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Support service for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

Note: This information paper relates to draft Resolution DR 27 on budget and to the Corrigendum to DR 28 on *Modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

1. At its 26th meeting, in December 2001, the Standing Committee requested its Subgroup on the STRP to review the STRP's links with other science networks.¹
2. The Subgroup submitted its recommendations to the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP8 and Subgroup on Finance at their meetings in May 2002, when they considered all remaining issues in relation to COP8 on behalf of the Standing Committee.
3. As the basis for discussion, the Subgroup had a paper prepared by Wetlands International entitled "Review of scientific and technical support amongst partners to improve core science foundation support to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the Ramsar Convention". The paper is available in the Ramsar web site at http://ramsar.org/key_strp_wi_review.htm.
4. The summary of conclusions presented by the Subgroup on the STRP in May 2002 are listed in the following paragraphs, supplemented with a few comments by the Bureau.
5. The review concluded that there is a need and value in establishing a mechanism for increased science-based support to the work of the STRP, especially in view of the increased work load placed upon the Panel. In particular, the Panel needs an improved mechanism for gaining access more fully and efficiently to global networks of expertise to support and contribute to its work.
6. The present STRP support arrangements managed by the Ramsar Bureau have been shown to require considerable strengthening, and several options have been reviewed.
7. The review further concluded that such a support service could be operated directly as a strengthened Ramsar Bureau role or by an International Organization Partner (IOP) of the Convention. It was felt that it is both feasible and appropriate for the support service to be

¹ The Standing Committee established a Subgroup on the STRP at its 25th meeting in October 2000. The Subgroup members are: Armenia, France, Japan, Uganda, BirdLife International, the Chair of STRP, and the USA as Observer, the Deputy Secretary General (ex officio), and the past Chair of STRP (Decision 25-11). At its 26th meeting in November 2001, the Committee approved the Terms of Reference for the review of STRP's links with other science networks to be undertaken by the Subgroup on the STRP (Decision 26-29).

operated by an IOP, and identified Wetlands International as the most appropriate IOP to deliver the service.

8. It was anticipated that cost savings, particularly in terms of staff costs, would be achieved in the operation of the support service by Wetlands International when compared with operation from within the Bureau or by a Swiss-based IOP. Fully-costed options would be prepared following the consideration of the conclusions and recommendations of this review by the Standing Committee Subgroups in May 2002.

[Ramsar Bureau note: A preliminary review has indicated that cost savings, particularly in relation to staff costs, would be achieved by the operation of an STRP support service by Wetlands International based in the Netherlands in comparison with such support being operated directly from within the Bureau. A more detailed and accurate study would be necessary to provide definitive figures.]

9. The support service should undertake the five main functions as set out in Recommendation 12.3 below.
10. A decision for Wetlands International to develop and implement the support service would need to be with the full agreement of, and contribution from, the other three Ramsar IOPs.
11. To be effective in supporting the work of the STRP in the 2003-2005 triennium, the support service would need to be established not later than January 2003.
12. The following were the recommendations submitted to the Standing Committee Subgroups on Finance and on COP8:
 - 12.1 that an International Organization Partner (IOP), working in open and transparent partnership with all other IOPs, STRP observer organizations, and others, be requested to host an enhanced support service to STRP and the Bureau, under a contractual arrangement with the Ramsar Bureau and with the supervision of the Ramsar Standing Committee;
 - 12.2 that Wetlands International be invited to be the host IOP for the enhanced service, for reasons of cost effectiveness and synergy with networks;
 - 12.3 that the STRP support service should undertake five major functions:
 - i) establishing improved links with and knowledge of existing expert networks operated by the Convention (Ramsar Experts Database, STRP National Focal Points), IOPs, other organizations with observer status to STRP and/or with which the Convention has developed links;
 - ii) further developing and building the capacity of the network of STRP National Focal Points and their within-country expert networks, if resources permit;
 - iii) identifying gaps in expert network coverage in relation to the STRP's work, and filling those gaps, including by identifying other existing networks and advising on the establishment of new networks as appropriate;

- iv) advising the STRP on appropriate experts from these networks to contribute to the work of the STRP; and
 - v) managing the work of expert working groups established by the STRP, on behalf of the Ramsar Bureau;
- 12.4 that full Terms of Reference, including budgets, for the STRP support service should be prepared by the Ramsar Bureau in consultation with Wetlands International, other IOPs, and the STRP;
- 12.5 that the Standing Committee's Subgroup on Finance consider funding the STRP support service as a budget line in the core Convention budget 2003-2005. The costs for the triennium 2003-2005 for this STRP support service are calculated at Swiss francs 380,000. This covers staff salary, social security and office support costs, and travel and subsistence. It does not cover any costs that might be necessary to undertake function 12.3.ii) above concerning development of STRP National Focal Point networks.
- [Ramsar Bureau note: The draft budget for consideration by COP8 contained in document COP8 – DR 27 includes a budget line 2 b) with an amount of 360,000 Swiss francs during the triennium, i.e., 20,000 Swiss francs less than the amount recommended by the Subgroup.]
- 12.6 that this cost is additional to that currently included in the tentative core budget 2003-2005 as budget line 8 c) 'Support to STRP Working Groups', the purpose of which is to provide resources to the Working Groups themselves to prepare draft texts and hold workshops to review texts.
- [Ramsar Bureau note: This recommendation was not retained in the budget proposed to the COP, which no longer includes the budget line mentioned here. It follows that any such additional resources needed for this purpose will need to be found from other sources such as voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties.]
- 12.7 that for the proposed service to be effective in its STRP support it is essential that the STRP support service should be fully funded for the 2003-2005 triennium and begin implementation in January 2003.
- 12.8 that the Bureau be requested to revise, as appropriate, the draft COP8 Resolution on the *modus operandi* of the STRP to reflect the establishment of the STRP support service.
13. As reflected in the draft resolution on budget (COP8 – DR 27) and in the Corrigendum to the draft resolution on the *Modus operandi* of the STRP (COP – DR 28), the Standing Committee Subgroups on COP8 and on Finance, acting on behalf of the Committee, have endorsed most of the recommendations listed above.