



10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the  
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

*“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”*

Changwon, Republic of Korea,  
28 October-4 November 2008

Agenda item VIII

Ramsar COP10 DOC. 4

## Report of the Chairperson of the Standing Committee

### Introduction

1. The Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention was established by a Resolution of the 3rd Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (1987), and at each ordinary meeting of the Conference the Standing Committee membership is reviewed. Ramsar COP7 adopted Resolution VII.1 on *Regional categorization of countries under the Convention, and composition, roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, including duties of Standing Committee members*, which established the terms of reference and proportional membership system that are presently in effect.
2. The election of the Standing Committee members for the 2006-2008 triennium was carried out at COP9 in conformity with Resolution VII.1, based upon a proportional representation according to the numbers of Contracting Parties in each region at that time. COP8 elected the following members to this Committee, representing the six Ramsar regions:
  - Africa:** Benin, Gabon, Kenya, and Malawi
  - Asia:** China, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Thailand
  - Europe:** Austria, Czech Republic, Georgia, and Slovenia
  - Neotropics:** Bahamas, Ecuador, and El Salvador
  - North America:** United States
  - Oceania:** Samoa
3. Additionally the COP9 host country, Uganda, and the COP10 host country, Republic of Korea, are members as well.
4. In addition, Switzerland and the Netherlands have Permanent Observer status on the Committee by virtue of their being host countries, respectively, for IUCN, which hosts the Convention's Secretariat, and Wetlands International, strongly linked to the Convention's inception and home of the Ramsar Sites Database.
5. The Convention's International Organization Partners – presently BirdLife International, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), IUCN, Wetlands International, and WWF International – are also invited under the terms of Resolution VII.1 to participate as observers in meetings of the Standing Committee.

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6. At its 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting, following the close of COP9 in Kampala, the new Standing Committee elected Uganda (represented by Mr Paul Mafabi) as its Chair for the next triennium, Bahamas (represented by Mr John Bowleg) as Vice-Chair, and the USA as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance.
7. The Standing Committee has been entrusted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties with the supervision of ongoing matters, including the implementation of policy by the Ramsar Secretariat, the preparation of the technical documents by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), the execution of the Convention's budget, the conduct of secretariat affairs, and the preparation of Ramsar COP10 in 2008, as well as consideration of any other appropriate matters raised by members and observers.
8. Notice of each meeting of the Standing Committee was distributed to all Contracting Parties through diplomatic notification, and Parties not members of the Committee were invited to attend in an observer capacity if they so wished. An increasing number of Parties have attended Standing Committee meetings as observers as a matter of routine – a very welcome development – either from their capitals or from their diplomatic missions in Geneva. All documentation to be considered by each SC meeting was e-mailed to the Administrative Authorities and posted on the Ramsar Web site at least one month in advance of the meeting.
9. The outcomes of each Standing Committee meeting have been distributed to all Contracting Parties under the cover of a diplomatic note, with the full text of the minutes in the English language, approved by the SC members at the end of the last plenary session of each meeting, and the texts of all decisions in English, French or Spanish, as appropriate. The minutes and the texts of the decisions have also been posted promptly on the Ramsar Web site.
10. In the present report, only the main issues the Standing Committee has dealt with are highlighted, from 15 November 2005 (the close of the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties) to 15 August 2008.

### **Overview of the main issues considered and decisions taken**

11. The Standing Committee met five times during the period under review:
  - 33<sup>rd</sup> Meeting: immediately after the close of Ramsar COP9 in Kampala, Uganda, on 15 November 2005
  - 34<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 10 – 13 April 2006, in Gland, Switzerland
  - 35<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 14 – 16 February 2007, in Gland, Switzerland
  - 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 27 – 29 February 2008, in Gland, Switzerland
  - 37<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 2 – 6 June 2008, in Gland, Switzerland
12. The Standing Committee Subgroups on COP10 and on Finance met just before each of the Standing Committee meetings, where they discussed the issues within their mandates and reported their recommendations to the Standing Committee meeting in plenary session. This practice allowed discussions to proceed much more smoothly in the plenary sessions in most cases. It should be noted that while these were meetings of the Subgroups, the interest in the issues to be considered was such that most other Standing

Committee members attended as well, together with a number of other Contracting Parties that participated in an observer capacity.

13. In order to promote the flow of information to members of Standing Committee, and to Parties generally, the Secretariat has regularly circulated updates on issues between meetings of the Standing Committee and for several years has also organized briefings for the diplomatic permanent missions to the UN based in Geneva. In addition, the Secretary General reports regularly on emerging issues to the executive team of the Standing Committee, i.e., the Chair and Vice Chair and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance.
14. At each of its annual meetings in 2006, 2007, and 2008, the Committee dealt with standing issues on the Committee's agenda, including:
  - a) Review of the audited accounts of the previous years. Normally, after study by the Subgroup on Finance, the Standing Committee approves the audited accounts for each year on behalf of the Conference of the Parties, but in the case of the audited accounts for 2007, they were not received from IUCN's auditors until after the 37<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee, so they are now with the Subgroup on Finance for comment and will be provided to COP10 with the information papers.
  - b) Review of the financial situation of the current year and the forecast of income and expenditure until the year's end, and adoption of the budget for the following year.
  - c) Review of the work of the Secretariat.
  - d) Review of reports on the implementation of the work programmes of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the CEPA Oversight Panel and recommendations for their future work.
  - e) Consideration of the projects submitted under the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) and approval of the projects to be funded.
  - f) Review of the financial and implementation status of other projects undertaken by the Secretariat.
15. The following section is a summary report on the main issues dealt with and decisions taken by the Standing Committee at each of its meetings. (The reports of the meetings and texts of the decisions are available at [http://www.ramsar.org/sc/key\\_sc\\_index.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/sc/key_sc_index.htm).) In addition to the formal SC meetings, SC members and particularly the SC Chair have met with Ramsar staff members on several occasions and participated in meetings with the International Organization Partners and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel.

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Meeting: Kampala, Uganda, 15 November 2005**

16. As mentioned above, at its 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting, following the close of COP9 in Kampala, the Standing Committee members newly chosen by the Conference of the Parties elected Uganda (represented by Paul Mafabi) as its Chair for the next triennium, Bahamas (represented by John Bowleg) as Vice-Chair.

17. In addition, the SC elected the following Parties to the Subgroup on Finance for 2006-2008: Benin (Africa), China (Asia), Czech Republic (Europe), Ecuador (Neotropics), USA (North America), and Samoa (Oceania), and the USA was elected as Chair of the Subgroup.
18. The SC also welcomed a proposal that the outgoing and incoming Chairs of the Standing Committee and the Subgroup on Finance should meet prior to the first full SC meeting of the term in order to facilitate a smooth transition to the next triennium's work. This transition meeting was subsequently held in February 2006 and provides the basis for draft Resolution DR4 for COP10 on formally establishing a Transition Committee of the Management Working Group.

### 34<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 10-13 April 2006

19. The Standing Committee elected members to serve on four important SC committees established by COP Resolutions:
  - i) The Management Working Group: Bahamas, China, Japan, Malawi, Russian Federation Samoa, and Switzerland, as well as BirdLife International and WWF, were accepted as participants in the new Management Working Group (Resolution IX.24) in addition to the designated members: the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the most recent and present Standing Committees, the Chairs of the most recent and present Subgroup on Finance and STRP, and the Secretary General *ex officio*.
  - ii) The SC terminated the former Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 and folded its unfinished tasks into a new Subgroup on the Strategic Plan and elected its members: the Vice Chair of the SC (Bahamas) as Chair; Benin, Islamic Republic of Iran, Georgia, Ecuador and the USA for the regions, and the representative from Oceania to be confirmed; BirdLife International for the IOPs; and Japan and the UK as observers.
  - iii) The Subgroup on COP10, to consist of: the Republic of Korea (chair); Kenya, Thailand, Austria, El Salvador, and the USA, and the Oceania member to be confirmed, representing regions, and Uganda (COP9 host country), with Switzerland as an observer and Wetlands International as the primary contact for the IOPs.
  - iv) The Oversight Panel for CEPA activities was established, to consist of the Vice Chair of SC, acting as Oversight Panel Chair; the Chair of the SC Subgroup on Finance; Chair of the STRP/WI CEPA Specialist Group; Vice-Chair of the STRP; one Government CEPA NFP and one NGO NFP; a representative of the IOPs; and the CEPA Programme Officer and the Secretary General from the Secretariat.
20. The Standing Committee responded to a report of a recent collaboration meeting between the Secretariat and the International Organization Partners by urging the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in the Parties and the IOPs' country offices to collaborate more fully in National Ramsar Committees and by a range of other means.
21. The Committee expressed its encouragement and advice following progress reports on Dave Pritchard's review of past COP decisions, on attempts to resolve the ambiguous legal status of the Ramsar Secretariat, and on a number of financial matters concerning the costs

of IUCN's services to the Convention. It also agreed a number of important changes to the Operational Guidelines of the Small Grants Fund and instructed the Secretary General to find innovative ways of securing funding for the SGF.

22. Following wide-ranging discussion of the problem of Parties' whose budgetary contributions are in arrears, the SC agreed a programme of steps through which the Secretariat should try to work out suitable repayment arrangements with Parties experiencing difficulties in meeting their financial commitments. It also agreed financial allocations to a number of Ramsar Regional Initiatives and outlined a procedure for future operation of this task, and it called upon Parties that have made financial commitments to support regional initiatives financially, especially the MedWet Secretariat, to make those payments in a timely way.
23. In additional administrative matters, the SC agreed in principle to extend the Secretary General's contract and asked the Management Working Group both to examine options for the length of that extension and to agree a mechanism for conducting the Secretary General's performance evaluation.

#### **35<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 14-16 February 2007**

24. In addition to caring for the ordinary financial business, the Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare future core budgets and budget proposals according to a revised grouping of major areas of expenditure. It agreed financial allocations for Regional Initiatives for 2007 and made refinements in the procedures for requesting and awarding funds for those programmes, and it progressed proposals for two new concepts, the Small Grants Portfolio and the Signature Initiatives, to attract new types of financial contributions to the projects in the Small Grants Fund.
25. In administrative matters, the SC decided to propose formally the establishment of a Transition Committee within the Management Working Group, and it established a procedure for monitoring the progress of an action plan aimed at resolving differences between the Secretary General and the Secretariat staff. It also agreed to the recruitment of an additional P1 post in the Secretariat to support the work of the Senior Regional Advisors.
26. In response to a report of the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan, the Committee agreed a number of requirements and directions for the draft Strategic Plan to be considered at Ramsar COP10 and for the procedure for further drafting of the Plan, and it gave detailed instructions concerning the form, scope, and length of the National Reports form to be finalized and issued in June 2007.
27. The Standing Committee reviewed progress on a number of issues emanating from COP9 decisions and gave instructions for the way forward, including on the review of previous COP decisions, wetlands and poverty reduction, and the status of Ramsar sites, and it particularly established that the review of the status of Ramsar sites should be an agenda item for all future Standing Committee meetings
28. The SC approved the Secretariat's work plan for 2007 and endorsed the draft Fourth Joint Work Plan between Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Committee reviewed the limited progress in resolving the ambiguous legal status of the Secretariat and

called for a more informative and comprehensive paper on the problem and options for solutions for its next meeting.

29. Outside of the ordinary meetings of the Standing Committee, in May 2007 the Committee selected Mr Anada Tiéga to take over as the next Secretary General of the Convention, to begin on 1 August 2007.

### **36<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 27-29 February 2008**

30. As Ramsar COP10 drew closer, the Standing Committee approved a set of procedures and principles on submitting draft Resolutions for meetings of the COP and welcomed the report of the Chair of the STRP on the final products to be expected from the Panel. The SC decided that there should be no draft Resolution on cultural guidelines but confirmed that the Culture Working Group should continue its work with a view to progressing its draft text for distribution in some other form, and it called for specific comments on the latest draft of the Strategic Plan 2009-2014.
31. A number of administrative matters were attended to at the 36<sup>th</sup> meeting, including modalities for supporting and overseeing Secretariat internal affairs in the changeover to a new Secretary General and for establishing a Transition Committee of the Management Working Group. The SC recognized that the Secretariat's proposals for staff increases and organization are appropriate as a vision for the future, but decoupled discussion of future staffing from budgetary considerations; the Committee called for further information on the implications of staffing proposals and possible alternatives to them.
32. Concerning the legal status of the Secretariat, the Committee called for continued dialogue with relevant organizations and additional information on the three options that have been proposed as solutions, namely an improved situation with IUCN and Switzerland, chartering as an independent international organization, and incorporation into the United Nations system.
33. In financial matters, the SC approved the allocations for Regional Initiatives for 2008 and determined the range of core budget proposals that it would like to have developed for consideration by COP10 for the next triennium.
34. In the preparation of COP10 documentation, the SC approved the STRP's guidance on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza for the COP's consideration and reviewed the progress of a number of guidance products expected from the STRP, and it encouraged further work in time for submission to COP10 on a number of emerging issues, including wetlands' interrelationships with agriculture, climate change, extractive industries, human health, and poverty reduction.
35. Finally, the 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting welcomed a proposal from Austria for changing the Convention's COP cycle from three to four years and invited Austria and the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution and further analysis on that idea.

### **37<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 2-6 June 2008**

36. The Standing Committee's final meeting before the COP was largely devoted to debates on and adoption of the draft Resolutions to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties for

its consideration in October. In administrative and financial matters, the Committee approved draft Resolutions on the Transition Committee, the frequency of meetings of the COP, the procedures for dealing with Regional Initiatives, the latest texts of the draft Strategic Plan and CEPA Programme for 2009-2014, and proposed modifications to the Small Grants Fund, and it approved two proposed amendments to the COP Rules of Procedure for consideration at the beginning of COP10.

37. The Committee also called for more information for COP10 on the legal status of the Secretariat, following continuing investigation of the three proposed options, and requested the Secretariat to redraft proposals for future Secretariat structure and staffing in light of the SC's decisions on priorities.
38. The SC also requested the Secretariat to redraft the proposed lengthy guidelines on partnerships with the business sector in the form of basic principles that can be discussed at the COP and then form the foundation for subsequent partnerships and perhaps more elaborate guidelines in future.
39. During the meeting, the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel introduced draft Resolutions and proposed guidance on a considerable number of technical issues, and these were discussed by the Panel, amended in some places, and adopted for submission for the COP's consideration.
40. In addition, the Committee reviewed all of the nominations and chose the three laureates for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, to wit, Dave Pritchard (science category), Denis Landenbergue (management), and Sansanee Choowaew (education), with a Recognition of Excellence for Jan Květ.

### **Concluding remarks**

41. The period since COP9 has been extraordinarily active and constructive for the Standing Committee and its subgroups. This is reflected in the large number of policy decisions incorporated in the draft Resolutions and information papers to be considered by COP10.
42. This output would not have been possible without the clear mandates created for the Standing Committee by Resolutions of COP9, the scope of work covered by the STRP and the Secretariat, and the substantial work of the members of Standing Committee itself, its observers, and the International Organization Partners.
43. Similarly, it is important that COP10 should once again set a clear forward agenda for the Standing Committee, STRP and Secretariat that is achievable within the agreed budget, and carefully targeted towards issues of strategic importance to the Convention. More effective and focused delivery of the Convention, particularly at national level, must be the cooperative aim and objective.
44. In reviewing the work of the Standing Committee and the Convention over the past three years, some issues emerge which merit our attention and serious consideration.
45. *First*, the legal status of the Secretariat remains a critical issue that merits our attention during this Conference. This needs to be resolved in order to further facilitate the work of the Secretariat at all levels.

46. *Secondly*, we need to think seriously about the long term financing for the Convention and mechanisms to resource the Small Grants Fund. In particular, Resolution IX.13, among others, requested the “Standing Committee to bring to COP10 new proposals for establishing a more vigorous mechanism to support SGF, including the possible development of regional support funds”. We need to concretise the proposals outlined in draft Resolution DR 7 in order to give the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat the necessary tools to implement the Convention.
47. *Thirdly*, the deepening and increasing effectiveness of the cooperative activities of the Convention with other international instruments is becoming fruitful and increasingly important.
48. *Fourthly*, the trend is continuing both within the work of the Convention and more generally to address issues of wetland conservation and wise use in their broadest context. This has meant that much closer attention is being given to the impact upon wetlands of events well beyond their immediate boundaries as well as to social and economic considerations, whether they are of immediate or more general impact. At the same time, given the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, much greater attention is also being paid to the role of wetlands in the provision of vital social, economic and ecosystem services at all scales from local to global.
49. *Fifthly*, there is need to strengthen capacity for the Convention’s implementation by the Contracting Parties

### **Acknowledgements**

50. On behalf of the Standing Committee, I wish to record my deep thanks for the work of all staff of the Ramsar Secretariat. This work is done in an increasingly pressured and under-funded environment, and the demands are increasing out of proportion to available resources. But it is always a pleasure to see the teamwork and professionalism evident in the Secretariat, especially when having to organize increasingly complex meetings for Standing Committee members!
51. I also wish to record the appreciation of Standing Committee for the great volume and quality of the work of the Chair and members of the STRP. Their skills and dedication have contributed greatly to many of the draft Resolutions now before the COP for consideration.
52. I would also like to thank the IOPs for their continued support for the Convention’s implementation, in providing technical support and advice, and in ensuring implementation of the Convention at all levels.
53. I thank all members of Standing Committee and the many observers who have attended and contributed to its meetings since COP9. Your willingness to work closely with each other, to constructively address issues of importance to the Convention and constantly seek to advance the effectiveness of Ramsar in the conservation and wise use of the world’s wetlands has made my job as Chair both easy and enjoyable. I am honoured to have been able to serve in this role.

54. Finally I wish all Contracting Parties, the new Standing Committee, and the new STRP courage and strength to carry on delivering the mandates of our very special convention!

Paul Mafabi  
Chairperson  
Standing Committee