

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
4th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on
Administrative Reform
Gland, Switzerland, 26 January 2010

Report of the 4th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform

Contracting Parties present: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay, Republic of Korea, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, USA, Uruguay, Venezuela.

Resources: IUCN, UNEP; Mr Kofi Addo, consultant

Agenda item 1: Adoption of the agenda

1. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** introduced the proposed agenda. **The USA** and **Japan** sought clarification about item 3 concerning drafting a recommendation, and Chile explained that items 1 and 2 of the Working Group's terms of reference (Resolution X.5, annex) have been completed in earlier meetings, and what remains is item 3, to "recommend . . . whether the Secretariat should be provided by UNEP or continue to be hosted by IUCN". He proposed to revisit the ten putative problems first identified in Standing Committee document 37-2 and see if the Group can agree upon an updated status for those, then to see if there is consensus on a draft recommendation, and to plan a report for the next Standing Committee meeting (SC41).
2. The proposed agenda was adopted by consensus.
3. **The Secretary General** thanked the participants for their willingness to take part in this work and expressed the hope that they would be able to make some recommendation to the SC. He offered to provide any information that the Secretariat could.
4. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** noted that, as at the last meeting, the staff of the Secretariat have been asked not to attend, in order to avoid inhibiting participants from frank discussion of staff-related matters, but that they could be called in when information is required.

Agenda item 2: Clarifications to the written inquiries by Parties

5. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** referred to document WG-AR4-2, "Supplementary information", circulated at this meeting.
6. **Argentina** thanked the Co-Chairs for the opportunity to submit additional questions after the last meeting. He also thanked the Chairs and UNEP and IUCN Secretariats for their hard work in trying to respond Argentina's questions. Although not all the questions submitted were answered because it was felt that they were not within the mandate, the answers received are useful for Argentina's government assessment on the status of the Ramsar Secretariat.

7. **The USA** noted that there had been insufficient time for replies to questions posed for UNEP and anticipated getting those answers in an appropriate time. **UNEP** offered to try to provide those responses in writing within three weeks.
8. **Germany** drew attention to the reply that indicated that the Secretariat hoped to gain access to GEF funding through the International Waters focal area – she reported that Germany has made such a request to the GEF for open access to GEF funds, on behalf of Ramsar and others outside the present system, and has found that it is not so easy. She questioned whether the Ramsar treaty is part of the UN system by virtue of having UNESCO as its depositary, as stated in the response, and the consultant **Mr Kofi Addo** confirmed that that is not the case.
9. **Japan** observed that some questions on costing had been posed to the Secretariat and sought the reasons for which a response was not received.
10. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** drew attention to the revised “apples and apples” table, as requested by the last meeting, which compares the present Ramsar budget with estimated low- and high-cost scenarios under UNEP.
11. **The representative of UNEP** expressed surprise at the table and would like to have seen it earlier, as there were budget items presented there that have not been discussed before. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** explained that most of those are line items in the present budget that would likely not be affected under the hypothetical scenarios, since the key item is the staff costs and whether JPOs or P1/P2s would be replacing the Ramsar interns. He felt that it makes a good basis for discussion.
12. **Mr Kofi Addo**, to **Switzerland’s** question about the office operating costs, explained that the estimated costs are based upon the 700 m² foreseen under UNEP and not the 307 m² presently serviced by IUCN under its agreement with Ramsar. **The UNEP representative** clarified that the operating costs for 700 m² includes meeting rooms, bathrooms, etc., which are presently provided by IUCN, so the UNEP figure would not necessarily imply more office space. She pointed out that some budget lines would not be subject to the 13% programme support cost (PSC) so the table is not precise in that regard.
13. **The Co-Chair (Australia)**, to **Serbia’s** question, explained that the purpose of the table was to provide a comparison of operating costs under the two options as a way of assisting Parties in forming their positions.
14. **Germany** inquired about the role of voluntary contributions in the Secretariat’s operations and their relation to the core budget expenses.
15. **The USA** noted that it would be useful to have line item budget estimates for transition costs as well as more information on voluntary contributions, as it would not be acceptable to have core budget programme funds used for any transition.
16. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** requested the Secretariat to provide a table of voluntary contributions over the past few years and how they were used. **New Zealand** seconded that request.

17. **Ghana** noted that at the last meeting major questions concerned any increases in costs and transition costs, and she requested the consultant to lead the meeting through the table comparing IUCN and UNEP estimated costs.
18. **Japan** noted that the budget table compared present costs only with the UNEP Geneva option and requested information on scenarios based upon other possible locations for the Secretariat. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** pointed out that that would make comparisons still more complicated and urged that the discussion focus only on the scenarios already described.
19. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** suggested that UNEP and IUCN work together to revise the table to clarify some of the questions raised, and he asked the Secretariat to provide a table of voluntary contributions for the past three years. He noted, though, that estimating transition costs would be more difficult, as there are unknown variables. He observed that that would be a one-time expense and that more discussion would be needed about how it would be funded, but at this time it would be like mixing apples and oranges.
20. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** proposed that, whilst the requested information was being prepared, the meeting turn to updating the putative problems to be resolved, and the Secretary General and Senior Regional Advisors were invited to attend. The Co-Chair drew attention to the paper circulated at this meeting which listed the problems cited and the Secretary General's report on them that was presented to the 2nd Working Group meeting in March 2009. Two more columns have been added for this meeting to agree on the current status of and conclusions about each of the problems.

Problem #1: Difficulty in obtaining travel visas

21. **The Secretary General (SG)** reported that there have been some improvements, in that there are better understandings with some of the missions in Geneva, but the process still takes some time.
22. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** said that staff of international organizations have legitimation cards, whereas with regular work visas it is difficult for staff from some countries to obtain travel visas.
23. **The Senior Advisor for the Americas** noted that there may be differences within the Secretariat, but that her region has been very responsive, and though she must go through the process she has never experienced any problems obtaining her visas.
24. **The Senior Advisor for Asia/Oceania** explained that, if he foresees a problem, he contacts the Ramsar focal point in the country and they contact the respective mission in Geneva. He noted that there are means of overcoming any foreseen problems.
25. **The Czech Republic** inquired specifically about a channel the SG had used to send out his letter on the visa issue, whereas the Czech Permanent Mission in Geneva had not been aware of this communication; at the same time, he pointed out that in most of the cases visas were not dealt with by Permanent Missions in Geneva but rather by Embassies in Bern which were better positioned for that. **The SG** explained that all of the Convention's diplomatic contacts are with the Geneva missions to the UN, where they exist, and it is left to the Parties to organize their responses according to their own systems.

26. **Sudan** said that the visa problems are probably not getting any better, given recent security issues, noting that Sudan is one of a number of countries subjected to additional scrutiny by the USA, for example. He felt that the UN system provides some leeway, an umbrella that makes countries more equal, and he said that if there is an opportunity to wipe out the visa problem it should be taken advantage of.
27. **The USA** reported that the SG's letters were appreciated by the US mission and handled according to its normal system, so it is not important how many Parties directly replied to his letters, as noted in March 2009.
28. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** felt that the SG's letters had not had much impact.
29. **The USA** noted that how people are treated in this respect was a very important matter but that perceptions are subjective and can be emotional. She felt that we would need to know how many visas were applied for and how many rejected, how many delays there were and whether any meetings were missed. Objective data would be needed to assess how serious the problem really is for the work of the Secretariat.
30. **Australia** noted that obtaining a visa for Australia would not be straightforward for people from certain countries. **The USA** observed that the same is true for the USA, and that is why firm numbers are needed to know which countries would present problems.
31. **South Africa** pointed out that the UN system would obviously involve a different procedure and firm numbers are not required to see that. She raised the question of the cost implications of having to reschedule flights or arrange last-minute tickets, and asked whether the Secretariat presently has to pay visa processing costs or is exempt from those.
32. **Germany** felt that the problem of visas should not be assessed simply by identifying in how many cases problems occurred in the past. Irrespective of the specific cases, there is a systemic difference between the current situation and the likely situation under UNEP. First, he stressed that it makes a fundamental difference whether one has to apply for a visa or not, because having to undergo the procedure already poses a potential problem depending on the circumstances in a particular country. And consequently, the current system under IUCN carries the systemic problem that it allows to differentiate between staff on the basis of their nationality, since some will encounter greater problems obtaining visas than others. He felt that all people working for the same international organisation should be treated equally.
33. **Ghana** felt that all should be treated equally, under one umbrella.
34. **Kenya** noted that a laissez passer does not always guarantee a visa, as a passport or letter may be needed as well. He reported that Kenya gives the same status to Ramsar as to other international organizations. **Sudan** said Kenya's procedure is not the same for all countries, as Sudan does not charge UN personnel for visas but does charge others.
35. **The SG** reported that there have been no rejected visa requests, but the process may take time. He said that payment is done on a case-by-case basis, as some staff have diplomatic passports whilst others do not, and in some cases fees are required anyway. **Kenya** noted that fees are charged for private visits but not for official business.

36. **The USA** requested that numbers on the visa issues should be included in the WG's report.
37. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** felt that the number of rejections was not as important as the difficulty of the process and he felt that the current status of the problem was the same as in the second column. He asked whether there were any suggestions for easing the problem.
38. **Indonesia** said that for his country people on an official visit always obtain their visas and that, with 159 Parties, it would be unlikely to find a single solution. He suggested as the best solution that staff members should apply for their visas earlier, exercise more foresight, include the letter from authorities, etc.
39. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** suggested that column three should be marked "status unchanged". **The USA** indicated that the information does not warrant that and that doing so would give all of the problems the same weight. **Chile** urged that the question is not about rejections but about the cumbersome process. It was agreed to mark the box "unchanged".
40. **Switzerland** recalled that UN staff also need visas sometimes, too.

Problem #2: Recognition at international meetings

41. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** summarized that the staff can participate in meetings but has been having problems with the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). **The SG** confirmed that there has been no change since March 2009, that there was still no permanent observer status with ECOSOC and still difficulties with the CSD.
42. **The Senior Advisor for Asia/Oceania** reported that over the past year and half, as long as he talks with the meeting organizers in advance, he has had no problem giving the presentations he wishes to make.
43. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** said that it depended upon the nature of the meeting and that in UN meetings there is a protocol to be followed, under which Ramsar usually comes last and might have less chance to be heard.
44. **Switzerland** explained the difficulties for all parties seeking representation at the CSD and said that it is a matter of getting in touch with the chair and CSD Bureau in advance.
45. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** described the ECOSOC procedure for participation in meetings and concluded that the problem with the CSD would not be solved easily. Column three was marked "current status unchanged."

Problem #3: Power to sign binding contracts

46. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** summarized the SG's report that the IUCN Director General's delegation of authority to the Secretary General to sign binding contracts remains valid in the new agreement with IUCN. To **Namibia's** question, **the SG** confirmed that the IUCN agreement is not time-limited and has no expiry date.

47. Column three was marked “solved, unchanged”.

Problem #4: International cooperative agreements

48. **The SG** explained that this refers to the power to engage in treaty-making and that no MEA secretariat can do so as an independent international organization by itself – all are, like Ramsar, dependent upon the host organization, whether the UN, UNEP, IUCN, etc.
49. **Germany** agreed that the legal capacity of the secretariat derives from the host organization as well as the Ramsar COP. Consequently the distinction between the legal capacity under the administration by IUCN and by UNEP is to a great extent equivalent to the distinction between the respective capacities and competences of IUCN on the one hand and UNEP on the other. With the one being a non-governmental organization and the other a UN Programme, one could not simply assume that there is no difference.
50. **The SG** added that the status also depends upon the powers granted by the Conference of the Parties, which authorizes the host organization.
51. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** proposed that column three should be marked “problem is unchanged” and the conclusion should be “depends upon host and powers from the COP.”

Problem #5: Legal liability of the host

52. **The SG** reported that the legal liability lies with IUCN and that is unchanged in the new agreement. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** proposed that column three should be marked “unchanged with the new letter of agreement.”

Problem #6: Parties’ difficulty in paying contributions

53. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** noted that this is no longer a problem and proposed marking column three “unchanged, solved”.
54. **Ghana** agreed that the government does not have a problem paying its contribution but it raises the question of why the Ramsar Convention is classed as an NGO.
55. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** said that some countries say “why should we send money to IUCN, as we are not members of IUCN,” and they might have to go to Parliament for authorization.
56. **The USA** pointed out that how Parties deal with these matters domestically is a separate issue, as they are in fact paying their contributions.
57. **Sudan** agreed with Ghana because there is a worry in some African countries about working with NGOs. He felt that joining UNEP would be a good idea, as there is more trust in the UN system.
58. **Japan** pointed out that IUCN is not simply an NGO, but rather an intergovernmental organization or quasi-governmental body. Japan, for example, is a member of IUCN.

59. **Argentina** voiced sympathy with the concerns but pointed out that no evidence has been provided that there is a problem with Parties actually paying their contributions. He felt that the table should be marked “no problem” unless such evidence is provided.
60. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** summarized that it is not a problem for Parties to pay but that a few of them seem to have concerns. She urged that the table should be marked “for some states, problems remain.”

Problem #7: Financial procedures of host

61. **The SG** reported that, by a decision of the last SC meeting, the Secretariat should have consultations with the SC Subgroup on Finance and IUCN to clarify areas where the SG can make decisions that may not be entirely in line with IUCN procedures (e.g., in performance-based salary increments). He said that we will need the agreement of both of those bodies.
62. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** proposed that the table should be marked “situation unchanged, pending discussions between the SC and IUCN.”

Problem #8: Security assistance for staff

63. **The SG** indicated that there has been no change since the March 2009 note in column two.
64. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** felt there was a need for interim measures because he was concerned about what would happen to staff in case of civil unrest, etc.
65. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** proposed that column three should be marked “unchanged” and column four left blank.

Problem #9: Taxpayer privileges

66. **The SG** indicated that there has been no change on this issue.
67. **Switzerland** pointed out that this has never been a particular problem for Ramsar. It might be true that in some communities non-taxpayers might have less access to services, but if so this would be the same for all foreign residents who are tax-exempt. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** suggested marking the table “problem solved”, but Japan agreed that this has never been a problem.
68. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** proposed marking the table “the problem also applies to others who do not pay taxes”.

Problem #10: Work permits for spouses

69. **Switzerland** observed that this has never been a problem and was corrected long ago. She proposed marking the table “work permits for spouses of non-Swiss staff have always been available.”

70. **The USA** said that it is difficult to see how these comments in the table would be useful for anyone who has not been part of the discussions, as there is an inconsistency in the answers.
71. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** noted that the putative problems come from a document of the Conference of the Parties, so all Parties theoretically know about them. The table will be filled out with the proposed comments and circulated to the WG participants, so they can still be made more consistent and coherent if wished. Switzerland's proposed wording for problem #10 was agreed.
72. The table of putative problems was agreed, subject to circulation for comment.
73. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** thanked the UNEP and IUCN representatives for having provided the revised table of comparative budgets.
74. **The UNEP representative** noted that UN budgets are expressed in US dollars, so it must be kept in mind that the present table is based in Swiss francs at the 1 January 2010 official UN exchange rate. She explained that the Oceania outposted staff member at SPREP, whose existence has been only revealed now, has been retained in the table for comparison but that person's responsibilities, etc., would have to be assessed; similarly, the "partnership officer" for 2010 would need to be provisionally classified on the basis of the TOR, as that post might fall, in whole or in part, under the 13% PSC. She noted that the travel expenses might actually be higher under UN rules, but that other budget lines could be lower, e.g., audit costs under "general operating costs" would fall under the 13% PSC, and the Ramsar Sites Database might be able to be combined with WCMC databases. There might be other differences throughout the table, but they would likely be small adjustments.
75. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** drew attention to the table of voluntary contributions, and the **Finance Officer** explained that this information, distributed to the Parties, shows both donors and projects over the period 2005-2008.
76. **The Republic of Korea** inquired about how legal costs are funded. **The Finance Officer** replied that there is no budget for legal costs and funding must be sought for any legal services required. IUCN does not provide legal services, but it is understood that UNEP would do so. She also noted that the Finance Officer's salary comes from the core budget; IUCN's support for financial services is included in its service fee, whereas under UNEP both the support and the salary would be covered by the 13% PSC.
77. **Germany** asked why only two staff members' salaries are included in the UNEP PSC, whereas most other MEA secretariats have three staff members included there. **The UNEP representative** explained that, in addition to the Finance and Administration Officers, some MEAs are also able to include a third position under the PSC, and that might be possible for Ramsar as well – this was meant to be a conservative estimate, however, and such a determination could not be made hypothetically prior to a decision about joining UNEP.
78. **Argentina** inquired about the status of this budget estimate document, and the **Co-Chair (Australia)** proposed that, after the WG's agreement, the table could be provided to the capitals as a Working Group document.

79. **The UNEP representative** and the **Finance Officer** stressed that it must be clear that the figures are only for estimated costs and that they are provided as an illustration, not as a proposed budget. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** felt that the estimates should be signed off by UNEP in some sense, but **the UNEP representative** explained that the table is not structured as a UNEP budget and can only serve as an illustration. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** suggested that though the budget formats might be structured differently, the bottom lines should be more or less the same, but **UNEP** pointed to a number of items about which there are considerable uncertainties that could vary by as much as 15%. **Chile** suggested that such variations in the estimates might tend to cancel out and leave a reliable bottom line.
80. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** acknowledged that the budget estimates are not meant to be binding but noted that there is a need to provide suitably-qualified but still useful figures to the capitals. **Canada** suggested adding a note to the table indicating that UNEP has not endorsed the figures. To **the USA's** suggestion that UNEP prepare an indicative budget according to UNEP principles, **the UNEP representative** stressed that there are so many unknown variables, like the eventual location of the Secretariat, that it would be virtually impossible to do so and rather time consuming. **Australia** concurred that it would be better to provide suitable headings and caveats for the present table and use it for illustration.
81. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** drew attention to the listing of voluntary contributions, their donors, and the projects they have funded. **The Senior Advisor for the Americas** explained the contributions for work on High Andean wetlands and the Aruaco contribution concerning management planning for a Ramsar site in the region. **The Finance Officer** explained the 'Biosphere Connections' programme in which the Star Alliance of airlines pays for some non-staff travel for Ramsar, IUCN, and the UNESCO MAB Programme.
82. **Iran** asked whether the IUCN/Ramsar "retained income tax equivalent" is similar to the UN's "staff assessment costs". **The UNEP representative** explained the staff assessment costs and noted that they are not really similar.
83. **Sudan** noted that some of the voluntary contributions have been one-off or irregular and inquired how they could be relied upon for budgeting purposes. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** noted that the figures represent an historical record and are not intended for budgeting purposes.
84. **Switzerland** explained the larger Swiss contribution during the COP year and noted that the remainder represented its annual funding for the Swiss Grant for Africa. **The Republic of Korea** affirmed that Korean voluntary contributions have continued since COP10 in 2008.
85. At **Germany's** request, **the Finance Officer** spelt out some of the acronyms used on the list, and it was agreed that the table would be refined with suitable caveats and more intelligible identifications, and then circulated for comment. **The USA** inquired how the Parties could use the table of voluntary contributions, and **the Co-Chair (Australia)** indicated that they might use the table however they wish to. **The USA** urged that the WG should be provided with a similar table of transition costs.

86. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** turned to the question of whether a further meeting of the WG would be necessary, noting that, whilst the present meeting had been foreseen as the last one, participants have been making requests for additional information. **Japan** suggested scheduling another meeting in four or five weeks to finalize the WG report and/or recommendation and noted that a response is still awaited from the Secretariat about transition costs. The meeting should take place at least 30 days before SC41.
87. **Belgium** observed that there will always be some unknowns and that the eventual recommendation will always involve a certain leap of faith. Citing the possibility of indefinite meetings calling for further information, he urged that if there were to be another meeting it should focus solely on the final result.
88. **The USA** noted that the information documents could be annexed to the WG's report but she could see no sign of a consensus on the content of the report itself. She suggested that it would help to have a draft report to discuss at the next meeting.
89. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** clarified again the distinction between the report of the WG's work and its recommendation to the SC. He also noted that the SC could note the report and ask the WG to continue its work with further meetings into the next period.
90. **Germany** agreed that the next meeting should be the last one but it would be pointless without a draft to work with, and suggested that the Co-Chairs prepare a draft in advance. **Sudan** agreed that having a draft would help to identify where there is agreement and disagreement and could help to bring positions closer together.
91. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** agreed on the value of another meeting, but only if boundaries are set to requests for additional information and there is agreement that at some point the WG must sign off on the best consensus that can be achieved. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** argued that at some point the WG needs to work out whether it can make a concrete recommendation or not.
92. **Ecuador** agreed that there should be a draft report for the next meeting, but noted that there is no necessity to conclude the WG's work before the Standing Committee meeting; it would be perfectly possible to report to the SC41 and then continue working on an eventual recommendation as needed.
93. **Belgium** suggested that, if in fact there is no consensus, it would be preferable to work on negotiating the text of the recommendation itself, and that this should be the agreed purpose of the next meeting.
94. **Switzerland** reminded that the WG cannot negotiate a recommendation for the COP but should suggest solutions for the SC, so that the SC can agree a draft Resolution to the COP.
95. **Canada** felt that a lot of information has been gathered and there should be no need for further meetings. She noted that IUCN and the Secretariat have been asked to work out an improved relationship but it is not yet known how well that will turn out. In the meantime, she saw no chance of any consensus on recommending a move to UNEP, and she

suggested that the WG should recommend that the Secretariat should report to the SC and the COP on progress in improving the IUCN relationship.

96. **The Republic of Korea** suggested that the WG should include some kind of recommendation with the report, even if it is not perfect, but it need not be just a choice between the IUCN and UNEP options. He urged that the Co-Chairs should draft a report and a recommendation for discussion, and the SC can decide whether it needs more information or not and restart the process if necessary.
97. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** recalled that item 3 of the Resolution X.5 annex tasks the WG with recommending either UNEP or IUCN, and she wondered whether, if there is no consensus on moving to UNEP, that defaults to recommending IUCN.
98. **Germany** saw no consensus for either option and noted that participants have not had an opportunity to consult with their regions yet. She wondered whether the recommendation must be based on a consensus and suggested that the WG lay out the differences of positions very clearly and ask how the member Parties and the regions feel.
99. **Argentina** agreed that it would be difficult to reach a consensus on moving to the UN system and felt that at this point the mandate seems to be to report on the work of the WG.
100. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** agreed and recalled that the first part of the task is to submit a progress report to SC41. He proposed that the Co-Chairs would prepare a draft report with the requested additional information in the next week or so: it would explain to the SC that the WG has done what was requested in terms of gathering information, explain the discussions, and conclude that there has been no agreement concerning the two options.
101. **Belgium** suggested that, instead of just reporting that there was no consensus, the report could go into some of the issues and report what some of the Parties' positions were. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** noted that some delegations might wish to be associated with particular positions and suggested that the report could 1) merely note that there was no agreement on the issues, 2) indicate that some/many Parties held certain views on the issues, or 3) identify the Parties holding the different views. **Chile** pointed out that the participants would have an opportunity to amend or add to the draft report before the meeting and UNEP, IUCN, and the Secretariat would have a chance to check the facts. Participants would need to come to the final meeting, in the 2nd or 3rd week of March, with their government's opinions and prepared to sign off on a final product.
102. **Germany** felt that the SC would not welcome vague characterizations of levels of support on the issues and would wish to know what the contentious issues were and how many Parties were for or against the positions.
103. **Ecuador** felt that there is already a good deal of information and Parties are ready to take a position, and that there is time to arrive at regional positions. **New Zealand** said that Argentina's proposal was a pragmatic one. It agreed that time needed to be made available for consideration of all available information, and with Japan's proposal to hold a final meeting. The Parties, Co-Chairs and Secretariat had worked very hard on the issue to date, and it would be only correct to invest the necessary energy to agree the language of the

WG's report. **The USA** agreed that the report should run through the various issues but urged that there would be no need for naming Parties holding various positions; it would be sufficient just to note whether there was some consensus, no consensus, etc., on each issue.

104. There was discussion of what form the requested information on transition costs should take. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** argued that the known information can be adequately conveyed in several paragraphs of text, whereas trying to develop a table of data on hypothetical and ill-defined potentials might be a great deal of work for little concrete gain. **UNEP** and **IUCN** stressed the difficulty of providing firm information with so many unknown variables, and **Germany** suggested that legal advice should be sought about whether redundancy costs would have to be paid to staff who moved on to UNEP.
105. **The USA** acknowledged the difficulty in providing concrete data on transition costs but emphasized that the issue does require real attention in the report. **Canada** suggested that there should be a list of unquantifiable but important costs, such as for contract terminations, physical moving, etc., to ensure that they are taken into account. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** agreed that there should be a few paragraphs to describe the implications of transition costs, and promised to try to think out, with the Secretariat's help, what other unforeseen costs there might be.
106. It was suggested that the Secretariat might ask staff members whether they would be interested in joining UNEP or not, and that rough moving costs might be sought by asking for some quotations.
107. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** summarized that the task now is to draft a report, with the requested information, for all to agree upon at a final meeting. Then the WG would wait to see what the SC wishes the Group to do, and if the SC were to request further information about, for example, transition costs, Japan and others could be asked to provide sample tables that could be used as models. That would not be for the next meeting, however.
108. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** pointed out that the draft report of the WG's 3rd meeting and the comments and amendments provided by participants have been on the Ramsar Web site for some time. It was agreed that the Secretariat should introduce those amendments and post the final report of the 3rd meeting.
109. **Chile** said that the Co-Chairs will provide the draft WG report in a week or so, by e-mail and the Ramsar Web site, and confer about the best date for the next meeting.
110. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** thanked the participants for their work and thanked the Secretariat, UNEP, and IUCN for their support.