



11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Wetlands: home and destination”

Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012

Agenda item VIII

Ramsar COP11 DOC. 5

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* (1999), which established the terms of reference and proportional membership system that are presently in effect. The Standing Committee has recently proposed some minor amendments to that document for the consideration of the Conference of the Parties in Draft Resolution DR19 for COP11.
2. The election of the Standing Committee members for the 2008-2012 quadriennium was carried out at COP10 in conformity with Resolution VII.1, based upon a proportional representation according to the numbers of Contracting Parties in each region at that time. COP10 elected the following members to this Committee, representing the six Ramsar regions:

Africa: Cameroon, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania
Asia: China, Lebanon, Thailand
Europe: Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia
Neotropics: Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay
North America: Mexico
Oceania: Marshall Islands
3. Additionally the COP10 host country, Republic of Korea, and the COP11 host country, Romania, are full 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 the Convention's Secretariat and for Wetlands International, which is 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.
6. At its 39th meeting, following the close of COP10 in Changwon, the new Standing Committee elected the Republic of Korea as its Chair, Paraguay as Vice-Chair, and Finland as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance. The Republic of Korea has been represented in the Chair by Mr Kim Chan Woo for the 39-41st SC meetings, and subsequently by Mr Yoo Yeon-Chul.
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 COP11 in 2012, 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, either from their capitals or from their diplomatic missions in Geneva. All documentation to be considered by each SC meeting has been e-mailed to the Administrative Authorities and posted on the Ramsar website 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 website.
10. In the present report, only the main issues the Standing Committee has dealt with are highlighted, from early November 2008 (the close of the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties) to April 2012.

Overview of the main issues considered and decisions taken

11. The Standing Committee met five times during the period under review:
 - 39th Meeting: immediately after the close of Ramsar COP10 in Changwon, Republic of Korea, on 4 November 2008
 - 40th Meeting: 11 – 15 May 2009, in Gland, Switzerland
 - 41st Meeting: 26 April – 1 May 2010, in Kobuleti, Georgia
 - 42nd Meeting: 16 – 20 May 2011, in Gland, Switzerland
 - 43rd Meeting: 31 October – 4 November 2011, in Gland, Switzerland.

12. The Standing Committee Subgroups on Finance and on COP11 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 has allowed discussions to proceed more smoothly in the plenary sessions in most cases. The Management Working Group also met prior to the 40th, 41st, and 42nd meetings.
13. In order to promote the flow of information to members of the 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 2009, 2010, and 2011, 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.
 - 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) Review of the financial and implementation status of 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 www.ramsar.org/sc/.

39th Meeting: Changwon, Republic of Korea, 4 November 2008

16. As mentioned above, at its 39th meeting, following the close of COP10 in Changwon, the Standing Committee members newly chosen by the Conference of the Parties elected the Republic of Korea as their Chair and Paraguay as Vice-Chair.
17. In addition, the SC elected the following Parties to the Subgroup on Finance for 2009-2012: China (Asia), Finland (Europe), Jamaica (Neotropics), Marshall Islands (Oceania), Mexico (North America), and Nigeria (Africa). Finland was elected as Chair of the Subgroup.
18. The SC also determined that the outgoing and incoming Chairs of the Standing Committee and the Subgroup on Finance should meet as the Transition Committee just prior to the

first full SC meeting of the term, in accordance with Resolution X.4 (2008), in order to facilitate a smooth transition.

40th Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 11-15 May 2009

19. At its first full business meeting, the new Standing Committee elected the members to serve on the Subgroup on COP11, with Romania as its Chair and including one SC member from each region. The members chosen to serve were, for Africa, Uganda; for Asia, Lebanon; for Europe, Croatia; for the Neotropics, Panama; for North America, Canada; and for Oceania, Marshall Islands.
20. The Committee also determined that henceforward the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SC and Chair of the Subgroup on Finance should continue to act as an informal intersessional “Executive Team” to guide the Secretary General on matters arising, and it agreed that a general principle should be to establish continuity (calling upon past Chairs, etc.) in all Standing Committee subgroups, in particular the Subgroups on Finance and the COP.
21. It was decided to initiate a process of developing concepts and terms of reference for a future Partnership Coordinator position, with a view to identifying synergies in fundraising for implementation of initiatives to support national capacity for wetland conservation and wise use.
22. On financial matters, the SC approved the 2008 audited accounts and core budget allocations for 2009, reviewed the Secretariat’s new Letter of Agreement on Services with IUCN, reviewed again the ongoing problem of Parties in arrears with their payments to the Convention, and considered ways of improving the operation of the Small Grants Fund and developing other opportunities for obtaining financial support for the work of the Convention and its Parties.
23. The Committee adopted Evaluation Criteria for Regional Initiatives operating in the framework of the Convention and endorsed a number of Initiatives as fully meeting the Operational Guidelines for 2009-2012, and it reviewed the progress of Parties and others in promoting and making good use of the Changwon Declaration adopted at COP10.
24. Following a review of early progress in the planning for COP11 in 2012, the SC endorsed the MOU to be negotiated further with Romania and made a number of decisions regarding both the form and content of the National Reports on Ramsar implementation to be completed by all Parties for consideration by COP11, as well as on the information provided by Parties on the status of their Ramsar and Montreux Record Sites.
25. After approving a number of recommendations on Communications, Education, Participation, and Awareness prepared by the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Committee reviewed the successes of World Wetlands Day and approved WWD themes for 2011 and 2012, whilst expressing its gratitude to the Danone Group for its financial support for WWD activities since 1999.
26. Finally, SC40 accepted the generous offer from Georgia to host the next meeting of the Committee, subject to sufficient progress in making the necessary arrangements, and asked the Secretariat to draw up guidelines for Parties wishing to host a Standing Committee meeting in future.

41st Meeting: Kobuleti, Georgia, 26 April – 1 May 2010

27. In addition to caring for the ordinary financial business (approving the 2009 statement and the core budget for 2010), the SC welcomed the proposals for a new budget framework for presentation to COP11 covering voluntary and in-kind contributions towards COP-mandated but unfunded activities, and it requested the Secretariat to prepare indicative 2011 budgets on this basis for further consideration by the Subgroup on Finance and the 42nd meeting of the SC. It requested the Secretary General to report back on the implementation of the Secretariat's staff salary awards process, and once again it urged Parties and others to increase the level of voluntary contributions to the Convention's work and especially to the Small Grants Fund. The SC members and the Secretariat were urged to pursue much closer collaboration and possible formal relations with the Global Environment Facility.
28. The Committee agreed financial allocations for Regional Initiatives for 2010 and made refinements in the procedures for requesting and awarding funds for those programmes, and it made a number of decisions regarding the progress in preparations for Ramsar COP11 in 2012.
29. In administrative matters, the SC received the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on assessing hosting arrangements for the Secretariat. Noting the Working Group's sense that a sufficient number of members were receptive to the idea that hosting by UNEP might be preferable to present arrangements with IUCN, the Committee invited the Working Group to continue exploring the modalities of such a potential change, including reducing the costs of administration by UNEP and of any transition arrangements, and proposing a potential timeline for any such change.
30. In other administrative matters, the Committee requested a report on the Convention's collaborative activities with the International Organization Partners; invited the Secretariat and Parties to redouble their efforts to disseminate the Changwon Declaration and make its contents more readily available for use at important meetings of other bodies; approved the draft COP11 National Report form for finalization, with a timeline for issuing the form by January 2011; and endorsed both the STRP's work plan for 2010-2011 and the allocation of up to 50,000 Swiss francs from the Reserve Fund for the priority work of the STRP in 2010.
31. Finally, the Standing Committee renewed the Secretary General's contract for another term, requested him to develop a strategy to maximize synergies within the Secretariat, and requested the Executive Team to improve the criteria and methodology for the annual evaluation of the Secretary General on the basis of the terms of reference for the post and the approved Secretariat Work Plan.

42nd Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 16-20 May 2011

32. In personnel matters, the Standing Committee noted the Secretary General's progress in establishing a strategy for maximizing the Secretariat's synergies; requested further information on current staff award systems, including options for non-monetary awards; agreed to review the current grievance procedure for staff; and noted the progress made by the SC Executive Team in establishing a clear process for the annual evaluation of the Secretary General.

33. As Ramsar COP11 drew closer, the Standing Committee considered a number of important related issues, including approving the draft agenda; noting progress in defining the logo and slogan; ensuring clarity in fundraising responsibilities for the COP; guiding the Parties in streamlining their input to COP informational documents in order to save time spent on updates during plenary sessions; modifying the procedure for electing the next triennium's Standing Committee members during the course of COP11; and exploring the feasibility of holding a high-level segment.
34. Based on the reports from the Subgroup on Finance, the SC noted the budget deficit for 2010 and approved the core budget for 2011. It requested the Secretariat to explore options for reducing voluntary contribution requirements for sponsored delegate participation, including a review of the rationale for sponsorship based on the OECD DAC list, and it requested the Secretariat to prepare for SC43 three budget scenarios for 2013-2015, including both core and non-core funded elements, based upon "zero growth" (allowing for inflation), "flat" (with no adjustment for inflation), and "modest growth".
35. The Standing Committee noted that the additional costs of simultaneous interpretation for subgroups are not included in the current core budget and requested the Secretariat and the Subgroup on Finance to explore options for such funding for 2012 and for the 2013-2015 budget.
36. The Standing Committee noted the progress of the Regional Initiatives that it had endorsed at its previous meetings and made a number of adjustments in its endorsements and the procedures in use – it approved the budget allocations for 2011 and agreed to make its allocations for 2012 by electronic circulation no later than April 2012.
37. The Standing Committee noted the progress indicated in the report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and encouraged voluntary contributions enable STRP members to participate in pre-COP11 regional meetings and COP11 itself. The SC decided to establish an informal working group to draft a COP11 Resolution to ensure that the STRP's objectives and strategies for their delivery are as targeted and as effective as possible. It also approved for finalization and consideration by COP11 the revised *Strategic Framework* and revised Ramsar Information Sheet to be annexed to a Draft Resolution.
38. In other administrative matters, the SC received a report on the dissemination and uptake of the Changwon Declaration, and it welcomed the report of the Partnership Coordinator and encouraged the Secretariat to continue working along the lines she described in developing business and other partnerships.
39. Concerning the exploration of hosting arrangements for the Secretariat, the Committee noted with concern the absence of a Draft Resolution by the Ad Hoc Working Group, urged the Working Group to reconvene its work as mandated in Resolution X.5, and urged the Group to report on a consensus position on the matter, or, if that were not possible, to report on the main positions within the Group with clear, precise, complete and comparable information.

40. The Committee considered further questions about the status of permanent observers to its meetings and about the desirability of going back to holding only one full SC meeting in the year prior to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

43rd Meeting: Gland, Switzerland, 31 October – 4 November 2011

41. The Standing Committee's final meeting before the COP was largely devoted to debates on and possible adoption of the Draft Resolutions and amendments to the Rules of Procedure to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties for its consideration in July. In light of very lengthy discussions on nearly all of about twenty proposed DRs, a "wiki" site was set up to allow for continued discussion and amendments to the texts over the ensuing months and eventually their approval for COP11 consideration by electronic means. It was agreed that the "Status of Ramsar Sites" DR in pursuance of Article 8.2 of the Convention would be reissued just prior to the opening of the COP including all updated information on Ramsar Sites received by that time. Draft Resolutions proposed by Greece and Spain after the submission deadline were reluctantly deferred.
42. In financial matters, the Committee recognized the financial challenges presented in 2011 stemming from the significant shortfall in income and adverse exchange rates; set new terms for the operation of the Reserve Fund; approved the 2012 rebudget reflecting zero salary increases; urged Parties with contributions in arrears to make arrangements to make their contributions as soon as possible, but determined that Parties in arrears should not be subject to penalties; requested the Secretariat to continue to seek alternative sources of financing for the Small Grants Fund and instructed the Secretariat not to solicit or assess any SGF proposals for the 2013 cycle.
43. In addition, the SC requested that only two budgets be presented for COP11 consideration, one a "flat" budget with zero growth and the other a budget that allows for a 2% annual cost of living adjustment, and it requested the Secretariat to focus on several specific items for possible cost savings when developing its revised budget scenarios. It asked the Secretariat and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance to prepare an Information Paper for COP11 setting out the basis, rationale and implications for Convention implementation of each of the two scenarios.
44. In administrative matters, it approved the Secretariat's Work Plan for 2012 and streamlined the process of replacing members of the CEPA Oversight Panel when necessary.
45. The SC agreed to forward the Ad Hoc Working Group's two alternative Draft Resolutions on the Secretariat's hosting arrangements, as amended after lengthy consideration by the Committee, and requested the Group to work with an independent consultant to prepare by the end of January 2012 an information paper based on existing information to facilitate the decision of COP11.
46. The Standing Committee requested the Secretary General and the Secretariat to revise the draft 'Strategic Framework for Ramsar Partnerships', particularly in order to provide further analysis of all existing partnerships; to identify potential global, regional, and national donors and prepare tailor-made products and projects for them; to elaborate a draft work plan for the Partnership Coordinator with a roadmap and clear indicators of success by May 2012, taking into account fundraising as a priority; and to offer training

possibilities and tools on fundraising to each region over the next triennium. The SC established a support group to work with the Secretariat on these matters.

47. The Standing Committee also invited the STRP Chair, the USA, Denmark, and the Secretariat, and any other interested Parties, to prepare a Draft Resolution on ensuring effective delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention.
48. Finally, the Standing Committee selected the laureates for the 5th cycle of Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, out of a field of nominations of high merit. For the award for education, the Wisconsin Wetlands Association (USA) was selected; for management, Ms Augusta Henriques (Guinea-Bissau); and for science, Prof Tatsuichi Tsujii (Japan). A special "Recognition of Achievement" will be made to Mr Thymio Papayannis, and one of the Convention's "founding fathers", Dr Luc Hoffmann, will be presented with a 40th Anniversary Honorary Ramsar Award.

Concluding remarks

49. The period since COP10 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 COP11. This output would not have been possible without the clear mandates created for the Standing Committee by Resolutions of COP10, 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.
50. Similarly, it is important that COP11 in Bucharest 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.
51. In reviewing the work of the Standing Committee and the Convention over the past four years, some issues emerge which merit our attention and serious consideration.
52. *First*, the hosting arrangements of the Secretariat has proved to be a critical issue that has consumed a great deal of our attention and our efforts during this quadriennium. Despite the apparent lack of consensus as we move into the COP debates, it is imperative that this issue be resolved in order, one way or the other, to put this issue behind us and permit the work of the Convention to resume without distraction.
53. *Secondly*, we need to think seriously about the long-term financing for the Convention, and especially its mechanisms for resourcing the Small Grants Fund and for organizing the meetings of the Conference of the Parties.
54. *Thirdly*, the deepening and increasing effectiveness of the Convention's cooperation with other international instruments is becoming fruitful and increasingly important. The Standing Committee must be careful to ensure that these collaborative arrangements are well chosen for their potential added value for the Convention's work and that our efforts do not become spread so thin that they do not achieve their optimum results.

55. *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 paid 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, 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.
56. *Fifthly*, there is an urgent need to strengthen capacity for the Convention's implementation by the Contracting Parties at all levels.

Acknowledgements

57. I thank all members of Standing Committee and the many observers who have attended and contributed to its meetings since COP10. 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 honored to have been able to serve in this role.
58. I wish to record the appreciation of the 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 COP11 for consideration.
59. I would also like to thank the International Organization Partners 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.
60. I also 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!
61. 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!

Mr YOO Yeon-Chul
Chairperson
Standing Committee