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Mr. Mohammad K. Koba
Chairperson
Ramsar *Ad Hoc* Working Group on
Administrative Reform
First Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Republic of
Indonesia to the United Nations,
World Trade Organization and other
international organizations in Geneva

15 August 2011

Dear Mr. Koba,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide IUCN's comments on the Report submitted to the Ramsar Convention *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Administrative Reform prepared by a consultant in November 2009.

As you have rightly noted, many of the report's findings have been superseded by the more recent developments in the administrative and substantive relationship between IUCN and the Ramsar Convention, which are captured in the IUCN submission of 20 June 2011 in response to the Ramsar Standing Committee Decision SC42-30.

The attached document therefore only provides the salient points for Parties' consideration, including factual corrections and other important updates to the abovementioned Report.

IUCN stands ready to provide any additional information upon request and looks forward to working with you, other members of the Working Group and all Ramsar Contracting Parties towards a constructive outcome.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julia Marton-Lefèvre'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General

CC: Mr. Anada Tiega, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention

Encl: IUCN updates to the Report submitted to the Ramsar Convention *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Administrative Reform

IUCN updates to the Report submitted to the Ramsar Convention *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Administrative Reform

Table 1: Summary of IUCN and UNEP responses

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Under “Institutional host”: *As IOP.* TO ADD: Under the new Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Convention’s International Organisation Partners signed in May 2011, IUCN and Ramsar are collaborating on a wide range of joint activities, to support the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015, including:

- contribution of freshwater species distributions to developing data dissemination mechanisms for Ramsar
- coordination of Ramsar site listing and management and evaluation of World Heritage nominations
- coordination of monitoring of coincident Ramsar and World Heritage sites, including sharing of information on threats
- facilitation of Ramsar input to policy papers on cross-Convention working by the World Heritage Committee
- joint support to the Danone Fund for Nature in mangrove restoration and development of Clean Development Mechanism methodology for carbon financing of mangrove restoration
- application of ecosystem valuation into technical and policy guidance on management and investment in wetlands as natural water infrastructure
- contribution of case studies on management of invasive alien species to Ramsar wetland restoration guidance
- support for collaboration with CBD and other MEAs on standards and regulations for control of invasive alien species.

The Ramsar Convention has full membership in UN coordination mechanisms, including the Biodiversity Liaison Group and the Environment Management Group. Being administered by IUCN in no way limits Ramsar’s ability to engage in formal and informal manner with the other environmental conventions and relevant organizations in the UN system and beyond.

Under “Enhancing the overall implementation”: *As IOP.* TO ADD: Further collaboration between IUCN and Ramsar to support implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015 under the new Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Convention’s International Organisation Partners signed in May 2011, including:

- support to Parties in identification of priority wetlands for Ramsar-site and protected area designation
- application of ‘Key Biodiversity Area’ assessment to further development of national wetland inventories
- support to Parties in identification of capacity development priorities for increasing site management effectiveness
- strengthening technical assistance to Parties on wetland policy and lawmaking by the IUCN Environmental Law Centre

- application of results from river basin demonstration projects to support national planning of wetland management by Parties and integration of wetlands into poverty reduction strategies
- integration of wetland conservation in national implementation guidance for Integrated Water Resources Management
- assistance to Parties in preparation of invasive alien species to Ramsar sites and national inventories of invasive alien species
- advocacy of the role of wetlands in climate change adaptation and support to Parties on preparation of Strategies for climate resilience
- support for consensus building and institutional development for improved transboundary cooperation in river and wetland management.

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Under “Legal personality. As host”: COMMENT: With regard to the statement “Convention has no legal personality”, it should be specified that the question of legal personality relates to the Secretariat, not the Convention which has full legal status as an intergovernmental treaty. The Secretariat does not have a separate legal personality from its host institution, which would be the case in both hosting options – by IUCN and by UNEP. As a fully accredited intergovernmental treaty, benefitting from the legal commitments entered into by Contracting Parties, Ramsar operates on an equal footing to the other biodiversity-related conventions.

Under “Staff. As host”: ADD: Concerning international travel, staff of both Secretariats are treated equally. Staff members are automatically insured worldwide for emergency medical services, evacuation and repatriation, at IUCN’s expense. In certain cases, senior staff members on official mission are accorded the same protocol as senior government or UN officials, at the discretion of the host country.

Ramsar staff fully benefit from IUCN’s recently launched *myLearningSpace* online portal, which contains over 100 learning and training tools covering the areas of communication, computer skills, ethics, health, IUCN courses, languages, leadership, management, personal effectiveness, and project management.

Under “Administrative service and cost comparison. As host”: ADD: IUCN has made continuous efforts to improve the cost-effectiveness of these services over the years. Between 2010 and 2011, overheads decreased from 10% to 8.5%, accounting and finance costs were revised in 2010 resulting in a decrease of 20%, and information technology services costs decreased by 10%. The Ramsar Secretariat will also benefit from the rollout of the state-of-the-art Enterprise Resource Planning system in 2011, the costs of which to the tune of CHF 5 million were borne by IUCN.

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Under “Location alternatives. As host”: ADD: IUCN hosts the Convention in Gland, at its award-winning recently inaugurated Conservation centre, and can do so for the foreseeable future, but cannot host the Convention at another location. The Ramsar Secretariat has full access to the library and conference facilities, including for regular meetings of its Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

Part B: Comparative analysis

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No Comment

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Paragraphs 23-25: IUCN acknowledges the need for and actively promotes synergies among MEAs and institutions. At the same time, it is IUCN's firm view that enhanced collaboration among biodiversity-related conventions, which holds the key for greater coherence in the international environmental governance system overall, can be achieved regardless of administrative arrangements.

In fact, it is already well underway. Ramsar already has full membership in UN coordination mechanisms, including the Biodiversity Liaison Group and the Environment Management Group. Being administered by IUCN in no way limits Ramsar's ability to engage in formal and informal manner with the other environmental conventions and relevant organizations in the UN system and beyond. IUCN itself participates in these processes and has, for example, recently been requested by the four biodiversity-related conventions to help them map their activities in support of the CBD Strategic Plan.

The Ramsar Convention currently has good cooperation and collaboration with the other MEAs, particularly those related to biodiversity. Ramsar has a successful joint work plan with the CBD and CMS. IUCN administration was no barrier to the establishment of these work programmes and is no barrier to their implementation. IUCN administration does not prevent Ramsar from partnering with UN-administered conventions.

In addition to hosting the Ramsar Secretariat since its establishment in 1987, IUCN is the official advisory body on natural heritage to the World Heritage Convention, and provides scientific and technical advice to CBD and CITES, for example by producing the Analyses of Proposals to Amend the CITES Appendices for each of the Conferences of the Parties. IUCN's knowledge tools such as the Red List Index have been adopted by the CBD as one of the indicators to measure progress towards the achievement of global biodiversity targets.

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Paragraph 29: IUCN is well recognized for its science-based expertise in the areas of conservation and sustainable development. Ramsar has access to IUCN's unique global community of more than 11,000 scientists that are part of six volunteer commissions: Species Survival Commission (SSC), World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), Commission on Environmental Economics and Social Policy (CEESP), Commission on Environmental Law (CEL) and Commission on Education and Communication (CEC). The lessons learned through IUCN's field activities are fed into the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel and used to provide guidance to Contracting Parties. Ramsar can also benefit from IUCN's conservation databases and tools. For example, IUCN is the leading authority on protected area management and has published a series of guidelines on this topic that are of direct relevance to Ramsar sites.

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No comment.

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Paragraph 40: It is IUCN's firm view that the Convention is already an equal partner of other MEAs regardless of administrative arrangements. IUCN is the only environmental organization which has the official Observer Status at the United Nations General Assembly and maintains a formally accredited permanent observer mission to the UN in New York where it is recognized as an Intergovernmental Organization. Ramsar routinely receives accreditation to various UN fora as an Observer, a procedure similar to one that applies to UN-administered conventions.

Paragraph 43: COMMENT: IUCN believes that the Convention has flourished under the current administrative arrangements and has a greater number of Parties and a greater budget than some UNEP-administered MEAs. The track record of the Convention demonstrates clearly that administration of the Secretariat by IUCN is not a barrier to success or constraint on ambition.

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Paragraph 46: The IUCN online recruitment system is cost-effective, efficient, ensures confidentiality and is paper free. Since September 2009, ten Ramsar positions have been filled through the online recruitment system with the average number of applications being 166. The average number of weeks between the closing date for applications and the acceptance of a job offer by the preferred candidate is eight.

Paragraph 48: On the basis of the agreement concluded in 1986 by and between the Swiss Federal Council and IUCN, the latter enjoys the following advantages:

- IUCN is exonerated from all direct, indirect (value-added tax) federal, cantonal and communal taxes.
- Non-Swiss IUCN staff members are exonerated from all direct federal, cantonal and communal taxes on salaries, income and indemnities paid to them by IUCN.
- Non-Swiss staff members employed by IUCN are entitled to a work and residence permit in accordance with the law on foreigners (residence permit, B permit, or residence authorization, C permit).
- IUCN staff members are covered by the Swiss social security system.

Paragraph 49: Concerning international travel, IUCN and Ramsar staff members are automatically insured worldwide for emergency medical services, evacuation and repatriation, at IUCN's expense. In certain cases, senior staff members on official mission are accorded the same protocol as senior government or UN officials, at the discretion of the host country. IUCN grants installation and repatriation allowances to compensate expatriates for the costs incurred in transferring from one country to another in order to take up an appointment, to return at the end of service, or for relocation to another country of assignment upon termination of the initial assignment.

Paragraph 50: Ramsar staff fully benefit from IUCN's recently launched *myLearningSpace* online portal, which contains over 100 learning and training tools covering the areas of communication, computer skills, ethics, health, IUCN courses, languages, leadership, management, personal effectiveness, and project management.

Paragraph 52: IUCN puts great emphasis on attracting and retaining highly qualified personnel and providing opportunities for staff development. While the majority enjoys a fulfilling career

with the organization, a number of its staff members have been successfully recruited to professional and management-level positions with UNEP and other UN agencies.

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Paragraph 53: IUCN has made continuous efforts to improve the cost-effectiveness of these services over the years. Between 2010 and 2011, overheads decreased from 10% to 8.5%, accounting and finance costs were revised in 2010 resulting in a decrease of 20%, and information technology services costs decreased by 10%. The Ramsar Secretariat will also benefit from the rollout of the state-of-the-art Enterprise Resource Planning system in 2011, the costs of which to the tune of CHF 5 million were borne by IUCN.

Paragraph 54: IUCN applies the highest international auditing and oversight standards. The latest audit report of Ramsar for 2010 carried out by Deloitte found no control weaknesses or irregularities.

Paragraph 55: Under its current hosting arrangements, the Ramsar Secretariat has full access to the library and conference facilities, including for regular meetings of its Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

Paragraph 56: With its on the ground presence in over 160 countries through its globally distributed Secretariat, Members and partners, IUCN can assist the Ramsar Secretariat in responding to the needs of its Contracting Parties.

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Paragraph 59: Since June 2010, the Ramsar Convention is headquartered in the IUCN Conservation Centre, an award-winning “green” office building, which offers world-class facilities and enables daily interaction with two out of five of the Convention’s International Organisation Partners.

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Paragraph 66: In IUCN’s view, the ‘cost-neutral’ scenario for a UNEP-administered Convention represents a downgrading of the capacity of the Secretariat, as the competencies for several key positions have been underestimated. This indicates that a UNEP-administered Secretariat will either be more costly to Parties, or it will lose vital capacity to support implementation.

IUCN believes that a move of the Ramsar Secretariat between now and 2020 would entail unnecessary bureaucratic upheaval during a time when all efforts should be focused on delivering conservation. Transition of the Secretariat to UN administration are likely to swallow most if not all of triennium’s work of the Convention. Human and financial resources will be channelled to transitioning bureaucracy instead of supporting action on implementation.

Part C: Innovative approaches and Next steps

Paragraph 67: IUCN welcomes the process of review of the Convention’s administrative arrangements with a view to contributing constructively to ensuring that the Secretariat is equipped to operate effectively in future. IUCN notes with satisfaction that the current discussions of the hosting arrangements have not questioned the quality of the administrative services or the intellectual environment provided by IUCN.

Pages 18-19

Paragraph 73: Under the new Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Convention's International Organisation Partners signed in May 2011, IUCN and Ramsar are collaborating on a wide range of joint activities, to support the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015, including:

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- contribution of case studies on management of invasive alien species to Ramsar wetland restoration guidance
- support for collaboration with CBD and other MEAs on standards and regulations for control of invasive alien species

Paragraph 74: IUCN believes that all nine issues raised by Parties have already been or can be resolved within the remit of the current administrative arrangements. IUCN notes particular progress on enhancing cooperation and coordination between IUCN and the Convention as well as strengthening partnerships with its IOPs, working on joint projects, and assisting the Convention to achieve all the goals of its strategic plan, especially the Convention's mission.

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Paragraph 80: UNEP is currently working towards resolving financial and other issues in the relationship with the MEAs it administers, therefore it may be prudent to wait for the outcome of that process before deciding on the best hosting arrangements for the Convention.

Paragraph 81: It should be noted that several UNEP-administered Conventions do not benefit from GEF funding, therefore this cannot be guaranteed in the case of Ramsar.

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Paragraph 82: The Ramsar Convention already enjoys close cooperation with other Conventions, UN entities and international organizations. Such cooperation is not contingent on the Secretariat's administrative arrangements.