



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. 4

Agenda item IX

Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

Explanatory Note by the Secretariat

1. This summary report has been prepared by the Chair of the STRP, Max Finlayson, with the assistance of the Secretariat. The report is a revised and updated version of that made to the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2005 (DOC. SC31-3) and includes issues concerning the *modus operandi* of the STRP reported to the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee in DOC. SC31-25.
2. Annex 1 provides a list of the products prepared by the Panel under its priority tasks for 2003-2005, grouped into the different types of product and their presentation for COP9 and through other processes. A detailed tabular summary of the Panel's progress against each of its priority tasks was provided to the Standing Committee as DOC. SC31-3 Annex 1 (available on: http://www.ramsar.org/sc/31/key_sc31_agenda_papers.htm).
3. Annex 2 provides an outline of the purpose and process for the newly established *Ramsar Technical Report* series, proposed by the STRP and endorsed by the Standing Committee.
4. The STRP's proposals for the technical Resolutions process for COP9, responding to the approach embodied in Resolution VIII.45, were supported by the Subgroup on COP9 when it met in March 2005, and approved by the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee. The various new and revised scientific and technical guidelines prepared by the Panel during this triennium are presented as Annexes to COP9 DR1, which Parties will be invited to consider under this Agenda item. STRP's recommendations for its future prioritized programme of work are incorporated into the Annexes to COP9 DR2 "Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention" (Agenda item XV). Issues and proposals from the STRP concerning proposed amendments to its *modus operandi* in the light of the Panel's experience during this triennium are incorporated into COP9 DR12 (Agenda item XV).

Introduction

1. Priorities for the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) during the 2003-2005 triennium were established by the Standing Committee, based on the list of tasks indicated for the Panel in Resolutions adopted by COP8. The Standing Committee

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identified six high priority topic areas for the Panel's work and also indicated a high priority for work on agriculture, water and wetlands in response to Resolution VII.34 and for Communications, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) as a cross-cutting issue. The 30th meeting of the Standing Committee approved the STRP Work Plan 2003-2005.

2. Notwithstanding this prioritization, there proved to be a large number of individual tasks for the Panel within these priority areas, and as in previous triennia the Panel has had very limited resources and capacity to undertake such a major programme of work.
3. To undertake its priority work, the Panel established six Working Groups, as well as a cross-cutting group on agricultural issues. These Working Groups are:
 1. Inventory and assessment, *co-leads Max Finlayson (Australia) & Lijuan Cui (China)*
 2. Wise use, *co-leads Randy Milton (Canada) & IUCN-CEM*
 3. Water resource management, *co-leads Heather Mackay (South Africa) and Rebecca Tharme (IWMI)*
 4. Ramsar site designations, *co-leads David Stroud (UK) & Dick Ho (Malaysia)*
 5. Wetland management planning, *co-leads Frank Alberts (RIZA) & Francisco Rilla (Uruguay)*
 6. Indicators of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention, *co-leads David Pritchard (BirdLife International) & Teresita Borges (Cuba)*
4. The Panel has been valuably assisted in its work during this triennium by the STRP Support Service, operated for the Convention by Wetlands International. The Service rapidly established an interactive Web site (http://www.wetlands.org/_STRP/default.htm) which has greatly facilitated electronic discussion and review of draft materials developed by each STRP Working Group.
5. During the triennium the Panel met twice in plenary sessions: the 11th meeting on 8-11 April 2003 and the 12 meeting on 1-4 February 2005. The full report and decisions of these meetings of the Panel, and the STRP Work Plan 2003-2005, are available for reference on the Ramsar Web site (http://www.ramsar.org/strp/key_strp_index.htm) and were circulated to all Parties.
6. In addition, so as to progress their work, each of the six STRP Working Groups met in a mid-term workshop (July 2004), hosted by Wetlands International in Wageningen, The Netherlands, as part of its role in the provision of the STRP Support Service. It should be noted that the funds available from the core STRP budget allocation for these workshops was insufficient to permit the participation by all appointed members of the Panel.
7. A number of STRP members and observer organization representatives are participating in COP9 and will be available to assist Parties in their consideration of the various scientific and technical materials being considered for approval.

STRP's progress in the main areas of its 2003-2005 Work Plan

8. In spite of its very limited resources, the Panel has made significant progress in a number of key areas for the Convention and has finalized a considerable number of additional technical and scientific guidelines and other materials designed to fill in gaps in the current 'toolkit' of Wise Use Handbooks (2nd edition, 2004) – see Annex 1.

9. In recognition that with the increasingly large suite of guidance available to Parties it becomes harder for users to identify which is the most relevant guidance to apply for particular purposes and at different times, the Panel and its Working Groups have prepared a number of overarching frameworks for different major aspects of Convention implementation. Each of these shows Parties how and when to apply the different more specific guidelines and includes short summary guidance on each of the relevant detailed guidelines in the 'toolkit'. Development of these frameworks has also helped the Panel to identify key gaps in the present guidance available to Parties, some of which are recommended to COP9 as priority elements of the Panel's work in the next triennium (COP9 DR2).
10. For COP9 these frameworks are:
 - i) A Conceptual Framework for Ramsar's wise use concept (COP9 DR1 Annex A);
 - ii) A revised *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the further development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (COP9 DR1 Annex B);
 - iii) A Integrated Framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance (COP9 DR1 Annex C); and
 - iv) An Integrated Framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring (COP9 DR1 Annex E).
11. In addition, the Panel have approved and the Standing Committee have welcomed the establishment of a new *Ramsar Technical Report* series of publications to be prepared by the Panel and Secretariat. An outline of the purpose and process for these volumes is provided in Annex 2 to this paper. The Secretariat will publish in this series a number of the more detailed technical guidance, reports and reviews prepared by the STRP in support of its materials which are provided for COP9 consideration. For previous COPs such papers would have been provided to Parties only as COP Information Papers, and this new approach has two benefits:
 - a) it has reduced the volume and number of COP papers which are not the subject of consideration for adoption by Parties, and
 - b) it makes this important technical guidance material more accessible and for a longer term to Parties and other users and stakeholders. A list of the anticipated *Technical Report* topics from STRP's work in the current triennium is included in Annex 1.
12. At the time of preparation of this report, the first issues of the *Ramsar Technical Reports* are undergoing peer review by the members and observers of the STRP and it is anticipated that they will be published by the end of 2005.
13. Some aspects of the STRP's work have led to it preparing proposals for updates and modifications to some existing key Convention guidance and definitions, and the Panel has prepared short Information Papers for COP9 which explain the rationale and thinking behind bringing forward these proposals for COP consideration.
14. In particular, the Parties' attention is drawn to STRP Working Group 2's work responding to tasks requesting the Panel to review, and as necessary update, the Convention's definitions of "wise use" and "ecological character" in the light of other more recent

developments and terminologies. The Panel is proposing that COP9 amend these definitions in the context of establishing a conceptual framework to assist Parties in their achievement of wetland wise use under Article 3.1 of the Convention.

15. This guidance is provided in COP9 DR1 Annex A, supported by Information Paper COP9 DOC. 16. In undertaking this work, the Panel has recognized the value of the work of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and its development of a conceptual framework for ecosystems and human well-being.
16. Another significant area of advance in the STRP's work is its preparation of a number of additional guidance papers on matters concerning the inter-relationship between water and wetland ecosystems, chiefly in response to instructions in COP8 Resolutions VIII.1 and VIII.2. In support of this increasingly important area of the Convention's attention, the Panel has prepared an "Integrated Framework for Ramsar's water-related guidance". This framework, prepared by Heather Mackay of South Africa's Water Research Commission and Vice-Chair of the STRP, is provided in COP9 DR1 Annex C.
17. Specific guidance prepared for COP9 on water-related issues concerns a) supplementary guidance on river basin management (COP9 DR1 Annex C i.); and b) wetlands and groundwater management (COP9 DR1 Annex C ii.). These will eventually be supported by a number of *Ramsar Technical Reports* including on environmental water requirements (see Annex 1).
18. A number of the Panel's priority tasks have concerned reviewing and preparing further guidance for Ramsar site designation, notably in response to Resolution VIII.10, and within the framework of the CBD/Ramsar 3rd Joint Work Plan and related requests from CBD COP7 (Decision VII/4) on its programme of work on inland water biodiversity. STRP's Working Group 4 has prepared a number of amendments and additions to the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the further development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (COP9 DR1 Annex B). This document includes a proposal for a new quantitative Criterion for non-avian wetland-dependent fauna (proposed new criterion 9).
19. Concerning existing Criterion 1, the STRP is proposing a minor change in the wording of the Criterion in recognition of the need to facilitate its application in situations and countries where most wetlands are heavily human-modified, and the Panel is suggesting an elaboration of the guidelines for the application of this Criterion so as to cover the full range of wetland ecosystem services (i.e., provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services) as described by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA). Criterion 1 already encourages the selection of sites on the basis of ecosystem services, notably regulating services (hydrology) and supporting services (biodiversity), but the guidelines for the application of Criterion 1 adopted in the Annex to Resolution VII.11 do not cover consistently all types of ecosystem service. It is worth recalling that as far back as COP4 in 1990 (Recommendation 4.2) the Parties adopted guidance concerning the application of Criterion 1 which explicitly refers to types of provisioning, cultural and regulating services.
20. An Information Paper setting out the rationale for these proposals is provided as COP9 DOC. 17, and Working Group 4 co-lead David Stroud is currently preparing a more detailed *Ramsar Technical Report* which traces the historical development of the Ramsar Criteria and the guidelines for their application since the signing of the Convention.

21. Inventory, assessment and monitoring is recognized by the Convention as key to the implementation of many aspects of wetland conservation and wise use. The Convention has already adopted guidance on several aspects of these topics, but COP8 identified a number of gaps in this material, for which STRP's Working Group 1 has been developing further guidance.
22. To assist Parties in distinguishing between the many different purposes and types of wetland assessment, and when to use them, an "Integrated Framework for Wetland Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring" (IF-WIAM) has been prepared for COP9 consideration (COP9 DR1 Annex E). This provides short summary guidance on each of the different inventory and assessment tools – both existing Ramsar tools and those additional guidelines being prepared by the Panel, including an explanation of the relationship between environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment, risk assessment, and vulnerability assessment.
23. Annexed to this IF-WIAM are guidelines for the rapid assessment of inland, coastal and near-shore wetland biodiversity, developed jointly by the CBD and Ramsar Convention (COP9 DR1 Annex E i.). In support of the guidelines on inventory, assessment and monitoring, the Panel is also finalizing additional guidelines on economic valuation of wetlands, on the use of low-cost Geographic Information Systems, and on vulnerability assessment, each of which will be published as a *Ramsar Technical Report*.
24. In addition to its work on preparing guidance on different aspects of assessment tools, the Panel also has a priority task concerning fisheries: "Contribute to assessment of contribution of Ramsar sites and other wetlands to fisheries maintenance, and recommend sustainable management practices". To support this task, IUCN, WWF and the WorldFish Centre have commissioned a report on this issue, and they have assisted the Panel in drafting the COP9 Resolution on the matter (COP9 DR4). The background report is now being prepared for publication as a *Ramsar Technical Report*.
25. COP8 (Resolution VIII.26) also instructed the STRP to develop a set of "indicators of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention". STRP's Working Group 6, working closely with the parallel CBD process that is developing indicators for assessing the CBD/WSSD 2010 biodiversity target of significantly reducing the rate of loss of biological diversity, has identified a first tranche of seven ecological "outcome-oriented" indicators for immediate development (COP9 DR1 Annex D). These indicators have been designed to complement the largely "process-oriented" indicators in the National Report Format.
26. Fact sheets for each of these indicators have been drafted and are provided in COP9 DOC 18, and in COP9 DR2 the Panel has recommended that a priority task for the next triennium is for it to establish mechanisms for the implementation and reporting of these indicators, in part as a Ramsar contribution to assessing the CBD 2010 biodiversity target.
27. It should be stressed that the task of going that 'one step further' than just assessing status and trends of wetlands to examining Convention effectiveness has proved a particularly challenging one for the Panel and Working Group 6, and the Working Group considers that some further development of this indicator approach will be required in the next triennium.

28. Concerning wetland management planning, STRP's Working Group 5, with the support of WWF, is drafting the requested management planning "field guide" for wetland managers. At the time of preparing this report, this is nearing final draft and field testing, and it is planned that, resources permitting, this will be published in the form of a 50-page booklet for field use, with sections and case studies outlining each of the steps embodied in the Convention's COP8 *New Guidelines for wetland management planning*.
29. In addition, WWF is currently developing and pilot testing a tool for assessing the effectiveness of management planning at Ramsar sites and other wetlands, similar to that already successfully developed for forest protected areas. It is anticipated that this tool will contribute to assessment of a number of the indicators of effectiveness of the Convention (COP9 DR1 Annex D).
30. The Panel's agriculture cross-cutting group has provided advice on addressing agricultural issues in the other work of Panel, notably in relation to the preparation of water-related guidelines. In addition, it has developed a scope for the wetland-type specific management guidelines for agricultural wetlands requested by COP8 Resolution VIII.34. The Panel has not progressed these during this triennium, pending resources being found for the precursory review work by International Organization Partners and others requested by Resolution VIII.34. It is anticipated, however, that much of this work can now be delivered through the preparation during 2005-2006 of a report to the Ramsar Convention from the IWMI-led "Comprehensive Assessment for Water and Agriculture" (CA), and through a project being developed by the Dutch government, FAO and other partners as a follow-up to the 2005 Water for Food and Ecosystems Conference. STRP12 prepared a detailed list of wetland-related questions to guide IWMI in the preparation of the CA report, which it is now anticipated may be prepared as a report jointly to Ramsar and the CBD.
31. In its 2003-2005 Work Plan the STRP established a mechanism, in response to Resolution VIII.31, for incorporating communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) into all aspects of its work, as appropriate, through input from the newly re-invigorated Wetlands International CEPA Specialist Group. However, the Panel considers that this mechanism has not worked as well as anticipated, and it has made proposals for strengthening CEPA input in its recommended revisions to the STRP *modus operandi* (COP9 DR12).
32. STRP12 reviewed the draft Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Ramsar Synthesis Report "Wetlands and Water: Ecosystem Services and Human Well-being", prepared by a Wetlands Synthesis Team co-lead by the Chair of STRP, the Deputy Secretary General and the Convention's former Regional Advisor for Asia, Rebecca D'Cruz. The Panel endorsed the report, subject to certain amendments and retentions, and requested the inclusion of a one-page "key messages" for decision-makers to head up the report's Summary for Decision-Makers (SDM). Subsequent to this, in March 2005 the MA Board requested significant changes and additions to the report, namely substantial expansion of its SDM from seven to approximately twenty pages, before being willing to approve it. The report is now being prepared for publication and will be presented at COP9.
33. To assist Parties, the STRP is now preparing an updated statement of its views as to the key findings of the MA for the Ramsar Convention and its future implementation. This will be made available at COP9. The STRP commends to Contracting Parties the work of

the MA, especially its report to the Ramsar Convention, as an assessment of major significance to future decision-making and efforts to secure the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Resourcing the Panel's 2003-2005 work

34. There was no core budget allocation in this triennium for the work of the STRP in preparing its guidelines and other substantive advice. Much of the progress in preparing its guidance reported above has been achieved only through a significant amount of voluntary unpaid work and in-kind support from individual STRP members and observers and their host organizations, notably the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist (Australia), Water Research Commission (South Africa), International Water Management Institute (Sri Lanka), RIZA (Netherlands), Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (Cuba), Chinese Academy of Forestry (China), UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, BirdLife International/RSPB, Wetlands International, WWF, UNEP-WCMC, IUCN, and The WorldFish Centre.
35. In addition, the drafting of a number of STRP's major new guidelines has been possible in this triennium through a generous voluntary funding contribution from the government of Sweden which became available in late 2003.
36. However, this has meant that the Panel was not able to start work on many of its substantive guidance documents until some considerable time into the triennium, and was able to progress work only as and when individuals could make time available on a voluntary basis. This has meant that its preparation of guidance destined for COP9 consideration has not progressed as rapidly as anticipated in the Panel's initial work plan, and most products were only available in a form appropriate for consideration by the Standing Committee and COP shortly before its 31st meeting.
37. One consequence of this is that there has been no time and opportunity for consultation on draft documents with STRP National Focal Points (NFPs) and National Administrative Authorities, as was anticipated in the terms of Resolution VIII.45. Increased involvement of STRP NFPs in STRP processes was scheduled to be facilitated during this triennium as part of the work of the STRP Support Service. However, this could not be progressed owing to the reduction in Support Service funding necessary as one of the core budget reductions decided by the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee. Lack of capacity for the better engagement of NFPs remains a major frustration for the Panel and the Secretariat, and it is a priority to resolve this in the coming triennium, as is indicated in COP9 DR12 on the proposed revised *modus operandi* of the Panel.
38. Due to its lack of capacity and resources, the Panel has not been able to progress a number of tasks in its approved 2003-2005 Work Plan. These include advice on:
 - i) delineation and mapping of wetlands;
 - ii) ecological character description;
 - iii) further consolidated guidance on the overall process of detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character;
 - iv) wetland classification systems;
 - v) analysis and report of the status and trends in the ecological character of sites in the Ramsar List;

- vi) methods and best practice studies on the wise use of wetlands, including application of the ecosystem approach;
 - vii) river basin management case studies;
 - viii) successes achieved and lessons learnt from demonstrating good practice in water allocation and management for maintaining ecological functions of wetlands;
 - ix) technical background groundwater methodologies papers;
 - x) interpretation of the term 'under-represented type' in the context of available information on the global extent of different wetland types;
 - xi) harmonisation of the layout and information fields of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) and the core data fields recommended in the Ramsar *Framework for Wetland Inventory*;
 - xii) review of data and information needs, review of the multiple sources of information available on Ramsar sites; and
 - xiii) advice on the redesign of the Montreux Record questionnaire.
39. The Panel has agreed recommendations for how each of these tasks should be taken forward in its future work, and these are included as actions in COP9 DR2.

Future scientific and technical priorities for the STRP and the Convention

40. Although the prioritization by the Standing Committee of the Panel's work for this triennium has proved helpful, STRP12 recommended that the Panel be more pro-active in the provision of its advice to Standing Committee and COP on future priorities and strategic issues. The Panel has identified a number of future strategic priorities, particularly relating to the development of stronger interaction with other sectors. These and other proposals for future scientific and technical implementation priorities are included in the Annex to COP9 DR2.

Proposals for amendments to the *modus operandi* of the STRP

41. In the light of its experiences and difficulties in attempting to operate under the *modus operandi* adopted by COP8 (Resolution VIII.28), STRP12 undertook an in-depth review of these issues and developed a number of recommendations for amendments to the current *modus operandi* which it considers would make the work of the Panel more efficient and effective. The issues identified include the very poor level of engagement and involvement of a number of the STRP's appointed members, the STRP Support Service operations, and funding for the Panel's work. In addition, during STRP12 the Panel expressed concern that for a number of the organizations invited as STRP observers by COP8 Resolution VIII.28, representatives have neither participated in STRP's meetings and/or had not contributed to the work or debates of the Panel.
42. In essence, the Panel considers that for a number of reasons the revised *modus operandi* adopted at COP8 had not delivered the anticipated improvements in the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Panel.
42. The Panel identified a number of constraints and difficulties in undertaking its work under its present *modus operandi*. These include:
- the onus placed upon a few key people to ensure coherence across the suite of tasks;

- the delay in building and implementing a work plan following the last COP, including the lack of funding to engage experts to prepare draft materials;
 - the loss of momentum after the first enthusiastic and ambitious work-plan session at the Panel's first plenary session of the triennium;
 - the limited expertise of many of the members appointed to the Panel;
 - the difficult role of observer organization representatives who must act as liaison with less motivated experts within their organizations; and
 - the excessive number of tasks assigned by the COP and SC, even within the SC's prioritization for this triennium.
43. The Panel's recommendations to the Standing Committee concerned the following topics:
- i) the contributions and roles of appointed members;
 - ii) the pattern and timing of meetings during a triennium;
 - iii) prioritization of future STRP tasks;
 - iv) a rolling six-year programme of work for the STRP;
 - v) ensuring that best expert advice is available to the Panel and the Convention;
 - vi) the role of CEPA as a cross-cutting issue;
 - vii) funding of the work of the Panel;
 - viii) the role of the STRP Support Service;
 - ix) the role of the STRP National Focal Points (NFPs); and
 - x) other issues concerning the scope and focus of future STRP work.
44. These issues were reported to the Subgroup on COP9 which urged (Decision COP9 SG-6) that the STRP and Secretariat further develop the recommendations on the draft *modus operandi* for SC31, with the inclusion of a mechanism for articulating the priorities and financial implications both before and during COP9. These were provided in DOC. SC31-25, available on http://www.ramsar.org/sc/31/key_sc31_doc25.doc, which provides further detail on the Panel's recommendations on each of these topics listed in paragraph 43. Future priorities and their financial implications are covered in COP9 DR2.
45. On the basis of these recommendations, the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee considered proposals for a revised STRP *modus operandi* for the next triennium. These proposals did not cover amendments to the appointment process for regionally-appointed members established by COP7 Resolution VIII.2.
46. However, SC31 expressed the view that the current STRP membership model had not worked to the benefit of the Convention, and that a restructuring of the selection process and composition of the Panel was now essential so as better to draw on the best expertise from wherever it is available. Such a restructuring would also have the potential for more efficient use of the limited core budget resources available to the Panel, in order to deliver the priority tasks allocated to it more effectively.
47. SC31 established an ad hoc Subgroup on the STRP to agree a revised proposal for the *modus operandi* for COP9 consideration, of which the STRP Chair was a member.
48. The Annex to COP9 DR12 provides this revised *modus operandi* proposal, which I strongly commend to you. It is designed to ensure that members appointed to the STRP have internationally-recognized experience, expertise and networks on the wetland conservation

and wise use topics directly relevant to the 2006-2008 priorities for STRP's work identified in Annex 1 to COP9 DR2.

49. Importantly, this revised *modus operandi* also addresses ways and means of continuing to ensure nationally and regionally equitable input to the work of the STRP, including through the STRP National Focal Points networks, and also of strengthening the regional applicability of the outputs of the Panel's work.
50. The revised *modus operandi* has also been designed to address another of the serious bottlenecks identified by the STRP12's review – that of delays under the current *modus operandi* to the start of the Panel's substantive work during each triennium, which has led to a severely restricted time-period available to the Panel in the triennium for the completion of its tasks and products in time for their consideration by the next COP. Under the revised *modus operandi*, the Panel and its Working Groups will be able to start their work very early in 2006, approximately seven months earlier than would have been the case under the 2003-2005 *modus operandi*. This is because under the former *modus operandi* the Panel would not be able to meet for the first time until July/August 2006, following the appointment of STRP members by the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee in April 2006.

Concluding remarks

51. Notwithstanding the above comments the STRP has, through the efforts of a number of its members and observers, made a lot of progress in this triennium. These people and organizations are to be congratulated for their efforts and in many cases for their ongoing support for the Convention and the STRP. The Convention is lucky to have such expertise and dedication at hand and I encourage you to invest further in not only the few who deliver a lot but, through the revised *modus operandi* you are considering at COP9, by ensuring that the few increases to the many. Since the proposed 2006-2008 core budget you are considering at COP9 does not include a substantial budget line for the drafting of major new guidelines and other products, it is inevitable that in the coming triennium the Panel will need your support in the form of additional voluntary contributions in order to deliver its costed priority tasks as set out in COP9 DR2 Annex 1.
52. For the 2003-2005 triennium I would in particular wish to thank Wetlands International for their rapid and effective establishment and running of the STRP Support Service mechanisms, and Douglas Taylor and Tunde Ojei deserve credit for this. The STRP delegates from the UK (David Stroud), South Africa (Heather McKay), Birdlife International (Dave Pritchard), IWMI (Rebecca Tharme), and Canada (observer country: Randy Milton) deserve to be recognized for their efforts that have been well above the norm anticipated of our members. WWF International provided support for the development of the wetland managers' 'field guide' manual. I would also like to thank the various invited experts engaged to provide specific aspects of technical advice – Rebecca D'Cruz, John Lowry, Vic & Christine Semeniuk, and Habiba Gitay.
53. During this triennium, the synergies between the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the STRP have been particularly significant. The work of the MA set the scene for developing our combined thinking on the concepts of ecological character and wise use – issues that are at the heart of the Convention. Funding support from the United Nations University through the MA allowed us to bring a number of additional wetland experts

involved in the MA processes to participate in the Panel's mid-term workshops. These workshops were an essential step in the STRP process this triennium, and they greatly benefited from the involvement of this wider group of experts, as well as from the organizational and logistic support provided by Wetlands International.

54. The work of the STRP has been superbly supported by the Ramsar Secretariat staff, led by Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson and ably assisted by Mireille Katz, Catherine Loetscher, Dwight Peck, Sandra Hails and the Senior Regional Advisors and their Assistants. The Chair of your Standing Committee, Gordana Beltram, and the Secretary General, Peter Bridgewater, attended our meetings and helped guide us through our heavy and challenging agenda, a challenge that Heather McKay, the STRP Vice-Chair, and myself hope has been answered in the best way possible – the production of high quality and technically sound advice to the Convention.
55. Since the STRP was established at COP5 in 1993 it has been through a remarkable transformation. It started as an idea, and the first group of seven appointed members and few observers and staff from what was then known as the Bureau set to work. As you may imagine there was little guidance – no one had written the Ramsar guidance about how to run a scientific and technical review panel – but there was support from many quarters. Over the subsequent 12 years, the STRP has evolved into a much larger panel, with 14 appointed members and many observers as well as the Convention's formal International Organization Partners. These changes were made to seek better regional representation and expertise from around the globe but, as you can see from this report and the proposals embodied in the revised *modus operandi* you are considering, this has only been partly successful. At the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee, the USA and other countries asked you to consider establishing a streamlined and more efficient process – we have been through many changes and yet we still are not satisfied with the situation. I fully support the Standing Committee's request to seek a better model – one focused on sound operational procedures based on experience and expertise rather than politically-linked issues of regional balance, but also one which ensures regional inputs and regionally-relevant products.
56. You have the Standing Committee's proposal before you (COP9 DR12) and when you consider this I urge you to heed the lessons of the past and what has worked well and what has been less successful. A key issue in my mind is the selection of members – they need breadth and expertise and the capacity to contribute across the many issues on which you request the Panel to work. A further issue is the successful engagement of STRP National Focal Points. This was a priority for the triennium just past, but the reductions in the resourcing of the Support Service prevented this, and so it becomes an essential priority for the next triennium.
57. The STRP has always been a low-budget operation and despite this limitation it has provided an extremely valuable resource for a science-based convention such as Ramsar. Questions have been raised about the extent to which much of this material prepared by the STRP is actually being used by Parties, but this is not a question of the value of the guidance – it is much more a question about access to and awareness of the existence of this material. Importantly, the revised *modus operandi* includes a proposal designed to enhance the CEPA aspects of the STRP, and I also ask you to consider this carefully, as it has the potential to bring much further value to your investment in the STRP.

58. The STRP has now been through 12 meetings, of which I have participated in 11. As we approach the 13th meeting – a number that in some cultures is not seen as lucky – I would like to reflect on the many people who have supported the STRP. These people have driven, under your guidance and critique, the technical programme of the Convention to the extent that concepts such as wise use and ecological character are not just undefined words in a remarkably prescient Convention text written in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These concepts now feature in many technical discussions and the guidance provided by the STRP has reached far beyond the Convention to other important initiatives and endeavours. In the past triennium we had the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and in the next we have the Comprehensive Assessment of Water and Agriculture, both of which have recognized Ramsar as a key end user of their information, and we have joint work plans and cooperative agreements with many other organizations.
59. The Convention is increasingly seen as a reservoir of knowledge about wetlands, about biodiversity, about wise use and people's livelihoods. This is an achievement that I ask you to recognize and applaud – the technical arm of your Convention has a public profile for the delivery of high quality scientific and technical review and advice. I would like to thank all those who have striven to provide this advice while all the while treading the fine line of advising, but not prescribing, scientific and technical guidance. It has been, and will continue to be, a challenge. It has been hard work, but it has also been enthralling; and it has provided a base for many global networks and friendships and much goodwill. The work goes on and at times it goes in circles: in the first report from the STRP to the COP6 in 1996 we were dealing with the intriguing complexities of wetland definitions, wetland services, cultural values, criteria, and indicators – all topics on which you have STRP-prepared guidance to consider at COP9. But the circles are now much wider and the debates far more erudite: the technical programme of the Convention is responsive to the broadening and cross-sectoral approaches needed to secure the wise use of wetlands and their services that are critical to the future of people's well-being as much as for the maintenance of the wetland biodiversity on which many of these services depend. Thank you for the opportunity to have participated in your STRP.

Annex 1

STRP 2003-2005: products for COP9 and other STRP products

This Annex provides a summary of the form in which the guidances, reviews, reports and other outputs from the Scientific and Technical Review Panel for its 2003-2005 priority work areas and tasks will be made available to Contracting Parties, at COP9 and in other ways.

There are four categories of material from the STRP:

1. New scientific and technical guidelines, annexed to COP9 DR1 on “Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept”;
2. COP9 Information Papers, providing background and rationale for some of the proposals prepared by the STRP for additions or significant modifications to existing COP-adopted guidance;
3. Draft COP9 Resolutions;
4. *Ramsar Technical Reports*. These will include a number of the longer and more detailed technical reviews, reports and other guidance prepared by the STRP. The reports will be finalized and published as each becomes ready, but with several which support application of the STRP’s scientific and technical guidelines anticipated to be available by the time of COP9.

1. **New scientific and technical guidelines** (Annexes to COP9 DR1)

- a) A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character (COP9 DR1 Annex A).
- b) Revised *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (COP9 DR1 Annex B).
- c) An Integrated Framework for Ramsar’s water-related guidance (COP9 DR1 Annex C), with additional guidelines annexed, as follows:
 - i) *River Basin Management: additional guidance and framework for analysis of case studies* (COP9 DR1 Annex C i);
 - ii) *Guidelines for the management of groundwater to maintain wetland ecological character* (COP9 DR1 Annex C ii).
- d) Ecological ‘outcome-oriented’ indicators for assessing the implementation effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention (COP9 DR1 Annex D).
- e) An Integrated Framework for wetland inventory assessment and monitoring (IF-WIAM) (COP9 DR1 Annex E), with additional guidelines annexed, as follows:

- i) *Guidelines for rapid assessment methodologies for inland, coastal and nearshore marine wetlands* (COP9 DR1 Annex E i.).

2. COP9 Information papers

- a) Rationale for proposals for *A Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character* (COP9 DOC.16)
- b) Rationale for the proposed changes to the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (COP9 DOC.17)
- c) Background, rationale and fact sheets for ecological “outcome-oriented” indicators for assessing the implementation effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention (COP9 DOC.18)
- d) Assessment tools contained within the *Integrated Framework for Wetland Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring* (IF-WIAM) (COP9 DOC.24)

3. COP9 Draft Resolutions

- a) COP9 DR1 “*Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept*” – with new guidelines annexed;
- b) COP9 DR2 “*Future implementation of the scientific and technical aspects of the Convention*”;
- c) COP9 DR4 “*The Ramsar Convention and the conservation and sustainable use of fish resources*”.

4. Ramsar Technical Reports (in preparation)

- a) Guidance for GIS applications for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring;
- b) A review of Ramsar sites and fisheries management;
- c) The Convention’s development of Criteria and guidelines for Ramsar site designation 1971-2005;
- d) A framework and guidelines for valuing wetland services;
- e) Rapid assessment methodologies for inland, coastal and nearshore marine wetlands;
- f) Methodologies for assessing the vulnerability of wetlands to change in their ecological character;
- g) Reviews of environmental flow methodologies:
 - i. rivers;
 - ii. estuaries and near-shore environments;
 - iii. non-riverine inland wetlands;
- h) Review of wetland classification systems.

Annex 2

Ramsar Technical Report Series

Purpose

To publish electronically technical notes, reviews and reports on wetland ecology, conservation, wise use and management, as an enhanced information support service to Contracting Parties and the wider wetland community in support of implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

In particular, the series will include the technical background reviews and reports prepared by the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at the request of Contracting Parties which would previously have been made available in most instances only as "Information Papers" for a Conference of the Parties (COP). This is designed to ensure increased and longer-term accessibility of such documents and will also reduce the ever-increasing volumes of paper provided to Contracting Parties at COP, much of which is not the subject of debate or consideration for endorsement by the COP. Other reports not originating from COP requests to the STRP, but which are considered by the STRP to provide information relevant to supporting implementation of the Convention, may be proposed for inclusion in the series.

Process

The series will be moderated by the Chair of the STRP and the Deputy Secretary General of the Convention. The final draft text of each report will be circulated to the STRP as a peer review process and for approval.

Final editing, design and layout will be undertaken by the Ramsar Secretariat.

A style manual will be produced as a guide to authors. Authors submitting draft technical reports should keep any formatting to the absolute minimum needed for clarity. Reports should be fully referenced.

Up to approximately six reports may be produced each year, with an emphasis on issues of current relevance to the Convention, and especially those on which the Convention has requested information and advice. Publication of a report does not imply that the Convention has formally accepted and endorsed the views and information presented by the authors or editors, and this will be made clear in each report.

Reports will be numbered sequentially and each will be assigned an ISBN number.

Each report, in PDF format, will be posted for downloading in a special section of the Ramsar Web site and will be announced through the Web site and the Convention's various listserves.

If funding has been specifically made available, a report may be produced also in hard copy.

Each report will be in English. Wherever funding or other opportunities arises, the report will be produced in two or all three of the working languages of the Convention (English, French and Spanish).

An annual report will be presented to the STRP and Standing Committee.