UN scale.

Decision SC37-6: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the four proposed budget options, as amended and with the requested recalculations and explanations.

110. **Gabon** felt that the Czech Republic's proposal for sanctions on arrears would introduce an unacceptable element of exclusion and argued that we need to bear in mind different government structures. **The USA** understood the intent of the proposal but echoed Gabon's concerns about punitive measures. **Brazil** also expressed concern that the proposal could result in COPs with an underrepresentation of developing countries. She argued that we should not punish Parties for their lack of resources and should make a presumption of good faith efforts to resolve their arrears. **Ecuador** agreed that the proposal could decrease the level of participation and urged that we find other ways to solve the problem.
111. **The Chair of the Subgroup** noted that this is not a new issue and recalled that Decision SC34-20 laid out a procedure for remedying the problem without punitive measures, one that includes reporting to the Standing Committee and COP in a formal review process. He noted that the list of Parties in arrears will be communicated to the COP.
112. **Malawi** reminded that punitive measures could result not only in the loss of member countries but also in the loss of their wetlands. He felt that the reason for nonpayment is usually the negligence of some officials and suggested that dialogue would be preferable. He suggested that Parties in arrears might be allowed to attend but not to speak.
113. **Chile** suggested that the Czech proposal could be split into two parts – no election to the SC, which might be appropriate, and no participation or sponsorship, which would not be.

114. **Samoa** requested a list of Parties presently in arrears, and it was noted that an up-to-date list will be included with the COP documentation.
115. **The SG** observed that frequently the reason for nonpayment is that the AA is weak at the national level, and said that we need to find ways to strengthen the AAs.
116. **The Chair of the Subgroup**, following break-out discussions, reported that the Czech Republic's proposal would not be pursued but it was agreed that the list of Parties in arrears would be included in the first mailing of documents (i.e., 27 July 2008).

Agenda item 6.3: Regional initiatives (DOC. SC37-8 rev. 1)

117. **The USA, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, reported that the Subgroup wished to strengthen the operational guidelines and add text on the umbrella initiatives. He described the umbrella initiative concept but noted that, since the idea of transferring responsibility for allocations to the regions has been dropped, it has become less critical. **The Czech Republic** felt that the umbrella concept would entail additional costs and work and urged that it be dropped. **The Chair** noted that the text describes the umbrella concept but does not implement it.
118. **The Chair of the Subgroup** reviewed the various amendments that the Subgroup has made to DOC. SC37-8 concerning new initiatives demonstrating how they would collaborate with existing initiatives, the sustainability of regional efforts, regional evaluations of the progress of their initiatives, etc.
119. **Wetlands International** noted that the Black Sea initiative was previously endorsed as "in preparation" and so is wrongly listed as new.
120. **Iran** offered wording that would differentiate between the regional centres and the regional initiatives, as the centres have a different purpose (ongoing capacity building) from the networks. **The Chair of the Subgroup** explained that both centres and networks are subsumed in the term "regional initiatives" and both are meant to be ongoing. The limits are set by the MedWet cap on funding, not by time. He said that no matter what the kind of initiative, the key issue is sustainability. **Iran** suggested adding words to the effect that the role of the Secretariat would be to assist the initiatives by mobilizing extra resources. **The Subgroup Chair** offered to meet separately with Iran to discuss wording offered on differentiation of initiatives and centres.
121. **Brazil** recalled the decision of a previous contact group meeting that it should be up to the regions to decide how to allocate funds for the initiatives, and so the regions may not need to have umbrella initiatives. **The Chair of the Subgroup** reported that this idea was rejected by a later Subgroup session and that the proposal is to follow the same process as in the present triennium, with the Secretariat evaluating proposals and the COP determining the allocations. Subsequently, substitute language for the DR was agreed to the effect that the definition of "umbrella initiatives" is only informative and in no way implements such a mechanism.
122. **Argentina** expressed concern about the DR paragraph on external evaluations and expressed the view that new regional initiatives should be approved by the COP and not by the SC. Argentina commented on the development of the Initiative "Estrategia de la

Cuenca del Plata”, which has been agreed by the five countries members of the basin: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. This five countries have decided to create a Working Group, of which WWF, Wetlands International and the Senior Advisor for the Americas are also part, in order to make progress on the Initiative. He explained the work going on in the context of the Working Group, which is coordinated by Argentina, as well as the future developments foreseen.

123. **Uruguay** also wished the record to show that Uruguay supports the La Plata Basin initiative, which will be put forward to COP10 for endorsement and financial support.
124. **WWF** noted that there were two separate proposals concerning the Congo and that one of them is not listed. More discussions on that one are taking place this week. **Gabon** specified that the initiative on the Congo Basin comes from Contracting Parties, suggested that the other may be parallel, and urged a bilateral discussion to clarify that.
125. **Benin** clarified a number of questions concerning the WacoWet proposal and noted that the funding request for 2009-2011 is still in preparation. **The DSG** explained that all of the information will be updated before issuing the document for COP10.
126. **China** highlighted the importance of initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region but urged that more consideration be given to the operational mechanisms and long-term financial resources of the Himalayan Initiative before submitting it to COP10 for consideration. She noted that the State Forestry Administration of China has joined the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.

Decision SC37-7: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on regional initiatives and its annex, as amended, and requested the Secretariat to prepare a new version of the explanatory background portions of DOC. SC37-8 as an Information Paper for COP10.

Agenda item 6.4: The Small Grants Fund (DOC. SC37-9 rev.1)

127. **The Chair of the Subgroup** reported on the Subgroup’s recommendations. He explained that the SGF’s big problem has always been insufficient funds, and there have been two responses to that. The portfolio has been trialed and seems to be successful. The signature initiative idea is more difficult to understand because it is meant to be regional rather than national. It was intended that regional meetings would define desirable regional projects, but no ideas emerged from the meetings in this triennium. Thus we have an idea but so far no mechanism – we need language to indicate where this concept goes from here, and he and the DSG will draft an additional paragraph on that for the DR.
128. **Japan** reported that the portfolio concept has been very effective and that Japan has supported projects already. Japan urged that projects should submit progress reports in a timely manner.
129. **Brazil** sought assurance that the Parties will have an opportunity to review the mechanisms established in this DR and provided a suggestion for textual amendment.
130. **Uganda** recalled that Resolution IX.13 called for the development of regional support funds. **The Subgroup Chair** noted that the signature concept and the portfolio were

intended to fill that niche and offered to discuss DR wording with Uganda that would make that clear. [See Decision SC37-40 below.]

131. **The Chair of the Subgroup** noted that there had been a request for funds to seek additional expert legal advice on the legal status of the Secretariat. **The SG** and **DSG** reiterated that the need for additional advice might require funding. **Gabon** urged the need to prioritize amongst the different financial needs.
132. **Japan** urged continued discussions with IUCN and Switzerland and said that if additional advice were required it should come from voluntary contributions and not from the core budget. **The USA** said that in light of yesterday's discussions there does not seem to be any value in further study, and the costs should come only from voluntary contributions and not from the core budget. [See Decision SC37-16 below.]

Agenda item 7: Policy and procedural draft Resolutions

133. **The DSG** noted that DOC. SC37-39 contains recent comments from the STRP on a number of the DRs to be considered.

Agenda item 7.1: Strategic Plan 2009-2014 (DOC. SC37-10)

134. **Bahamas, Vice Chair of the Standing Committee**, noted that most of the Strategic Plan (SP) has been covered in SC36 and the Secretariat has introduced all of the amendments called for. **The SG** recalled that we may need to revisit the period of the SP in light of a COP decision on the future COP cycle.
135. **The Chair of the STRP** noted that the STRP has recommended text that will place additional emphasis on the role of science and research.
136. **Brazil** proposed a number of textual amendments and suggested that "wise use principle" should be replaced by "wise use approach" throughout. **The DSG** foresaw a problem with that suggestion, since for 37 years the wise use principle has been at the heart of the Ramsar message, based in the Convention text and eloquently defined in 1987 in terms of "sustainable utilization" and again in 2005 and explained in numerous official documents, and this would be a significant change in Ramsar traditions. **Brazil** noted that "principle" is not specifically mentioned in the Convention text and insisted on the change to "approach". **The Chair of the STRP** proposed "the principle of wise use" as less prescriptive.
137. **Switzerland** proposed a number of textual amendments to the SP and the Mission Statement and urged that "conservation and wise use" should be used instead of just "wise use" in certain passages, including the Mission Statement. He urged further thought about the assignment of responsibilities after each of the Strategies. **The DSG** noted that the absence of "conservation" in the Mission Statement seems to have been an early mistake.
138. **The Netherlands** and **the USA** submitted a number of suggestions for improving the text.
139. **WWF** recalled that in the SP for 2003-2008 there were targets of 2,500 Ramsar sites and 250 million hectares by 2010, and he proposed that these should be included under Strategy

2.1 with a new timeframe. It is important to keep up the momentum, as Ramsar sites coverage is one of the three pillars of the Convention.

140. **Namibia** inquired whether the SP makes adequate provision for cultural issues and for newly emerging issues such as “quake lakes” and other disasters. **The DSG** noted that a COP9 Resolution dealt with disasters but it would be hard to see how we could include a strategy on that. He said that it merits further thought. **The Chair of the STRP** suggested that that concern could be mentioned in the preamble of the DR.
141. **China** suggested conducting further studies on how to use wetlands wisely whilst conserving them and on providing practical guidelines and case studies on how to use wisely different kinds of wetlands. China expects the Secretariat to conduct further studies on how to maintain ecological character and provide timely technical support for the Parties while highlighting the inclusion of more Ramsar sites.
142. **Brazil** urged that the phrase “wise use” from the Ramsar Convention and tradition should be changed to “sustainable development” throughout, since that term is more frequently used these days. **The DSG** noted that that suggestion would cause a lot of concern in light of our normal usage and Convention traditions. He suggested that he, Brazil, and the Chair of the STRP should discuss this idea later.
143. **The DSG** summarized that all of the textual amendments proposed are doable, with the exception of Brazil’s suggestion regarding the phrase “wise use principle”, and he would report back on those later. He suggested that the time period of the SP should not be changed at this point.

Decision SC37-8: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the draft Strategic Plan 2009-2014, subject to resolution of language on “wise use”. (See also Decision SC37-20 below.)

Agenda item 7.2: The CEPA Programme 2009-2014 (DOC. SC37-11)

144. **Bahamas** introduced the draft CEPA Programme and noted that no changes have been made to it since SC36.
145. **China** thanked the Secretariat for approving its CEPA programme for China and promised to implement it. Five publicity and education centres will be established in different wetland areas in China between 2005 and 2010 to increase public awareness. A series of activities have already been conducted at the education centre at Poyang Lake. China urged the Secretariat to offer technical guidance on developing the CEPA centres, provide successful case studies, share information, and conduct personnel exchange.

Decision SC37-9: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the draft CEPA Programme 2009-2014.

146. **The SG** drew attention to DOC. SC37-33 on the activities of the Advisory Board on Capacity Building for the Ramsar Convention and noted that we had hoped to have a draft Framework but it is still a work in progress.

Decision SC37-10: The Standing Committee noted the progress of the Advisory Board on Capacity Building for the Ramsar Convention, encouraged the Board to pursue its proposed course of action, and noted its activities in the period 2005-2007.

Agenda item 7.3: The STRP modus operandi (DOC. SC37-12)

147. **Heather MacKay, the Chair of the STRP**, reported that the present modus operandi is working well and the STRP is only proposing two refinements: removing time-limited language from the modus operandi and urging appointment of a supernumerary STRP Chair, one who will chair the Panel without additional responsibilities with the working groups.
148. **The DSG** added that there is an additional appendix containing terms of reference and a profile of needed expertise and skills for the STRP National Focal Points.
149. **Japan** inquired whether the invited observer agencies in the bulleted list had been consulted, and **the DSG** responded that we are working with all of them presently and will confirm their inclusion in the list after the SC has approved it. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** recommended including the International Network of River Basin Organizations in that list.

Decision SC37-11: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the refinements to the modus operandi of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).

Agenda item 7.4: Partnerships and synergies with MEAs and others (DOC. SC37-13)

150. **The SG** explained the background and observed that the DR deals not only with the organizations at the global level but also at different levels, national, even local, in order to help translate the synergies to the work on the ground.
151. **El Salvador** reported that in 2004-5 El Salvador and many other countries all over the world implemented an instrument of self-evaluation to assess national strengths and weaknesses (NCSA) in implementing the Rio conventions, and included Ramsar in that study. It was intended to encourage synergies among those conventions. He suggested that Ramsar should discuss with GEF, UNDP and UNEP whether this instrument has evolved since that time.
152. **Ecuador** and **Brazil** proposed improved wording to the text of the DR. **Switzerland** proposed adding UN Water and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to the bodies mentioned in para. 10. **Slovenia** listed a number of decisions from the recent CBD COP9 that mention collaboration with Ramsar.
153. **The Netherlands** inquired whether the UNEP-WCMC tools mentioned in para. 17 are the same as the UNEP issue-based modules. **The DSG** said that the Tematea, formerly the issue-based modules, are different from the WCMC knowledge-management work, but both should be mentioned there. He summarized other ongoing collaborations with WCMC.

154. **Namibia** asked why we need this DR – what is missing from the past Resolutions on this subject that we are now addressing? **The DSG** replied that this reflects an update on past Resolutions since a lot has been happening and changing in our collaborations, and it also reflects decisions made since 2005 by other bodies. He announced that our 4th Joint Work Plan with the CBD has been endorsed by CBD COP9. He noted that it is helpful to have a mandate from our COP to show to bodies with which we want to collaborate.
155. **Japan** inquired how the SG will develop relations with the GEF. **The SG** explained that we will learn their strategies and ensure that they understand ours. Collaboration has already begun with GEF and the African Development Bank and there are a number of opportunities. We want to facilitate our Parties to be able to take advantage of them.

Decision SC37-12: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the partnerships and synergies with other organizations, as amended.

Agenda item 7.5: Status of Ramsar sites (DOC. SC37-14)

156. **The Senior Advisor for Europe** explained that the document is an outline DR in the form of traditional Article 8.2 notifications to the COP about matters concerning Ramsar sites, based on annual reports to the SC and Article 3.2 reports to the Secretariat. He mentioned that Romania has submitted a DR on the Danube Delta (DOC. SC37-37) and suggested that the SC may wish to consolidate that matter into this DR rather than transmit it as a standalone.
157. **The Republic of Korea** noted that Korea has no Montreux Record sites and has a programme for monitoring sites every five years to detect changes and respond to them.

Decision SC37-13: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the status of Ramsar sites.

158. **The Chair** and **the SG** announced that a letter had been received 26 February 2008 from Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, concerning Ramsar joining the UN system, and this will be discussed later in the meeting.

Agenda item 7.6: The Changwon Declaration (DOC. SC37-15)

159. **The Chair of the STRP** recalled that SC36 endorsed the idea of a powerful statement to come through as a DR and summarized progress in planning out the Declaration with a small group of Korean and STRP members. She detailed the present thinking on the purpose and objectives of the Declaration, the target audience to be addressed, and the way forward. She indicated that Korea has offered to host a drafting workshop in a few months' time, consisting of 4 or 5 STRP members and 4 or 5 Korean experts, and the resulting draft will be posted on the STRP Support Service for comment. She urged any Parties that wish to be involved to inform Edgar Kaeslin. The draft will be presented to the Conference Committee at the COP, which can introduce it as an "emerging issue".
160. **Wetlands International** welcomed this excellent initiative and urged that the target audience should include the development sector, finance institutions, and the water and sanitation sectors. She offered WI's support for the drafting group.

161. **The Republic of Korea** indicated that Korea wishes this COP to be remembered in Ramsar history and wants to send a strong, ambitious message to outsiders about the Ramsar Convention.

Decision SC37-14: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposed way forward in the preparation of the draft Changwon Declaration for consideration by the COP Conference Committee and the COP.

Agenda item 7.7: Wetlands and extractive industries (DOC. SC37-16 add.1)

162. **The Chair of the STRP** noted that the DR is based principally upon comments at SC36 and regional meetings and draws heavily on a briefing paper presented at the African regional meeting in November 2007. The emphasis is on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and on governance, with special attention to the post-closure or post-handover phase.
163. **Benin** called this an extremely important and topical DR and would like the contents to include commitments by the Parties and mandatory EIAs, etc. He felt that it must be binding on all Parties. We would never be able to prohibit or ban activities but we need an environmental management provision to deal with adverse effects. He offered to supply written text, and he noted that consultations with the public and those affected must be included in the EIAs.
164. **Wetlands International** wished to contribute and promised to provide text later. The preamble should include mention of the vulnerability of wetlands and the complexity of wetland impacts far away that need to be considered in EIAs. She suggested adding mentions of river basin concerns (e.g., Doñana, Tisza tailing spills) and loss of livelihoods (e.g., Niger Delta, Tierra del Fuego).
165. **WWF** emphasized the need to establish and maintain regular contacts between the Ramsar AAs and the GEF focal points, as there are a lot of funding opportunities on wetland-related activities and extractive industries of which the AAs are unaware.
166. **Ecuador** stressed the importance of these issues and highlighted the fact that valuation of ecosystem services is a much slower process than licensing extractive activities. He suggested amendments to address the need to have necessary information ready and take account of the state-run license granting mechanisms. He welcomed this DR and offered to contribute to further work on it.
167. **Malawi** noted that operators often cooperate before they begin work but, when they have done the damage, they pack up and go. It is important that Parties should adopt this into their legislation so that punitive measures will be available. **The DSG** recalled that Resolution VII.16 on impact assessment calls for Parties to legislate the EIA mechanism.
168. **The Chair of the STRP** thanked all for the helpful comments and invite submissions in writing to Dave Pritchard, promising to produce a Rev. 1 by Friday morning for consideration for the way forward with this DR.

Decision SC37-15: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on wetlands and extractive industries, taking account of suggestions for revision.

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169. **The Chair** noted that today is World Environment Day, with the theme of “Kick the CO₂ habit”. **The DSG** drew attention to a few outstanding agenda items to be cleared up and promised that a Rev. 2 of DOC. SC37-9 on the Small Grants Fund would be circulated later in the day.
170. **The Chair** read out the opinion provided by Carl Bruch concerning the DR on facilitating the work of the Secretariat (DOC. SC37-3), to the effect that the Resolution would not be legally binding but could be very helpful anyway, and he reaffirmed the SC’s Decision SC37-3 taken on that matter the preceding day.
171. **The SG** recalled that we had not had a response from UNEP concerning the legal status of the Secretariat and reported that, when we contacted their legal advisor again, a February response from Executive Director Achim Steiner has been resent. He urged that we should continue to explore both options 1 and 3 and that the next step should be to continue our discussions with IUCN and Switzerland, as reflected in Decision SC37-2, report back on the results, and then consider how to make a decision.
172. **The Chair** summarized the UNEP letter and said that we need to consider the pros and cons fully. He suggested that the SC should note the contents of UNEP’s letter and use it as the basis for further consultations with IUCN and Switzerland.
173. **Ecuador** argued that the SC is not addressing the central issue, which is the lack of legal existence – other issues, such as staff problems, participation in meetings, etc., are peripheral. He felt that the draft Report does not reflect the discussions of the first day. He argued that all three options should still be on the table and that Option 2 does have its advantages, even if it would require an amendment to the Convention. He felt that all initiatives should be welcomed and that the door should not be closed on any options.
174. **The USA, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, reported that the Subgroup has drafted a decision that would cover all of the options and the financial implications of further study. **The SC Chair** affirmed that the draft will leave all three options open and take account of the UNEP information.
175. **Gabon** supported Ecuador’s remarks and requested a written copy of the Subgroup’s draft decision.
176. **Switzerland** observed that the priority is on further discussions with IUCN and Switzerland to seek feasible solutions. **Kenya** urged that the decision should call for financial analysis of all of the options.
177. **Argentina** reiterated that the government of Argentina does not promote changes that would lead to a substantial increase in Parties’ contributions or other financial implications.

The DSG recalled that this decision speaks only to the financial needs for further study, and that Decision SC37-2 concerns the legal status issues *per se*.

Decision SC37-16: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to discuss opportunities with those Parties and others who might be in a position to make a voluntary contribution to facilitate work prior to COP10 concerning the issue of the legal status of the Secretariat, recognizing that:

- a) the Secretariat may need further independent legal advice and financial analysis in relation to further discussions with IUCN and Switzerland about Option 1;
- b) Option 2 appears to require an amendment to the text of the Convention and would have funding implications; and
- c) in the light of the further information received from UNEP during SC37 concerning Option 3 on acquiring UN-related status.

The Standing Committee further requests the Secretariat to keep these matters under review and to report to COP10 if there may be a need to budget for further expert advice.

Agenda item 5.4: Future Secretariat structure and staffing (continued)

178. **The Chair** returned to the issue of the future staff and structure of the Secretariat and reported that the Management Working Group has drafted language for a decision on that matter.
179. **Switzerland** suggested that the SG should also report to the SC on any financial implications to the options.
180. **Austria** argued that the SG's proposal is a well-thought plan for the future, though it is a maximum that would need considerable financing. He said that everyone can see that the Secretariat is doing an excellent job as its tasks increase more and more, and that it clearly needs additional staff as soon as possible. There are more and more new initiatives that are not followed by increased staffing. He noted that the annex to DOC. SC37-5 demonstrates a decline in growth rates and a much smaller budget per Contracting Party than in other conventions. He observed that the staff is overstretched by an enormous number of responsibilities and will be more so following COP10. He called on the SC to help and urged Parties to consider secondments to the Secretariat, and Austria supported the MWG's priority on adding one technical officer to each of the four regional teams.
181. **The Czech Republic** agreed with Austria that the successful development of the Convention depends upon growth in the number of staff. She said that the Secretariat provides excellent service and makes great efforts. She noted that she has a lot of experience with Ramsar and many other secretariats and feels that the Ramsar Secretariat is the best one. She urged that if we wish to improve the Convention, we should increase its staff. She asked the SG if he could identify which positions in his proposals would be the most important to have over the next three years.

182. **The SG** thanked Austria and the Czech Republic for their comments and promised that such priority preferences will be included in the 10 July review called for by the draft decision.
183. **China** argued that adding one more technical officer per region would be five additional staff, which is too many, and urged that this needs further consideration.
184. **Malawi** supported the MWG's draft decision, applauding the proposal to increase the lean Secretariat, and he highlighted the importance of strengthening CEPA capacities as well as those of the STRP. He particularly supported strengthening the regional teams, who will be able to support work in the Parties. The Ramsar Convention is the least understood and needs to do more to support work in the field, so adding one post for each region is very important. The number of Parties in Africa is increasing and they need support.
185. **The Chair of the Subgroup** recognized the concerns about the budget and recalled that this decision is not connected to the budget discussions. He pointed out that the second position on the regional teams began with the internship programme that was originally supported solely by voluntary contributions, a very positive development that did not impact strongly on the budget and was only slowly worked into the core. The important thing is the focus on regional support as where we need to go. The Subgroup Chair noted that we have established two points: 1) a focus on partnerships and 2) reaching out to the regions. Since it is not practical to debate whether any region needs more or less support than the others, it should be one additional officer for each of them.
186. **The SG** agreed that we are very fortunate to have the internship programme, without which we would be unable to respond to the Party's needs. He said that the interns are dedicated and extremely overworked, and he asked the SC to show their appreciation. There was prolonged applause.

Decision SC37-17: The Standing Committee requested the Secretary General to 1) review the proposed staff structure for 2009-2011, bearing in mind the need to address the burden on the Deputy Secretary General and not to create a new mid-management level; 2) propose a redistribution of responsibilities, especially regarding the coordination of the scientific & communication unit, the regional teams, and the proposed partnership unit; and 3) add one position to each regional team to increase their capacity. The SC requested the Secretary General to report to the Standing Committee the results of that review by 10 July 2008 at the latest and indicate the financial implications of those results.

Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards

187. **The Chair** announced that the Standing Committee in closed session has chosen the winners of the **Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards**. The laureate for science is Dave Pritchard; for management, Denis Landenbergue; for education, Sansanee Choowaew; and a Recognition of Excellence has been bestowed upon Jan Květ. A press release will be circulated shortly and the news announced on the Ramsar Web site, Forum, and Exchange, and the Awards will be made in a ceremony at the opening of COP10.
188. **The DSG** reported that the SC also discussed finding a way to recognize a small number of Administrative Authorities for significant achievements in implementing the

Convention. The Secretariat will reflect on this idea and communicate electronically with the members about a possible proposal for COP10.

Agenda item 7.8: Review of past COP decisions (DOC. SC37-17)

189. **The DSG and Dave Pritchard** noted a number of ways in which the SC35 preliminary report has already proved useful and explained the STRP's intentions with regard to continuing the work.

Decision SC37-18: The Standing Committee noted the progress so far in reviewing the past COP decisions and the STRP's planned work in taking this project forward.

Agenda item 7.9: Framework for partnerships with the business sector (DOC. SC37-34)

190. **The SG** explained that after 10 years of successful partnership with the Danone Group it is time to seek additional partnerships and develop more influence on the business sector. He noted that IOPs all have experience in this area from which we can learn, not just at the Secretariat but also at the local and national levels. We need to find a way to share our values and create commitments, because businesses have important impacts upon wetlands and growing awareness of their dependence upon wetland services – we seek to help them to avoid, minimize, mitigate, or offset adverse effects of their activities and get them to recognize their dependence upon wetland services.
191. **The SG** noted that the framework document proposes guidelines, a validation process, and a list of challenges, as well as guidelines on management of conflicts and rules on the use of the Ramsar name by commercial enterprises, and he invited input to it. We need to involve the Administrative Authorities, the National Ramsar Committees, and the work of the STRP.
192. **Argentina** agreed on the importance of finding areas of cooperation with the business sector and on the need for criteria for such cooperation, but he noted that a number of sensitive issues are dealt with in this DR and felt that it would need detailed analysis by the Parties, beyond our present timeframe, before it is ready to be transmitted to the COP. He queried the reference in para.45 to the National Ramsar Committees as “Ramsar bodies”, as the only Ramsar bodies are the COP, the SC, the Secretariat, and the STRP. There are a number of such points about which Argentina has concerns, and though he endorsed the intent he felt that the DR is not ready to be submitted to the COP.
193. **Switzerland** thanked the Secretariat for this dense document and noted that partnerships are very important and need a strategy. She felt that this document needs further editing and shortening. Some Parties may already have such guidelines and these should be provided to the Secretariat. She encouraged the Secretariat to work with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development in Geneva on revising the document and offered Switzerland's help. She felt that it is a very important and interesting document with a lot of good things in it, but it needs further work.
194. **Chile** noted that Chile is involved in similar sorts of initiatives with the private sector and offered to share that experience. Chile urged that the terms of reference for such partnerships should be flexible for each one and aimed at accomplishing one objective.

195. **Japan** drew attention to para.15's mention of exploring new initiatives and, expressing concern about increasing the Secretariat's workload, urged that that be deleted.
196. **WWF** noted that the document addresses many issues in great detail and contrasted that with the fast-acting style of the business sector. He suggested submitting the draft to private companies to seek their advice. He urged including an additional reference to private foundations and private donors. He felt that the flexibility of the Ramsar Secretariat would be attractive to potential partners and suggested that 'complexifying' that would create an impediment. The private sector has an allergy to bureaucracy and he urged avoiding potential obstacles.
197. **The SG** expressed thanks for that input and invited Switzerland to help in approaching the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. He invited further comments on how to improve the document. **The DSG** recalled that if the DR is to be considered by COP10 it must be revised, translated, and distributed by 27 July, and he called for comments within two weeks. **Argentina** understood the urgency but felt that the Parties would need more time to consult all of the necessary ministries about it.
198. **Wetlands International** felt that the DR would take a lot of work to ensure that everyone would be happy with it and suggested that, instead, a shorter DR should focus on key principles, informing the public that the Convention is looking for partnerships along those lines, so that we could take more time to develop detailed guidelines. **The DSG** suggested that the guidelines could then be circulated to the Parties as an information paper in September.

Decision SC37-19: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a brief draft Resolution on partnerships with the business sector, articulating the basic principles of such partnerships, and to revise the draft guidelines for circulation as an information paper for COP10.

Agenda item 7.1: Strategic Plan 2009-2014 (continued)

199. **Dave Pritchard** explained that in discussions about the draft Strategic Plan, the Secretariat, the STRP, and Brazil have reached agreement on a form of words about the "wise use principle" or "approach", recalling debates about the precautionary principle. He said that in effect we have the expression of a principle in the Convention text, of an approach in the wise use definition, and we have used "wise use concept" in early guidelines. **Brazil** confirmed that there is agreement that for "wise use principle" substitute texts referring, for example, to "the wise use provisions of the Convention" will be used.

Decision SC37-20: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the draft Strategic Plan 2009-2014, as amended. (See also Decision SC37-8.)

Agenda item 8.15: Wetlands and poverty reduction (DOC. SC37-32)

200. **The DSG** noted that in response to a request from SC36, Ghana, Benin, and Mali submitted a DR on this matter in good time before the deadline but with little time for consultations about it. The STRP's comments on the draft pointed out of number of issues

requiring resolution. Much of the DR repeats the text of the COP9 Resolution IX.14, thus raising the question of whether a new Resolution is needed for COP10 and, if so, what its focus should be beyond just restating the early document.

201. **The Chair of the STRP** noted that the STRP expressed concern that the DR's focus is so broad and suggested that it should call for a guide to available guidance from the STRP and mention the ongoing work of the IOPs. She urged a short DR with a request to the STRP without repeating a lot of the earlier text.
202. **Wetlands International** felt that Resolution IX.14 has proved its worth, and the Parties are now asking for a guide to implementation. She urged a short DR calling for action, highlighting current initiatives, and requesting a guide to guidance, and she advised against trying to make the present draft more comprehensive.
203. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** said that he, the STRP Chair and the DSG will draft a shorter text, but he urged that we should not forget that Resolution IX.14 was silent on many important issues, and these are what the DR drafters wished to include. He read out a communication from the government of Ghana on this matter:

“By Decision SC36-22, the SC requested Wetlands International, representing the STRP, to work with Benin, Ghana, and Mali and any other interested parties and the Senior Regional Advisor for Africa to develop a draft resolution on wetlands and poverty reduction for consideration by SC37. We, however, noticed that the draft DR on ‘Wetlands and poverty reduction’ by Benin, Ghana, and Mali has been posted on the Web site without any inputs from WI as Doc. SC37-32 agenda item 8.15 for the upcoming 37th meeting of the Standing Committee. We believe the Secretariat will take into consideration our comments submitted via e-mail to the Senior Advisor and reproduced below for ease of reference to facilitate the SC’s discussion and review of the draft Resolution at their meeting”.
204. **The DSG** observed that the Secretariat must receive DRs in time to turn them around and distribute them to the SC members – he expressed his gratitude to Ghana, Benin, and Mali for submitting this text but noted that, though it arrived on time, there was no further opportunity to work with them on it.
205. **Wetlands International** wished to clarify that WI supported the drafting workshop financially, commented on the matter, and was represented at the meeting. She noted that the SC called for a new DR and not a repeat of Resolution IX.14. For their own reasons, she said, the Parties took their own route, leading to the present DR. WI finds it to be inconsistent with SC36’s wishes and not helpful on the ground. WI has tried to work with these Parties, as well as with others outside of Africa, and pledged to work further on preparing a good DR.
206. **Brazil** suggested replacing “poverty reduction” with “poverty eradication” to be consistent with the first Millennium Development Goal.
207. **Japan** understood the importance of this emerging issue but insisted that the Secretariat must work within the mandates given it by the COP, and noted that this DR includes additional tasks that are not priorities.

208. **The Chair** supported the need for a DR but felt that this text needs further work.
209. **The DSG** invited the STRP Chair, Wetlands International, the Senior Advisor for Africa, and Ghana to join him in looking at what can be done to improve the DR.
210. **Ecuador** shared the DSG's concern about the timing. This is an important issue, vital to many local communities that depend upon wetlands. He felt that this DR is at a very early stage, with only a few weeks left for finalizing it, and he hoped that that difficult goal could be reached.

Decision SC37-21: The Standing Committee approved in principle the draft Resolution on wetlands and poverty reduction for transmittal to COP10, subject to revisions suggested by the STRP and the Secretariat.

Agenda item 8.1: Ramsar data and information needs (DOC. SC37-18)

211. **The Chair of the STRP** explained that the STRP spent a lot of time on this issue and took a step back to understand all of the Convention's data needs relative to the Strategic Plan (SP). **The DSG** affirmed the need to use the SP as much as possible as a framework for all aspects of the Convention's implementation. He recorded his appreciation to the colleagues at UNEP-WCMC who helped with this work and hosted two small working meetings.
212. **Dave Pritchard** explained that the work was driven by a clear perception of the purpose of the needs for data and is not just a long shopping list but is targeted to strategies in the SP.
213. **Switzerland** noted that the list of data needs is an indicative list and wondered whether an exhaustive list would be feasible. If it would require too much work, that might have implications for the SP, too, and we may need to prioritize the Key Result Areas according to the capacities of the Parties and Secretariat. **The STRP Chair** noted that the SP encapsulates our vision of what kinds of data are really needed to support it, and some data is absolutely necessary for implementation. **Switzerland** agreed that there are priority issues and we may need to feed that back into the SP and highlight those priorities there. **The Chair of the STRP** said that the STRP will be exploring the implications of that during the next triennium.
214. **Argentina** expressed concern that, when data are not available, the DR seems to suggest that Parties are not meeting their treaty obligations. This should be optional for the Parties. **The STRP Chair** explained that this list will help the Parties to prioritize in planning their implementation programmes and is not meant to imply that they are not fulfilling their commitments.

Decision SC37-22: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the data and information needs of the Convention, subject to further revisions especially with regard to Key Result Areas.

Agenda item 8.2: Describing wetland ecological character (DOC. SC37-19)

215. **The Chair of the STRP** noted the potential need for changes in the Ramsar Information Sheets and the need for further development of this issue in the next triennium.
216. **Dave Pritchard** explained that the DR draws on thinking already being developed, particularly by Australia; meets the COP request for a simple form for Article 3.2 reporting; and harmonizes the RIS and inventory core fields and links to management plans. The purpose is to provide an overall harmonized structure and not to change a lot of the content of the existing tools.
217. **The DSG** acknowledged the invaluable assistance of the work done by Australia. He noted that often Parties will not have quantitative data for many of the fields, but it is only meant to provide a guide on desirable information; it is designed to be a flexible tool to help focus on what information might be needed in various circumstances. **The STRP Chair** said that the STRP is working towards a more streamlined set of tools rather than a series of separate and different ones.
218. **El Salvador** asked what units of measurement are meant to be used. **Thailand** felt that this will support the AAs very much in updating their RISs and designating new sites. **The UK** offered that it would be useful to attach some case studies. **The STRP Chair** noted that a detailed information paper, with case studies, will be provided to COP10 to accompany this DR.
219. **Malawi** felt that Africa is disadvantaged in terms of collecting data on its wetlands – there is a need to conduct inventories and look at ecological character, produce management plans and RISs, and many Parties have inadequate capacity. He appealed to the IOPs and others to finance such work.
220. **The Republic of Korea** welcomed the DR but said that some items are quite challenging to fill out and it would be helpful to prioritize the fields to be completed. **Dave Pritchard** explained that actual needs will differ case by case so one cannot prioritize them generically. He recalled that this overall scheme derives from schemes already adopted by the Parties and is meant just to be a harmonization of those.
221. **Japan** noted that the tables require inventories and there is a need to take into account the workloads of the AAs and compilers. Are we to prefer less comprehensive information from more countries or less information from more countries?
222. **The DSG** noted that the DR needs language to stress that there is no expectation that all fields need to be completed, that rather this is a tool for compiling what we do know and identifying the gaps. He noted that often information gathered for one purpose will be usable for others.

Decision SC37-23: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on describing the ecological character of wetlands, with the revisions indicated and additional language to show that it is intended only to provide guidance.

223. **China** provided information about inventory efforts in China and urged the STRP to develop guidance on how to inventory peatlands.

Agenda item 8.3: Detecting, reporting, and responding to change in ecological character (DOC. SC37-20)

224. **The STRP Chair** noted that there will be an information paper with more detail and that the STRP will continue work on more detailed guidance on each of the boxes.
225. **Dave Pritchard** said that this DR goes to the heart of a fundamental part of the Convention and is meant to be an overall description of how the whole system fits together. He described the planned subjects of the detailed information paper.
226. **Namibia** raised a question about the distinction between reporting on and responding to human-made vs. natural changes. **Mr Pritchard** explained that the purpose is to work out what flows from the Convention requirements and that there is no intention to discourage responding to changes wherever appropriate. **The SG** felt that it would be good to have a response strategy for all changes, and said that the key lies in land use patterns.

Decision SC37-24: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on detecting and reporting on change in the ecological character of wetlands, without Flow Chart F.

Agenda item 8.4: Indicators of effectiveness (DOC. SC37-21)

227. **Dave Pritchard** reported that the STRP's early work on this matter has given leadership to other conventions' work on indicators, but we must keep a clear focus on the mandate of evaluating the effectiveness of the Convention. The STRP contracted outside expertise to prepare the work so far but would need further resources and expertise to continue.
228. **The DSG** reported that Ramsar is working closely with the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership and is on its Steering Committee, which will be meeting later this month.
229. **Kenya** noted a need to emphasize capacity building in all of the work of the STRP, including for the STRP National Focal Points. **The DSG** agreed that when the COP asks the STRP to develop guidance, we still have no mechanism for following up and bringing that back into the Parties. **Austria** suggested that the STRP NFPs could be helpful in taking up the STRP documents and discussing them further.
230. **Namibia** inquired whether the purpose was to assess the performance of the Parties, and **the STRP Chair** indicated that the purpose is to evaluate the impact of the Convention on the ecological character of wetlands, globally and perhaps at other levels. **Mr Pritchard** said that there is an element of judgment but it concerns the Convention and not the Parties' performance.

Decision SC37-25: The Standing Committee noted the progress on the development of indicators of the Convention's effectiveness and encouraged the STRP to continue its work, noting too that information products on this matter will be prepared for COP10.

Agenda item 8.5: CBD guidelines on EIA (DOC. SC37-22)

231. **The DSG** thanked Helen Byron and Dave Pritchard for going through the CBD guidelines on EIA and SEA and annotating them for the Ramsar community. He noted that this is a follow-up to earlier CBD guidance that was adapted for Ramsar in Resolution VIII.9 and this DR will supersede that Resolution.
232. **The SG** suggested that the preamble should mention the importance of wetland inventory in order to have baseline information, since it is difficult to detect change or conduct a good EIA without adequate information in advance.
233. **El Salvador** asked whether step 2 in para.17 includes such activities as pipelines and aquaculture and, if not, recommended including them.

Decision SC37-26: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the CBD's guidelines on impact assessment, as amended.

Agenda item 8.6: Application of response options from the MA (DOC. SC37-23)

234. **The STRP Chair** reported that Rebecca D'Cruz, the STRP Vice Chair, went through the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and drew out all of the response options relevant to Ramsar. A Ramsar Technical Report (RTR) is planned for this analysis, hopefully before COP10, and its Executive Summary will be provided as a COP information paper. The DR will be updated to take the results of CBD COP9 into account.
235. **The SC Chair** urged adding an operative paragraph encouraging collaboration with other MEAs in taking up the MA response options and instructing the Secretariat to make the analysis available to the subsidiary bodies of the other MEAs.

Decision SC37-27: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the application of Ramsar-related Millennium Ecosystem Assessment response options, subject to the amendment noted.

Agenda item 8.7: Wetlands and river basin management (DOC. SC37-24)

236. **The STRP Chair** explained that this document consolidates and supersedes all of the Convention's previous guidance on river basin management from COP7 and COP9, with additional detail from case studies, and will be the basis for the revised Ramsar Handbook and its supplementary information boxes. The detailed case studies called for by COP9 are now being prepared, with help from Lucia Scodanibbio, for publication as an RTR. She said that we hope to have a similar consolidated Resolution on water issues by COP11.
237. **Iran** inquired about whether the COP9 DR on transboundary wetlands will be brought forward to COP10. **The DSG** described the debates at COP9, which ended with the DR being withdrawn, and explained that the then-Secretary General's idea of bringing it back with the collaboration of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas was left hanging. He noted that the COP9 debate focused on the level of prescription and observed that new draft Strategic Plan urges Parties to identify transboundary wetlands and consider identifying means of collaborative management, which elegantly picks up the essence of the COP9 objective without the need for a new Resolution. This gives the Parties the flexibility to work out the best ways to respond to the issue for their own circumstances.

238. **Switzerland** suggesting adding mention of national forest programmes to the section on multisectoral planning and offered to provide more details to the STRP Chair.
239. **The SG** noted that this is an important document for us because many people do not think of river systems as wetlands, whilst the treaty refers to “riverine systems”. We must make that clear to people.

Decision SC37-28: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on river basin management, with Switzerland’s amendment and some additional comments from the STRP.

Agenda item 8.8: Biogeographic regionalization schemes (DOC. SC37-25)

240. **The STRP Chair** explained that the DR is based on the work of The Nature Conservancy consortium’s Marine Ecosystems of the World (MEOW), which was developed with STRP involvement. **The DSG** noted that this is especially important for the application of Criterion 1 in designating Wetlands of International Importance. He noted that a subsequent version of MEOW is expected and suggested adding to the DR an instruction for the STRP to make that available to the Parties. He urged attaching a summary map of the regions to the COP document.

Decision SC37-29: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on biogeographic regionalization schemes, with those amendments.

Agenda item 8.9: Wetlands and human health (DOC. SC37-26)

241. **The Chair of the STRP** indicated that the STRP is working on a technical report on the interactions between wetlands and human health, which it is hoped will be available later this year, with an executive summary and key messages to be provided to the COP in an information paper.
242. **The DSG** recorded thanks to the World Health Organization for help with this work and to the Republic of Korea for hosting a writing workshop. The main report is a first go at a complex subject and it will focus on providing the Ramsar community with as good an overview as possible to help prepare for interactions with other sectors. It is hoped later to address health professionals on the wetland aspects. **The STRP Chair** said that the key point is to ensure that cross-sectoral responses are not harmful to wetlands.
243. **Wetlands International** promised to provide text to address three main points: 1) the DR paints a rosy picture and it is important to admit that wetlands can cause problems; 2) eradication methods are often directly or indirectly deleterious to human health; and 3) it is addressed to wetland managers but does not address the development sectors. **Switzerland** agreed on the need for balance between positive and negative aspects and suggested that the energy sector should also be addressed.
244. **The DSG** responded that the report is carefully balancing the negative and positive and addressing responses to the negative, stressing the exacerbation caused by degraded wetlands.

245. **Wetlands International** announced that, thanks to the government of the Netherlands, the wetlands and livelihood project will begin in 2009 and will highlight problems and solutions on many of these issues.
246. **Ecuador** suggested several improvements concerning specifying MDGs, checking the use of the term “human health management”, and revising some hard to read paragraphs. **Thailand** urged the mention of the WSSD targets in addition to the MDGs.
247. **Japan** questioned the need to comment on the effects of climate change on human health and the mention of HIV. **The DSG** noted that the full report will address the effects of changing climate. He observed that there is information emerging that there are HIV issues related to wetlands, to do with the increasing vulnerability of HIV sufferers to other diseases. **The SG** suggested that malaria should be mentioned specifically, and **the DSG** noted that that is present in one of the comments provided for the text by the STRP responses. **Thailand** asked about other water-borne diseases like cholera and typhoid, and **the STRP Chair** cautioned against listing water-borne diseases individually as some might be left out.

Decision SC37-30: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on wetlands and human health, with the indicated revisions and the comments from the STRP.

Agenda item 8.10: Climate change and wetlands (DOC. SC37-27)

248. **The Chair of the STRP** indicated that this DR is meant to supersede the Resolution from COP8 and said that there will be other technical papers made available prior to the COP. The purpose of the DR is to recognize the state of play and get a message out on the importance of wetlands in the climate change debates. She noted the substantial STRP comments on this issue.
249. **The DSG** noted that we will need to incorporate into the DR references to the CBD’s COP9 decision, which recognizes Ramsar’s work and the importance of wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and expects Ramsar to lead on these issues.
250. **Ecuador** noted that para.37 needs to be rewritten for intelligibility, and that will be done. **Kenya** suggested a reference to the UNFCCC national programme actions, taking cognizance of possible regional actions, and will provide text on that matter.
251. **China** suggested that the STRP conduct further studies on the interactions between wetlands and climate change, in particular on the capacities of various types of wetlands in carbon cycling and carbon storage, and at the same time to conduct further studies on the adverse effects of climate change on wetlands, providing detailed data for policy makers.
252. **Switzerland** expressed concern about all of the tasks being mandated for the STRP in these draft Resolutions and suggested the need a tabulation of them all in order to provide an overview of how much work the Parties are asking for. **The STRP Chair** reassured that the STRP has already taken up all of the tasks so far in DOC. SC37-30 on the STRP’s future priorities. **The DSG** explained that we are following the successful COP9 procedure of prioritizing all of the requested tasks as the basis for the subsequent STRP work plan, and noted that that will be updated after this meeting and after the COP.

253. **Argentina** suggested that the preambular paragraphs could mention the antecedents without quoting them at length and that they should be put into some kind of coherent order or hierarchy. He suggested that the mention of the UNFCCC decision should be precise and placed at the beginning, and so too should the IPCC. **The Chair of the STRP** agreed that the paragraphs should be ordered by hierarchy or temporal sequence.
254. **The Republic of Korea** reported on UNDP-supported government research on the impacts of climate change on the Upo Wetland near Changwon and offered to share the results with interested parties. The results cannot be generalized but they offer a good example. **The Chair of the STRP** encouraged all Parties to provide all such research to the STRP.
255. **Brazil** observed that there is no reference to the work of the IPCC, which is the key authority, and she urged that all assumptions made in the document must be based on the IPCC results. She urged that language should be added about differential responses between developed and developing countries and she suggested language to highlight the UNFCCC, IPCC, and CBD's recent decision.
256. **The Chair of the STRP** replied that the STRP makes every effort to base all of its work on peer-reviewed scientific reports, and she said that the STRP will see what it can do to provide additional references both to the IPCC work and to other peer-reviewed research.
257. **The DSG** summarized the contents of the CBD's COP9 decision on climate change, which noted the importance of wetlands and especially peatlands, urged coordination with Ramsar, welcomed the work of the STRP, invited the STRP and Ramsar Secretariat to assess biodiversity in all types of wetlands in regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation, invited the STRP and Secretariat to make those reports available on the Web site, requested SBSTTA to engage with IPCC and invited IPCC to engage with SBSTTA and Ramsar, requested the Executive Secretary and Ramsar SG to analyze incentives on climate change mitigation and adaptation concerning wetlands and to explore engagement with CGIAR centres, and invited Ramsar COP10 to consider appropriate actions.
258. **The SG** suggested that it would be useful to add to requests for studies of carbon storage and sequestration a request for studies of water storage and water supply. Some Parties fail to consider deep lakes as wetlands and this needs to be clarified. All lakes are wetlands and they are important in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
259. **The Netherlands** posed the neglected issue of methane and suggested that the fact that wetlands are methane producers should be mentioned. **The DSG** reported that the STRP has commissioned a study of the roles of the different kinds of wetlands in the carbon cycle and the possible effects of wetland degradation. This study will cover all forms of carbon, including both CO₂ and CH₄ (methane).
260. **The Chair of the STRP** reviewed the comments made on the DR on the STRP Support Service concerning the need for more emphasis on actions, the listing of Ramsar sites that are more resilient to change, harmonizing cross-sectoral policies, etc.

Decision SC37-31: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on climate change and wetlands, as amended by the meeting

and STRP comments and taking account of the CBD COP9 decisions in square brackets.

Agenda item 8.11: Wetlands and biofuels (DOC. SC37-28)

261. **The Chair of the STRP** explained that the message of the brief DR is that any policy should take account of the potential for adverse impacts upon wetlands. The STRP is suggesting that it should be asked to consider developing guidance on this issue in the next triennium.
262. There was discussion about whether to use the term 'biofuels' or 'agrofuels' – the latter is more accurate in the agricultural context but the former is more common and immediately recognized.
263. **Switzerland** suggested a new preambular paragraph to the effect that, since people do not eat biofuels, there may be less concern about limiting the use of pesticides. Not only foods have problems from pesticides, but so too do the sea and wetlands. She provided text on that subject.
264. **The Netherlands** urged strengthening paragraphs 9 & 10 and adding a mention of sustainable forest management. The examples of good agricultural practice are incomplete and should be either extended or deleted. **Ecuador**, too, urged strengthening several paragraphs and adding references to pollution of wetlands.
265. **WWF**, speaking for Wetlands International, cautioned against using the term “marginal lands” (para.5). **The Netherlands** agreed, because marginal lands can often be biodiversity-rich, and suggested the phrase “degraded lands” instead. He suggested adding mention of the FAO meeting taking place this week.
266. **Argentina** said that given the world food situation it would be a good idea to look at crops that are not consumed at global scale or are not food crops. Biodiesel production in Argentina is mainly soya-based and is rain-fed with irrigation. Argentina suggested including references, not only to land rehabilitation, but also to resettlement of people with livelihoods. He urged the inclusion of algae cultivation as a potential biofuel. He urged the need for a more broad definition of biofuels, which should include non-fossil alternative energy sources.
267. **The Chair of the STRP** agreed that some kind of definition of biofuels could be added to the preamble. **Argentina** urged a broader attention not only to crops grown for agrofuel production but also to other second generation biofuels. **The STRP Chair** indicated that that would need some discussion by the STRP as to whether it would be appropriate within the mandate to consider wetland impacts. **The DSG** agreed that the DR needs to speak to Ramsar-related issues and we will have to look at the suggested amendments with that in mind.
268. **Argentina** suggested that some of the mentioned biofuels can also be considered within the Ramsar context, reiterating as an example the possibility of producing methane from swamps, waste water, etc. **Dave Pritchard** noted that the STRP is proposing a task that includes a broad review of energy issues and which could include second generation fuels

like crop waste, waste water, etc., and he said that those issues could be more knowledgeably addressed after that review.

269. **Brazil** suggested a number of textual amendments and urged that the DR should also address the positive effects that biofuels can have on the environment. Brazil urged care in crossreferencing the work of the CBD, FAO, etc., to avoid duplication. **Slovenia** responded that the purpose of such crossreferencing is not to repeat but rather to demonstrate common cause and progress.
270. **The Chair of the STRP** indicated that the STRP would do its best to incorporate the suggested amendments and circulate a new text in a week or so.

Decision SC37-32: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on wetlands and biofuels, as amended by the meeting and STRP comments.

Fourth day, 6 June 2008

Agenda item 8.12: Conservation of waterbird flyways (DOC. SC37-29)

271. **The Chair of the STRP** noted that the focus of the DR is upon cooperation not only within flyways but amongst them as well, in order to learn from one another.
272. **The Netherlands** suggested adding a reference to the International Waterbird Census, a 50-year-old initiative that is important for establishing the 1% thresholds of Ramsar Criterion 6. **The DSG** added that the IWC is one of many important sources for Wetlands International's Waterbird Population Estimates, which the COP has endorsed as the source for 1% calculations.
273. **The DSG** and **Iran** noted the need to reflect the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) African-Eurasian Flyways UNEP-GEF project, established to support Ramsar and AEWA, and suggested that a reference to its regional capacity building centres and demonstration sites, most of which are Ramsar sites, could be added to para.16.
274. **The Republic of Korea** reported that in its efforts to conserve wetlands, especially tidal flats, Korea is now vice-chair of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway project and has bilateral agreements with Australia and China, the latter of which could be mentioned in para.13. **The DSG** encouraged that mention, because the East Asian-Australasian Flyway is the one presently facing the world's largest declines in waterbird populations.

Decision SC37-33: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways, with the suggested revisions.

Agenda item 8.13: Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention (DOC. SC37-30)

275. **The Chair of the STRP** noted that the process being followed is the same as that for COP9, with a list of suggested tasks for the STRP grouped in thematic areas. She noted

that all of the tasks listed are already present in the DRs provided to the SC by the STRP and that the list will be revised in light of SC decisions and COP Resolutions. The list will be discussed for feasibility and priorities by the first STRP meeting following COP10 and approved by the first full SC meeting.

276. **The STRP Chair** noted that the section in which the STRP looks forward strategically to emerging issues has been strengthened for this triennium and that the document reflects a growing emphasis within the STRP on implementation support and on how the guidance is being used. She observed that lower priority tasks are not therefore unimportant, only that there are insufficient resources to devote to them at this time. She noted the benefits of STRP observers melding the STRP's tasks into the work of their own organizations, and she thanked those Parties whose voluntary contributions have enabled the STRP's tasks.
277. **The DSG** noted that all of the immediate and highest priority tasks this triennium have shown results, thanks to the generous contributions of Parties, and particularly the government of Sweden. He drew attention to the proposed task on agriculture and wetlands which will ensure that the STRP will remain involved in the next level of international work, and he described the progress of the GAWI (Guidelines on Agriculture, Wetlands, and Water Resources Interactions) consortium project aimed at supporting Ramsar Resolution VIII.34. He noted that, for this triennium, the scientific tasks of other convention bodies besides the STRP have not been included as that did not seem helpful.
278. **The Netherlands** pointed out that an FAO-Ramsar information paper is about to be completed and that a COP10 side event will be planned in the hope of broadening participation in the next phase of the work. **The DSG** expressed gratitude to the FAO for its significant input into the work of the STRP.

Decision SC37-34: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on implementation of the scientific and technical aspects of the Convention, with the suggested revisions and updating.

Agenda item 8.14: Conservation and management of urban wetlands (DOC. SC37-31)

279. **The DSG** explained that the DR is a first draft intended to capture the SC36 discussions and that para.16 will need updating in light of the decisions of CBD COP9.
280. **Switzerland** suggested several improvements to the text. **Japan** suggested that if a consensus definition of "urban wetlands" were to be included, certain paragraphs of the DR might no longer apply.
281. **Gabon** noted that an important threat to wetlands in Africa comes from building – wetlands frequently have a negative connotation as threats to health and building plans are promoted as contributions to public health. He said that we need to bear that in mind when we talk about the values of wetlands. He noted that, in the African context, legislation on urban planning is rarely respected and people settle in an unplanned fashion. **The STRP Chair** took note of those remarks, and **the SG** observed that the Parties should have pro-active land-use planning in place to respond to natural disasters, as too often, for example, they build on floodplains.

282. **The Republic of Korea** reported that Changwon is currently engaged in a project to restore artificially straightened rivers to their natural flows. He invited participation in an international side event to share experiences in restoring urban wetlands that is planned in association with COP10. **The STRP Chair** noted that the STRP will add a task on restoration of urban wetlands.
283. **WWF** supported Gabon's point and drew attention to the huge numbers of major building projects taking place, especially around the southern Mediterranean and often adjacent to wetlands. He suggested that the DR should include an appeal to Parties to designate Ramsar sites near urban centres as quickly as possible, as experience shows that investors are frequently reluctant to build near Ramsar sites. WWF also noted that wetland education and visitors' centres are often very important in helping to educate the public about the impacts of building projects.
284. **The SC Chair** noted that UN Habitat plays an important role in these matters and suggested that the DR call for increased collaboration, and he suggested, for para.17, the need for collaboration with the physical planning departments of governments.
285. To the Chair's question about inviting mayors, **Korea** responded that an international side event on wetlands is being prepared but it has not yet been decided whether to pursue the idea of inviting city majors from around the world, and he welcomed suggestions. **Ecuador** urged that the mayor of Panama City should be included, because the Ramsar site "Panama Bay" is under risk due to huge new buildings in its surroundings. **The DSG** recalled that Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) includes key sites that are brought in with the full support of the mayors of nearby urban centres and that the linking of those mayors has proved valuable, and he suggested inviting some of them to the symposium.

Decision SC37-35: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on urban wetlands, with the suggested revisions.

286. **The DSG** reviewed the STRP appointment process and noted that a call for nominations will be issued in early autumn – the appointments of thematic and regional members will then be made by the STRP Oversight Panel after the COP has determined the priority work areas for the next term. He anticipated that several current STRP members will be present at COP10 to help guide Parties through the guidance to be considered.

Draft Resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties

Agenda item 9.1: Additional guidelines for the national implementing agencies (DOC. SC37-35), submitted by France

287. **France** explained that the DR follows on from COP9 and the concerns expressed by the African Parties about bottlenecks and inconsistencies in the ways in which Parties are expected to organize their implementation processes. The purpose of the DR is not to revolutionize the Convention's organization but only to seek consistency of processes in a practical way. He felt that some Parties might not perceive a need for such guidance but it would be a help to the African colleagues.

288. **The STRP Chair** drew attention to STRP comments recorded in DOC. SC37-39 and noted their main point about the need to ensure that the DR should not be too prescriptive, especially with regard to the composition and operations of National Ramsar / Wetland Committees (NRCs), and that flexibility is required for differing circumstances.
289. **The UK** agreed on the need to avoid being too prescriptive and suggested that the objectives should be changed from the “roles and duties” to a focus instead upon desired outcomes. **The Netherlands** agreed on the need for flexibility, as there are often many ways to achieve the Convention’s purposes; in the Netherlands, for example, a distinction is made between the international and in-country liaisons for the Convention. **Iraq** supported the DR in general and agreed that the Parties should implement the Convention in their own best ways, according to their own circumstances.
290. **Benin** welcomed the French initiative and noted that the DR responds to concerns that have been felt for some time and expressed most recently at the regional meeting in Yaoundé. He recognized the need for Parties to implement the Convention as best suits them but suggested that there should be guidance on minimum practices, a *sine qua non*, and the DR fills that gap.
291. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** explained that the DR originated in a project with the government of France to develop a toolkit to help familiarize the francophone African countries with the work of the MEAs. He reported that funds have been provided by Switzerland to translate the toolkit into English as well. **The DSG** suggested that the DR’s preamble should include a mention of that valuable toolkit and urge contributions to translate it into Spanish, too.
292. **Ecuador** questioned the need (para.14) for better communication between the National Focal Points and the National Ramsar Committees since the NFPs should be the core part of the NRCs anyway.
293. **Austria** supported the proposed DR and urged that it should be noted that the most important function of the NRCs is to care for the coordination of national implementation of the Convention and its Resolutions. He suggested wording to the effect that the NRCs can also serve as a platform for national CEPA activities.
294. **France** explained that this DR was submitted as a result of work with the African countries and that in amending it we should not lose sight of the added value for the African countries that we are looking for. He noted that in some countries the environmental authorities feel isolated and need to work with and feel connected to a network of National Focal Points, and thus the suggestion of a Web platform to help them to interact. He felt that the revised DR need not be overly prescriptive and said that France will work with the Secretariat to follow up on the discussion.
295. **The DSG** noted that, wherever possible, DRs should seek global applicability and thus consensus approval, and he observed that though the impetus for this DR has come from Africa it will be useful and applicable to all Parties. He offered the Secretariat’s services in incorporating the suggested amendments and ideas and providing a revised text for France’s consideration.

Decision SC37-36: The Standing Committee welcomed France's initiative in bringing forward the draft Resolution on implementing the Convention and approved it for transmittal to the COP, subject to inclusion of the suggested improvements by the SC and STRP as far as possible.

Agenda item 9.2: Small Island Developing States and the Convention (DOC. SC37-36), submitted by Bahamas for the Caribbean Parties

296. **Bahamas** explained that the purpose of the DR is to establish that the Convention recognizes the special vulnerability of small island Parties, given the effects of climate change and loss of mangroves, and that it should consider them all as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in terms of eligibility for Ramsar financial support, whether or not they are included in the OECD Development Assistance Committee list of eligible states. He noted that the DR was drafted specifically with the Caribbean states in mind but is applicable to all other island states as well.
297. **The Chair of the STRP** reviewed some of the STRP comments provided in DOC. SC37-39, and **Dave Pritchard** added that some clarifications are necessary in the terminology and intended scope of the DR. In particular, the DR makes no distinction between Caribbean Parties, non-Parties, and overseas territories of other Parties. He supposed that the intent of the DR is that all Parties that are islands should be treated by the Convention as developing states, and if so, that should be clarified.
298. **Gabon** voiced support for the DR as long as it referred to all such Parties and not just those in the Caribbean.
299. **Bahamas** agreed that the primary purpose is to make more such Parties eligible for the Small Grants Fund and indicated that the suggested clarifications can be made. He noted that a reference to the Mauritius Declaration (2005), which affirms that "small island developing States continue to be a 'special case' for sustainable development", will make it clear how states are included globally.
300. **The DSG** offered the Secretariat's services in working with Bahamas in making the DR as global as possible.
301. **Austria** observed that it is a very important DR for the small islands and he suggested text urging such Parties to prepare new infrastructure on traffic and tourism to take account of the increasing vulnerability and to make Ramsar objectives more visible.

Decision SC37-37: The Standing Committee welcomed Bahama's initiative in bringing forward the draft Resolution on the Small Island Developing States and approved it for transmittal to the COP, subject to the revisions proposed by the SC and STRP.

Agenda item 9.3: Danube Delta (DOC. SC37-37), submitted by Romania.

302. **The DSG** explained that the Convention generally speaks to issues at specific Ramsar sites by means of the Article 8.2 report to the COP and the subsequent omnibus COP Resolution containing any recommendations that the COP may wish to make about the

issues at specific sites. He suggested that the SC may wish to propose incorporating the present DR into that report.

303. **The Senior Advisor for Europe** reported that a communication had only yesterday been received from Ukraine that offered an apparently detailed response to the requests for action and information made of Ukraine by Resolution IX.15 (2005). He noted that the Espoo Convention on EIA in a transboundary context found Ukraine in non-compliance in January 2008 and reached some kind of accommodation with Ukraine at its recent meeting of the Parties, 19-21 May 2008, in Bucharest. The SRA for Europe read out Ukraine's communication, in which that Party indicated that it is willing to reconsider its final decision on the Bystroe Canal, will arrange for consultations with other stakeholders, welcomes a joint Ramsar Advisory Mission by the Ramsar and Espoo Conventions, is ready to sign a bilateral agreement with Romania, welcomes the assistance of the Ramsar Secretariat on the way forward, and includes four pages of text responding directly to Resolution IX.15 para. 27 iv.
304. **The SRA for Europe** indicated that the joint advisory mission is now planned for late July. He noted that the Secretariat and Romania will need to see if all of the questions have been addressed and whether new issues in Romania's DR have also been addressed and closed. He suggested including any unresolved issues and the results of the RAM mission in the omnibus DR on the status of Ramsar sites.
305. **Romania** indicated that it has only just learnt of the Ukraine's information but noted that despite similar declarations of intent since 2003 nothing has changed in the situation in the Danube Delta. Romania asked that the DR should be kept on hold until the COP to see whether Ukraine's statement of intentions will be followed by genuine steps to address the terms of Resolution IX.15 para 27 iv.
306. **Iraq** indicated that the DR concerning the Danube Delta is broadly applicable to the situation in Iraq as well. The Hawizeh Marsh Ramsar site is part of a wetland shared with Iran and fed by sources in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. He reported that huge regulatory structures are being constructed, and thus the site suffers from uncoordinated structures outside the country. He drew attention to a major dam construction on the Tigris River in Turkey that will be completed in about four years and noted constructions within Iraq as well. He felt, however, that the greatest threat to Hawizeh Marsh comes from a dike being constructed by Iran in the middle of the wetland along the international border, and he said that it is unneeded and harmful and may well interrupt the flow of water through the wetland. He indicated that it is difficult to assess the present situation in the site for military reasons, and he invited the Convention to help to facilitate open and constructive discussions and agreements with Iran on this matter.
307. Returning to the Danube Delta, **France** noted that the Bystroe Canal is on the agenda of five different organizations and expressed the need to ensure coordination in the response of all five, to avoid sending mixed signals, and he pointed out that the Espoo Convention is the most advanced, having set a deadline of 30 October. France supported Romania's preference for waiting to the last possible moment to assess Ukraine's response to the Espoo deadline.
308. **The DSG** pointed out that Article 5 of the Convention requires Parties to consult with one another concerning shared water systems, and he explained the Article 8.2 obligation

for the Secretariat to arrange for discussion at the COP of all changes in the status of sites on the Ramsar List. He noted the established practice that problems at individual sites are presented, not as one Party's complaints against another, but as part of the COP's advice to all concerned Parties concerning problems at specific sites. He urged that these matters be included in the Article 8.2 report to the COP and that the concerned Parties work with the Secretariat to ensure that all relevant information will be available in that report, and he offered to provide an information paper from the Secretariat that will include all updated information subsequent to the distribution date of the Article 8.2 DR.

309. **Iran** agreed that the first step on transboundary wetland issues should be consultation and expressed satisfaction that the political situation in the region is now developing in such a way as to permit consultations on Hawizeh Marsh. He recalled that there were allegations concerning the Iranian Hamun Ramsar sites bordering with Afghanistan but that UN experts determined that most of the problems were caused by mismanagement of the site.
310. **The SG** thanked the interested parties in these debates and indicated that the Secretariat will follow the SC's guidance in progressing them, not in isolation but in coordination with other international bodies. **The DSG** pointed out that WWF suggests that the Montreux Record mechanism might be appropriate in helping to find solutions to these problems.
311. **Iraq** reported that it is now preparing documentation for listing the Hawizeh Marsh in the Montreux Record, and he indicated that he is trying to use this forum to encourage the colleagues in Iran to collaborate in getting the Marsh listed as a Ramsar site in Iran and declared jointly as a Transboundary Ramsar Site, as many contiguous Ramsar sites in Europe have already done. **Iran** responded that it has a long record of protection of wetlands and, following a full study of the realities on the ground, would welcome consultations, perhaps then leading to the start of some collaborative procedure of that kind.
312. **Romania** and **the DSG** confirmed that the idea would be to incorporate the substance of the DR (SC37-37) into the omnibus Status of Ramsar Sites DR, as updated. **The SRA for Europe** noted that the joint Ramsar-Espoo mission will take place just after the obligatory distribution of COP DRs and urged that a subsequent update on all Ramsar site issues should be issued as an Information Paper in September. **Slovenia**, the current Presidency of the Council of the EU, supported Romania in its efforts to resolve the issues concerning the Bystroe navigation canal, taking steps as agreed at the Espoo Convention meeting in May.
313. **Namibia** felt that it was a pity that the failed DR on transboundary wetlands at COP9 has been withdrawn. **The DSG** noted that such issues are presently included in elements of the Strategic Plan, and **the SG** explained that he does not believe that a DR would be helpful because we are promoting and facilitating any consultations needed, for example through the Ramsar Advisory Mission which takes account of all stakeholders. The SG noted that many Parties have already taken the initiative to undertake transboundary collaborative management arrangements, and have notified the Secretariat of that intent (cf. www.ramsar.org/key_trs.htm), and we encourage such cooperation in all appropriate circumstances.

314. **Iraq** acknowledged that, on transboundary issues, bilateral consultations are the correct place to start, but argued that if these are not productive we should urge the larger Ramsar community to consider other ways of helping.
315. **WWF International** said that an increasing number of Ramsar sites qualify for the Montreux Record, but too often Parties are not sufficiently aware of or hesitate to use the MR tool, and are unaware of the potential benefits of a Ramsar Advisory Mission. These involve time and resources from the Secretariat, and it would be difficult to keep up if there were too many requests for MR assessments or RAM missions, but it is likely that these mechanisms will be used increasingly. He pointed out that these transboundary disagreements apply not only to shared wetland systems but also to the river basin impacts of dams and other upstream activities and will become more frequent.
316. **The Netherlands** urged that the language of the Danube Delta DR should be softened, since words like “deplored” are not normally used in Ramsar discourse.

Decision SC37-38: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to work with the Parties concerned to ensure that all ecological character Ramsar site issues are transmitted to the COP through the Article 8.2 report and omnibus status of sites draft Resolution, and requested the Secretariat to provide the COP with an Information Paper containing the latest possible information on these issues.

Agenda item 9.4: Enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies (DOC. SC37-38), submitted by the Republic of Korea and Japan

317. **The Republic of Korea** explained that the DR emanated from a sense of the importance of rice and its typical agricultural landscape and a sense that these functions are not fully recognized, with resulting loss and degradation of rice paddies. The purpose of the DR is to identify the importance of rice paddies, promote best practice, and enhance awareness of them. Data is to be provided to the STRP for an information paper for COP11 on promoting good planning practices and implementation and facilitating the exchange of information.
318. **The Chair of the STRP** thanked Japan and Korea for this initiative and drew attention to the STRP comments in DOC. SC37-39 – these welcomed the DR in principle but expressed some concerns on technical issues and language. It was felt that the DR lacks balance, emphasizing the positive role of rice paddies but not the challenges and possible negative effects. The STRP Chair recommended that the STRP should work with Japan, Korea, and the Secretariat on the technical side of the issue and open the way to how the STRP can work further on the issue.
319. **The SG** noted that the rising price of rice may bring other emerging issues, because the economic value of rice may alter land use patterns and possibly encourage the conversion of wetlands to rice paddies. He said that we must ensure that rice paddies continue healthy and productive but not at the expense of other ecosystems.
320. **El Salvador** noted that this is an important DR but cautioned that it might cause conflict, since methane production from rice crops is becoming prominent in climate change issues. He urged that the STRP consider ways in which wetlands might be adversely affected as a result of rice cultivation. **Ecuador** urged inclusion of a mention of incentives for avoiding

pesticides as well as an invitation for Ramsar to work more closely with the FAO on rice paddies.

321. **Gabon** observed that the DR deals only with biodiversity without addressing the increasing need for food. He felt that the DR is not useful as now drafted and urged the STRP to rethink it to expand its scope beyond just biodiversity.
322. **The Netherlands** suggested amendments for the DR concerning including a mention of flyways, referring to papers from the Zurich meeting of the OECD, citing the work of GAWI, mention of methane issues, the inadvisability of using the word “multifunctionality”, and a reference to the FAO initiatives on “ingenious techniques”. **The DSG** suggested that the DR should also include an encouragement to collaborate more closely with the FAO and others.

Decision SC37-39: The Standing Committee encouraged Japan and the Republic of Korea to work with the Secretariat and STRP to take account of the issues and amendments raised and transmit the revised draft Resolution on rice paddies to the COP.

323. **Korea** promised to consult with Japan and the Secretariat to try to accommodate these concerns and provide a more balanced text. **Japan** expressed thanks for the constructive comments and hope that the revised DR will be supported by all Parties.
324. **The USA, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, introduced DOC. SC37-9 rev. 2 on the Small Grants Fund, which provides editorial amendments and a follow-up on the Signature Initiatives.

Decision SC37-40: The Standing Committee approved for transmittal to the COP the draft Resolution on the Small Grants Fund, DOC. SC37-9 revision 2.

325. **Iran** inquired whether there would be a Rev. 2 of DOC. SC37-8 on regional initiatives, and **the DSG** recalled that there has already been an SC37 decision on this agenda item, so there will be no Rev. 2 at this time. **Iran** wished to ensure that its comments on differentiating between regional centres and initiatives were adequately reflected in the amended DR. **The DSG** indicated that there will be no Rev. 2 of that document in the remaining hours of the meeting and urged Iran to meet with the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance to consider any outstanding language difficulties. **Iran** wished for a clear understanding now, and the **Chair of the SC** suggested a lunchtime meeting.
326. **The Czech Republic** thanked Austria for organizing a first meeting of the STRP National Focal Points in Europe and offered to organize a second one in autumn 2009, and she encouraged other regions to do the same. **The Chair of the STRP** thanked the Czech Republic for that initiative.

Agenda item 11: 38th meeting of the Standing Committee

327. **The DSG** explained that the SC’s next meeting will take place on 27 October in the Convention Centre in Changwon and an agenda will be provided in advance. The meeting will consider final preparations for the COP and determine what committees, contact groups, and side negotiations may be required for the COP. The SC will then

metamorphose into the Conference Committee. All SC members thus need to arrive in Changwon no later than 26 October.

Agenda item 12: Any Other Business

328. **The SG** sought clarification on the manner in which the Resolution IX.12 calculation of 13% of the core budget for IUCN support services should be calculated.

Decision SC37-41: The Standing Committee approved that up to a maximum of 13% of the expenditure in each year's core budget can be spent on service charges for Administration, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Financial Services.

329. **The CEPA Programme Officer** recalled that SC36 approved the World Wetlands Day 2009 theme of River Basin Management and provisionally adopted for 2010 and 2011 the themes of "wetlands, biodiversity, and climate change" and "forests". She observed that 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and the 2010 targets and that 2011 is the International Year of Forests, to be led by the UN Forestry Forum.
330. **Switzerland** supported the 2011 theme on forests and it was agreed that Ramsar should seek greater collaboration with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. **Brazil** suggested accepting the 2010 theme now and the 2011 theme subject to confirmation.

Decision SC37-42: The Standing Committee determined that the theme for World Wetlands Day 2010 will be "Wetlands, Biodiversity, and Climate Change" and the theme for 2011, subject to confirmation, will be "Wetlands and Forests".

331. **The DSG** introduced a needed change to the COP10 draft agenda to do with regional meetings for nominating SC members, and **Austria** urged that the SC members should soon consult with the Parties in their regions to begin thinking about nominations for the Standing Committee for the next triennium.

Decision SC37-43: The Standing Committee approved amendments for a Rev. 1 of the COP10 draft Agenda.

332. **The DSG** explained two proposed changes to the COP9 Rule of Procedure (to be adopted early in COP10), one of them recommended by the COP9 Credentials Committee, the first to do with changing the Head of Delegation during the COP and the other, to advance the deadline for submissions of DRs from the Parties from 40 to 60 days before the last SC meeting to adopt DRs for the COP. He noted that the COP9 Credentials Committee recommended finding a solution to the Central Asian states' problems with obtaining suitable credentials and indicated that the Secretariat is still consulting with other conventions about their solutions for that problem if any.

Decision SC37-44: The Standing Committee approved the proposed amendments to the COP Rules of Procedure concerning Heads of Delegations and deadlines for submission of draft Resolutions, and looked forward to an update on resolving the credential problems of the Central Asian states.

333. **The DSG** introduced the list of Parties that have not yet submitted their National Reports. He noted that the analyses of National Reports for the COP10 implementation reports will start at the end of next week, so any Parties that submit their National Reports after 13 June will not be included in the global and regional implementation reports to the COP. Their NRs may be posted on the Web as a special category but will not be part of the COP process.
334. **Romania** invited the Parties to consider holding Ramsar COP11 (in 2011 or 2012) in Bucharest and promised that a formal invitation will be issued soon. There was prolonged applause. **Slovenia** supported Romania as the host for Ramsar COP11.

Agenda item 13: Adoption of the Report of the meeting

335. **The DSG** explained the established Ramsar procedure, whereby Parties wishing to make editorial or factual corrections to the draft reports should provide them in writing directly to the Rapporteur and intervene only in matters requiring alteration of the record, and whereby the SC members delegate the approval of the last day's report to the Chair of the Standing Committee on their behalf, thus permitting the SC to make the full report available to the public in English and the decisions in English, French, and Spanish in the shortest time possible.
336. **The Chair of the SC** commenced reviewing the three days of draft Reports already circulated.
337. **Gabon** protested that draft Decision SC37-2 on the legal status of the Secretariat did not adequately reflect his views, mention the letter subsequently received from UNEP, or include the discussions between Germany and the African "group".
338. **The SG** noted that presently all three legal-status options are under investigation, but they require different amounts of financial support, and the Secretariat cannot promise to provide additional analysis where funding has not been made available.
339. There was prolonged discussion among **Ecuador**, the **Secretariat**, and **Gabon** about the way forward, and **the USA** suggested amendments to Decision SC37-2 that would ensure that all three legal status options would be pursued to the extent financially possible. The proposed revision of Decision SC37-2 was adopted.
340. **Iran** and **the DSG** explained that the present purpose is not to reopen issues already resolved but rather just to confirm the record of what we have decided.
341. **Brazil** requested that text in the preambular paragraphs of DOC. SC37-27 on climate change referring to the CBD COP9 decisions in relation to references to the Ramsar Convention be kept in square brackets to allow for further consultation.
342. **The SG** agreed but recalled that we have a Joint Work Plan with the CBD and are bound to reflect awareness of CBD decisions and CBD requests for Ramsar leads on various issues.

Decision SC37-45: The Standing Committee adopted the report of the first three days of the meeting, as amended, and empowered the Chair to approve the fourth day on its behalf.

Agenda item 14: Closing remarks

343. **The SG** thanked the Standing Committee for its guidance and promised to review all of the draft Resolutions in the light of its suggestions, and he thanked the SC also for its clear advice on matters affecting financial matters, the legal status, and the staff and structure.
344. **The SG** requested the SC to help in seeking funding to support the COP10 participation of developing countries, to support additional expert advice on the legal status of the Secretariat, and to help provide for future Ramsar Advisory Missions, as needed. He enthusiastically welcomed the offer from Romania to host the next COP, apologized that he was not able to personally visit Romania for consultations on that matter, and promised to visit soon to help prepare the formal offer.
345. **The SG** thanked the Secretariat staff and wished all SC participants a safe journey home.
346. **The Chair of the Standing Committee** expressed his thanks to the SC members, to the Secretary General and Secretariat staff on the SC's behalf, and to the interpreters, and he instructed the rapporteur to include thanks to himself for preparing the Conference Report for approval before the end of the meeting. The Chair looked forward to a good COP10 and expressed thanks to the Republic of Korea for its promising preparations.
347. **The Chair of the Standing Committee** said "Bon Voyage" in a large number of relevant languages and closed the meeting.