



## 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

*“Wetlands and water: supporting life, sustaining livelihoods”*

**Kampala, Uganda, 8-15 November 2005**

### **Ramsar COP9 DOC. 3**

#### **Agenda item VIII**

## **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. 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 2002-2005 triennium was carried out at COP8 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: Botswana, Ghana, and Morocco
  - Asia: Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Japan
  - Europe: Armenia, Austria, Romania, and Slovenia
  - Neotropics: Argentina and Nicaragua (Bahamas attended the SC31 meeting following the accession of Antigua and Barbuda, the 25<sup>th</sup> Contracting Party from the region)
  - North America: Canada
  - Oceania: Papua New Guinea
3. Additionally the COP8 host country, Spain, and the COP9 host country, Uganda, 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 the World Conservation Union (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, Wetlands International, The World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the World Wide

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Fund for Nature (WWF) – are also invited under the terms of Resolution VII.1 to participate as observers in meetings of the Standing Committee.

6. At its 28<sup>th</sup> meeting, following the close of COP8 in Valencia, the new Standing Committee elected Slovenia (represented by Dr Gordana Beltram) as its Chair for the next triennium, the Islamic Republic of Iran (represented by Mr. Javad Amin Mansour) as Vice-Chair, and Canada as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance.
7. The Standing Committee had been entrusted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties with the selection of the new Secretary General of the Convention and 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 the COP9.
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. 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 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 Convention's Web site.
9. In the present report, only the main issues the Standing Committee has dealt with are highlighted, from 26 November 2002 (the close of the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties) to 15 September 2005.

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

10. The Standing Committee met four times during the period under review:
  - 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting: immediately after the close of Ramsar COP8 in Valencia, Spain, on 26 November 2002
  - 29<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 26 - 28 February 2003, in Gland, Switzerland
  - 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 13 - 16 January 2004, in Gland, Switzerland
  - 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting: 6 - 10 June 2005, in Gland, Switzerland
11. The Standing Committee Subgroups on COP9 and on Finance met before each of the Standing Committee meetings and once additionally, in Gland, Switzerland, in March 2005 to progress matters related to COP9. It should be noted that while these were meetings of the Subgroups, the interest in the issues to be considered was such that most Standing Committee members attended, together with a number of other Contracting Parties that participated in an observer capacity.
12. 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 organized briefings for the Missions based in

Geneva. These briefings have been very successful and will be continued in the next triennium. It is especially gratifying to note a continued rise in the numbers of observer Contracting Parties attending the Standing Committee-related meetings, whether from capital cities or from Missions in Geneva, during the triennium.

13. At each of its annual meetings in 2003, 2004, and 2005, the Committee dealt with standing issues on the Committee's agenda, including:
  - a) Review of the audited accounts of the previous years. It should be noted that the Audited Accounts for each year have been distributed under the cover of a diplomatic note to all Contracting Parties in the three official languages as soon as they became available. No comments or questions had been received from Contracting Parties. Thus, the audited accounts for 2002, 2003 and 2004 are not included as COP9 documents.
  - 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 programme of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and recommendations for its 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.
14. 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.

#### **28th Meeting: 26 November 2002, Valencia, Spain**

15. Acting upon Resolution VI.17 of COP6, the Committee established a permanent Subgroup on Finance with the following members for the triennium: Canada (Chair), Argentina, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Romania. The Subgroup on Finance has convened on the day prior to each meeting of the Standing Committee to review all financial and administrative matters on the agenda and prepare recommendations to the SC. This has proved to be a very useful *modus operandi* for increasing the efficiency of decision-making by the Standing Committee. In addition, the Subgroup, and in particular the Chair of the Subgroup, has been consulted on a number of financial and administrative matters between meetings. The members of the Subgroup, and especially its Chair, Canada, represented by Mr. Trevor Swerdfager, Director General of the Canadian Wildlife Service, should be commended for the contribution they have made to the work of the Convention during this period.
16. One issue of special concern for this meeting was the establishment of a selection committee for the replacement of Mr Delmar Blasco as Secretary General to the

Convention, to continue the work begun by the Standing Committee in the previous triennium. The Committee agreed that the following Contracting Parties would represent their regions on the Secretary General Second Selection Panel: Africa: Botswana; Asia: Japan; Europe: Austria; Neotropics: Argentina; North America: Canada (acting also as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance); Oceania: Papua New Guinea.

**29<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 26 - 28 February 2003, in Gland, Switzerland**

17. The selection process of the short-listed candidates for the Secretary General's position took place prior to the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee. The Second Selection Panel invited and interviewed five candidates and unanimously proposed Dr Peter Bridgewater for approval by the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee then determined to offer the position of Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands to Dr Peter Bridgewater.
18. The Standing Committee received a list of proposals for membership in the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and agreed to invite the following experts to become members of the Panel until the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties:
  - Africa: Mr Manikchand Putto (Mauritius), Dr Heather MacKay (South Africa), and Prof Steven Njuguna (Kenya)
  - Asia: Dr Cui Lijuan (China), Prof Ho Sinn-Chye (Malaysia), and Mr Najam Khurshid (Pakistan)
  - Europe: Prof Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium), Mrs Tatiana Minaeva (Russian Federation), Dr Maria-José Viñals (Spain), and Mr David Stroud (United Kingdom)
  - Neotropics: Dr Jorge Jiménez Ramon (Costa Rica) and Prof Teresita Borges (Cuba), with Prof Francisco Daniel Rilla Manta (Uruguay) to be added with the accession of the next Party from that region
  - North America: Dr Francisco Contreras Espinosa (Mexico)
  - Oceania: Dr Max Finlayson (Australia)
19. The Standing Committee selected Dr Max Finlayson to serve as STRP Chairperson and Dr Heather MacKay to serve as Vice-Chair, and it prepared the priority issues for the STRP to work on in the triennium 2002-2005. In addition, the Committee adopted the proposal for establishment of the STRP Support Service and terms of reference, and instructed the Secretariat to conclude contractual arrangements in line with those terms. The Committee also confirmed the dates of the first STRP meeting as 8-11 April 2003.
20. Also at its 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, the SC endorsed a proposed agreement between Panama and the Ramsar Secretariat on the establishment of a Regional Ramsar Centre for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere, to be based in Panama. It adopted a National Planning Tool and National Report Format to be used in the preparation of national reports for COP9, and it decided that COP9 should be held in the last quarter of 2005, whilst agreeing to await further discussions with Uganda before setting specific dates.
21. The Standing Committee named the following Parties to serve on the Subgroup on COP9: Uganda (as Chair), Ghana for Africa, Japan for Asia, Spain for Europe, Nicaragua for the Neotropics, the USA for North America, representatives of the International Organization Partners, and the Secretary General *ex officio*. Papua New Guinea was named for Oceania after consultations in the region. In addition, the Committee established a new Subgroup

on Resolution VIII.45 to work intersessionally and to be composed of: Morocco for Africa, Iran and Japan for Asia, Austria and Romania for Europe, Argentina for the Neotropics, the USA for North America as Chair, and Papua New Guinea for Oceania, with BirdLife International representing the International Organization Partners.

22. On financial issues, the Standing Committee noted the provisional report on income and expenditure for fiscal year 2002 and also determined that Secretariat's budgets for 2004 and 2005 should be brought before it for approval, with information on any changes that may have occurred in relation to the forecasted income, including information on overheads on projects and any additional revenue from new Contracting Parties.
23. Standing Committee also noted that further work would be needed on the *modus operandi* for the Ramsar Endowment Fund and thus it approved a timetable leading to a report to its 31<sup>st</sup> meeting (SC31). Finally, the Committee approved the updated Operational Guidelines 2003-2005 for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF).

### **30<sup>th</sup> Meeting: 13-16 January 2004, in Gland, Switzerland**

24. The Standing Committee approved in principle the Secretariat's Work Plan for 2004. The issue of the form of work plans is one which subsequently occupied the attention of Standing Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, and some ideas and mechanisms contained in the document COP9 DR 9 could provide a better framework for discussion, approval and evaluation of work from the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 to be undertaken by the Secretariat in the coming triennium.
25. On STRP issues, the Standing Committee reiterated the importance of the STRP as a hallmark of Ramsar as a science-based convention; charged the STRP Chair and the Secretariat to make concrete proposals for changes in the STRP *modus operandi*; urged the Parties to consider making voluntary contributions for the substantive work of the STRP in the triennium; and encouraged the SC Regional Representatives to contact their Parties about appointing their STRP National Focal Points, where necessary.
26. The SC reviewed the STRP's work on the indicators to assess the effectiveness of the Convention, and on the issue of indicators of ecological effectiveness, the Committee:
  - endorsed the approach taken thus far by the STRP Working Group in preparing these proposals;
  - requested the Working Group to continue to develop these proposals, taking account of the comments made during the meeting, and the global-scale indicators recommended by the CBD process;
  - instructed the Secretariat, with the assistance of the STRP Support Service, to seek appropriate additional expert consultancy assistance to work with the STRP Working Group in refining the detailed indicator descriptions and guidance on the application and use of the proposed indicators;
  - encouraged Contracting Parties willing to assist with pilot-testing the proposed indicators during 2004, in conjunction with their use of the National Planning Tool and National Report Format for COP9, to make their willingness known to the Secretariat; and

- requested the Working Group, depending upon resources, to prepare a further draft of the proposed indicators for circulation to the Standing Committee for comment prior to its 31st meeting.
27. The Standing Committee discussed the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for COP9 and agreed that the categories of Management, Science, and Education should be established, and that the Subgroup on COP9 would act as a jury to choose among the Secretariat's recommended shortlist. The Committee approved the Criteria and Procedures proposed and gratefully accepted the generous offer of the Danone Group (France) to provide three "Evian Special Prizes" of US\$ 10,000 each to accompany the Awards.
28. Regarding the preparatory process for COP9, the SC recognized the value of mid-term meetings of regional groupings of Parties and pre-accession countries and adopted as a goal that there should be at least one intersessional meeting of each regional grouping in each triennium. The Committee recommended that proposed meetings should be the responsibility of a country or countries in the region concerned to organize, in collaboration with the Secretariat, and that the purpose of the meeting and the issues to be discussed should be kept flexible in order to meet the priority issues and needs of the countries concerned. Opportunities should be sought to capitalize on other relevant meetings taking place in the regions. It was foreseen that the Secretariat would provide advice to organizing countries and participate in any such meetings as appropriate. The Standing Committee also endorsed the Subgroup on COP9's proposal that the theme of Ramsar COP9 should be "*Wetlands and water - sustaining life, supporting livelihoods*".
29. A special presentation on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was made to the Standing Committee, and the meeting:
- welcomed the progress of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in relation to the needs of the Ramsar Convention;
  - urged all Contracting Parties to contribute, as requested, to the review of the MA's full and summary reports;
  - strongly encouraged the MA to ensure that its experts contribute, as appropriate, to the work of the STRP and its Working Groups, and expressed gratitude to the United Nations University for its offer of support for this involvement;
  - requested the STRP's 12th meeting to review all appropriate MA reports, including the draft Ramsar synthesis report, and to prepare a report and draft COP9 Resolution for consideration by the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee; and
  - requested the Secretariat and the MA to make all MA findings available for consideration by COP9.
30. The Standing Committee received reports from the Subgroup on Finance which showed some severe income deficiencies in the budget agreed at COP8. The Standing Committee determined thus to:
- reject the option of continuing a deficit into future years;

- reduce the deficit by increased fundraising for the Secretariat (by redirecting the terms of reference of the Senior Advisor for Development and by studying how other conventions deal with unpaid contributions);
  - reduce expenditures on operating costs and communications by CHF 12,000 and 60,000 respectively;
  - reduce the STRP Support Service by no greater than 50% in 2004 and 2005 and maintain the support as high as possible by fundraising for additional contributions;
  - instruct the Secretariat to report to the Subgroup on Finance in a year's time and seek further direction; and
  - request the Subgroup on Finance to develop guidance for COP9 on how to budget for interest income.
31. Concerning the Small Grants Fund, the Standing Committee approved allocations and decided that:
- the Secretariat would be authorized to cancel, following consultation with the Chairs of the Standing Committee and Subgroup on Finance, an SGF project that has not complied satisfactorily with reporting requirements within three years of the date of signing the project contract and for which the Secretariat has received no indication that the project is being implemented to completion;
  - the proposed modifications should be made to the SGF Operational Guidelines and Project Proposal Assessment Form;
  - a separate Emergency Assistance Fund should **not** be established within the Small Grants Fund, as emergencies should be dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis.
32. Following discussions on the Ramsar Endowment Fund, the Standing Committee directed the Secretariat to analyze and document the issues that precluded consensus on the Ramsar Endowment Fund's *modus operandi* and endorsed the establishment of a working group to identify further options to resource the Small Grants Fund and other fundraising needs of the Secretariat for Standing Committee consideration. The objective of this group would be to identify fundraising opportunities and inform the Secretariat; it would also be to support the Secretariat when needed, by introductions to private companies, development cooperation agencies, etc.
33. Following a report from the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45, the Standing Committee requested the Secretariat, working with the STRP and the Subgroup, to explore the most practical approaches to addressing Resolution VIII.45, and it took note of the questionnaire concerning the Resolution's paragraph 10 that was afterwards circulated by the Subgroup to the Administrative Authorities.
34. On the question of synergies with other environmental agreements, the SC reiterated its view that it was important to engage with other MEAs and international agencies. The Committee especially:
- noted the progress in implementing the Ramsar/CBD Joint Work Plan and welcomed the work of the Secretariat, the STRP, and the CBD Secretariat in furthering this collaboration;

- urged the Contracting Parties to ensure that the importance of wetland issues and the collaborative role of the Ramsar Convention were fully reflected in the decisions made by CBD's COP7;
- urged that participants in CBD COP7 recognize the Ramsar Convention's role in marine and coastal and other ecosystem programmes of work, and in the cross-cutting issues, in the relevant decisions made by that COP, in line with the CBD/Ramsar Joint Work Plan 2002-2006;
- urged that participants in CBD COP7 take account of existing global mechanisms when planning the CBD's work on protected areas;
- requested the STRP, if appropriate and following CBD COP7 discussions on invasive alien species, to update as necessary and bring forward to Ramsar COP9 the draft guidance on invasive alien species that was prepared by the STRP in advance of COP8;
- welcomed the full participation of the Secretary General and the Chair of the Standing Committee in the CBD COP7 process; and
- requested the Standing Committee members and other Ramsar Administrative Authorities to bring this decision to the attention of their delegations to CBD COP7.

#### **Meetings of the Standing Committee Subgroups on COP9 and on Finance in Gland, Switzerland, on 7-10 March 2005**

35. The Subgroup on COP9 dealt with issues of logistics for COP9 and considered an initial tranche of draft Resolutions, including especially some technical Resolutions prepared by the STRP; discussed progress on implementation of Resolution VIII.45; and examined further the question of developing ecosystem-based indicators.
36. The Subgroup on Finance discussed the budget in a preliminary way for further preparation and discussion at SC31 and considered further the future of the proposed Ramsar Endowment Fund.

#### **31st Meeting: 6 -10 June 2005, in Gland, Switzerland**

37. The meeting discussed preparations for the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties and examined possible draft Resolutions to be discussed at COP9. Special consideration was given to including the package of technical Resolutions as a comprehensive draft Resolution, following the advice of the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45.
38. The Standing Committee had reservations about the inclusion of a separate ministerial session following COP9 and advised Uganda to ensure that any ministerial dialogue was firmly embedded in the COP proper. The Standing Committee took the view that a separate ministerial segment for Conferences of the Parties would not be a positive move.
39. The Subgroup on Finance recommended that the audited statements for 2004 be approved and recommended that COP9 be presented with a core budget proposal for 2006-2008 that would reflect an annual budget increase of 4%, with an emphasis on expanding regional initiatives and communication, education, and public awareness (CEPA) activities. The Subgroup also requested the Secretariat to examine options for savings in the costs



foreseen for the Ramsar Sites Database, and it recommended that a draft Resolution on the Endowment Fund be transmitted to COP9.

40. Some changes to the Rules of Procedure were discussed and agreed for presentation to COP9, respectively to Rules 5 and 27. First, Resolution VIII.45 recognizes the need to streamline technical and other Resolution processes prior to, and during, the COP in order to maximise the efficiency of the COP procedures. It encourages any Contracting Party considering submitting a draft Resolution (technical or otherwise) to submit it to the Standing Committee before its consideration at the COP. Notwithstanding the current terms of Rule 5, Resolution VIII.45 also encourages Parties to submit proposals for draft technical Resolutions to the Ramsar Secretariat at least 120 days before the start of the COP (i.e., for COP9, this would have been by early July 2005).
41. In its advice to the Subgroup on COP9, the Secretariat's analysis of the process established in Resolution VIII.45 for preparing and considering draft COP Resolutions recognized that establishing such a deadline for submission, in terms of a number of days prior to COP, can mean that the deadline for submission falls *after* the Standing Committee has met to give final approval to the documents for COP consideration (as is the case with SC31 and COP9). This arises because the dates of the Standing Committee meeting approximately six months before COP are not known at the time of the previous COP. This was clearly not the intent of Resolution VIII.45.
42. The proposed alteration to the Rules of Procedure which was agreed by Standing Committee for Rule 5, and which can be found in COP9 DOC. 2, is: "The Bureau shall notify all Parties of the dates, venue, and provisional agenda of an ordinary meeting at least 12 months before the meeting is due to commence. The notification shall include the draft agenda for the meeting and the deadline for submission of proposals by the Parties, which normally shall be 40 calendar days prior to the opening of the Standing Committee meeting at which approvals are made for documents for consideration by Contracting Parties at the COP. Only Parties, the Standing Committee and the Conference Committee shall be entitled to submit proposals."
43. A second amendment to the Rules of Procedure, in Rule 27.1, specifies that the Secretary General of the Convention shall be the Secretary General of the COP, a change to the ambiguous wording of the old rule that was identified by the IUCN Environmental Law Centre (see COP9 DOC. 19).

### **Concluding remarks**

44. The period since COP8 has been extraordinarily active and constructive for the Standing Committee and its subgroups. This is reflected in the large corpus of policy decisions incorporated in the draft Resolutions and information papers before COP9. It is gratifying to note the continued accession of new Parties, in one case requiring an additional member from the Neotropics to join the Standing Committee in conformity with agreed proportionality.
45. This output would not have been possible without the mandate created for the Standing Committee by Resolutions of COP8, 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.

46. Against this background it is important that COP9 set again 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 must be our cooperative aim and objective.
47. In reviewing the work of the Standing Committee and the Convention over the past three years, some issues are clear.
48. *First*, there is the highly cooperative spirit and commitment that has characterised activity with all involved in delivering the Convention.
49. *Secondly*, the deepening and increasing effectiveness of the cooperative activities of the Convention with other international instruments is becoming fruitful and increasingly important.
50. *Thirdly*, 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.
51. While our convention is the oldest of the international environmental instruments, it is also highly relevant to the key environmental debates in 2005! Much work remains to be done by all actors in the Ramsar arena.
52. Finally, I would like to reiterate an important consideration made by the Director General of IUCN in his introductory statement, made on behalf of all IOPs, at the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee. He stressed that a great challenge for the Ramsar Convention and the environmental community was that many of our issues, though important, are not at the forefront of the emerging global discussions on development. There is unprecedented interest in using the world's resources for development and a lack of focus on environmental issues in the global development discussions; the role of the IOPs, the Contracting Parties, and the whole Ramsar family in this context needs strengthening. This Ramsar COP must face the challenge of engaging with the global development debate or risk losing relevance.

### **Acknowledgements**

53. 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! My sincere thanks also for the hard work of the Deputy and the Secretary General of the Convention Secretariat. I believe that for Peter

Bridgewater, his first two years have been a special challenge, since he took over the post only in mid-2003.

54. 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.
55. 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.
56. I thank all members of Standing Committee and the many observers who have attended and contributed to its meetings since COP8. 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.
57. While I am thanking all those who worked so hard to make the Standing Committee's work successful, I am saddened to recall our common grief at the tragic death of Mr Robert Martel following our 31<sup>st</sup> meeting in June 2005. Robert represented Canada in the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance and led our efforts with enormous intelligence, humour, grace, and insight, and it was devastating for all of us to learn that our new colleague and friend had died in a paragliding accident in France just a few days later.
58. 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!

Gordana Beltram  
Chairperson  
Standing Committee