CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

30th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 13-16 January 2004

DOC. SC30-5

Agenda item 6.2

Establishment and operations of the STRP Support Service

Action requested: **The Standing Committee is invited to note the progress reported by Wetlands International in its provision of the STRP Support Service, and to consider whether it would be appropriate to make any adjustments to its future delivery.**

Background

1.   Through COP8 Resolution VIII.28, Contracting Parties endorsed the establishment of an STRP Support Service, "working in open and transparent partnership with all International Organization Partners (IOPs), STRP observer organizations and others", and instructed the Bureau to establish a contractual arrangement and terms of reference for the delivery of this Service. The role of the STRP Support Service is intended to provide increased capacity to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel in its development and implementation of its Work Plan for 2003-2005.

2.   The 29th meeting of the Standing Committee considered Terms of Reference for the Support Service prepared by the Secretariat and the proposal for its delivery made by Wetlands International, adopted (Decision SC29-15) the proposal amended to fully accommodate the STRP Work Plan and its cost implications as subsequently developed by the 11th meeting of the STRP in April 2003, and instructed the Secretariat to conclude contractual arrangements with Wetlands International. The proposal by Wetlands International was developed in agreement with the Convention's three other International Organization Partners (BirdLife International, IUCN, and WWF International).

3.   This report, prepared by Wetlands International, provides a summary of implementation progress of the STRP Support Service to November 2003, together with a Financial Statement (Annex 1) and a revised Work Plan schedule of delivery of the Service (Annex 2).

Summary of Progress in 2003

4.   In accordance with Decision SC29-15, contractual arrangements were finalized and the Support Service rapidly moved into its first phase of implementation prior to the 11th meeting of the STRP in April 2003, in order to provide advice and support to the Panel in the development of its Work Plan and identification of experts to contribute to its work.

5.   Within the reporting period, the Support Service has created a primary tool to enable communication and to track the progress of the STRP Working Groups and other processes established in the STRP's Work Plan 2003-2005. This is delivered through the Ramsar STRP Support Service Web site, hosted on www.wetlands.org/strp. This

interactive Web site organizes the Working Group discussions and libraries of background information leading to development of the outputs and products from the STRP, for consideration by the 30th and 31st meetings of the Standing Committee, leading up to COP9 in Kampala, Uganda, in late 2005.

6.   The STRP's six Working Groups and the networks established for other areas of the STRP's work have been using the discussion facility, and Working Group members have familiarised themselves with the tools that this Service offers. The Support Service sends a bi-monthly reminder of tasks to Working Group leads, as a guide and reminder on outstanding tasks and deadlines. This has proved very useful for generating positive responses on tasks and especially on slipped deadlines where these arise. The Support Service also endeavours to update regularly the libraries of each Working Group with relevant information resources it identifies.

7.   The Support Service also actively seeks the participation of IOP networks and Specialist (expert) Groups sponsored by the International Organiszation Partners towards contributing to the work of the STRP. These include the Wetlands International Specialist Groups (especially the re-activated Education and Public Awareness Specialist Group, which is now leading on CEPA cross-cutting issues for the STRP). The IUCN Species Survival Commission Specialist Groups, the Commission on Ecosystem Management, and the Commission on Education and Communication have all been made aware of these opportunities. However, as is noted in the Report of the Chair of the STRP (DOC. SC30-4), it has proved difficult to date to secure full engagement of these expert networks.

8.   A summary report on progress was recently sent to the IOP representatives on the STRP and a phone conference will be held in December 2003 as a means of briefing on progress, in order to provide for discussion on the way forward and enhancing the use of their networks. This would enable the Support Service to act more effectively as a clearing house for access to International Organization Partner Support for the STRP generally.

9.   In recognition of the close linkage between the Ramsar Expert Database and the role of the STRP Support Service in identifying additional experts to contribute to different aspects of the work of the Panel, by agreement with the Ramsar Secretariat Wetlands International has assumed responsibility for the management and maintenance of the Ramsar Experts Database. This is now maintained as a live database through the STRP Support Service Web site. Wetlands International has contacted over 300 listed experts on that database via e-mail and postcards to confirm their continued interest in remaining on the register.

10.   To date over 110 experts have updated their records, while more recently identified experts will be added after due consideration by the Ramsar Secretariat, which retains the responsibility for accepting candidates into the Experts Database. Access to this database is available to STRP Members via the STRP Support Service Web site, but only for experts who have agreed that their records can be viewed by the STRP. The Support Service has also identified relevant experts from the records available and has subscribed them to the appropriate STRP Working Groups for which their expertise is most relevant.

11.   The Support Service also plays a secretarial role to the STRP in its workshop planning (including logistics), budgeting, and consultancies. From information supplied by STRP Working Groups an overview of workshops requested by the Working Groups, with cost

estimates, has been prepared by the Support Service along with an identification and costing of those tasks which require additional funding, chiefly for expert consultancies, for their delivery. The Ramsar Secretariat is currently seeking sources of additional funding for this work.

12.   As part of its responsibility, the Support Service also notifies the STRP through its global calendar of events of relevant conferences and expert meetings.

13.   In addition to its contractual role of providing the Support Service, Wetlands International has also offered the services of its newly constituted CEPA Specialist Group to lead CEPA cross-cutting issues within the STRP. The CEPA SG has already held it first face-to-face meeting, which established a work plan based upon the CEPA objectives of the STRP for the triennium and upon the tasks identified as needed for the implementation of the Convention's CEPA programme set out in the Annex to Resolution VIII.31. Additional resources will need to be found for elements of this work.

14.   The overall operation of the Support Service will be kept under review by Wetlands International and the Ramsar Secretariat, with input from the other IOPs, STRP Working Group leads, and STRP Chair and Vice-Chair.

15.   Table 1 summarises the tasks required of the STRP Support Service and the actions taken to date. Overall, the Support Service has been able to meet much of the expected delivery in this first period of its operations, in terms of setting up the framework for the Service and in supporting the various Working groups.

Table 1. STRP Support Service tasks and input requirements, and actions undertaken

Task	Action taken to date
i) Assist the Ramsar Secretariat in identifying the costs of preparing each substantive task identified for the work of the STRP, and help identify sources of funding for such work.	Outline estimates prepared. Detailed costings have been achieved. Now awaiting Secretariat fundraising actions.
ii) Support, on behalf of the Secretariat, the work of the Working Groups established by the STRP, including through:	[See below for each sub-task]
a) providing expert advice and relevant materials to Working Groups;	Some resource materials are available electronically via the Web site. Specific requests have been met to date
b) facilitating and participating in the work of the Working Groups, including through the setting up of electronic discussion groups, teleconferences and other information exchange systems;	Web site set up and programming is complete. Minor bugs are addressed as they arise and full operation of Ramsar Experts Database was achieved by 1 September 2003.
c) facilitating and arranging a mid-term meeting for each Working Group, as needed and resources permitting, for review of first draft materials, and identifying appropriate conferences and other meetings which might provide a cost-effective and timely venue (Note. Mid-term working group meetings should be planned to occur not later than early 2004);	The cost estimates and planning have been made for all meeting requests and this estimate is currently with the Ramsar Secretariat for a decision on budgets.
d) identifying to Working Groups national and	Partly identified through contact with

international experts and organizations who might be invited to undertake a wider peer-review of draft materials prepared by the Working Group;	Observers and others. See Web site. Need first contact with STRP National Focal Points to progress national level contacts
e) facilitating the involvement of STRP National Focal Points in contributing to the work of STRP's Working Groups and any other mechanisms established for the preparation of materials for COP9 (see also section f) below);	Planned. However, Ramsar Secretariat is taking the lead on first contact with the National Focal Points and the Support Service will follow this up with the Secretariat.
f) monitoring the progress of each Working Group, including the drafting of preparation by experts under contract from the Ramsar Secretariat, and providing regular reports on progress from the groups to the STRP Chair and the Secretariat; and	Regular follow-up emails sent bi-monthly to remind those involved of deadlines.
g) ensuring that all relevant materials from each Working Group are transmitted in a timely manner to the Secretariat for their preparation for circulation for review by the Panel at its second meeting of the triennium.	Reminders sent, and regular reminders on unachieved tasks and progress sent as well.

Financial statement

16. Following the STRP11 meeting in April 2003 and as called for in the initial STRP Support Service contract, a revised estimate of costs taking into account the pattern of work established by the STRP in its 2003-2005 Work Plan was prepared for the Secretariat, to enable the budget to be confirmed for the remaining period of the triennium. The estimates reflect the relative workloads of each Working Group and also reflect the experience obtained within the first four months of running the Support Service. The budget estimates have been kept within the total allocation of SFr 330,000 approved in the core Convention budget for the STRP Support Service by COP8.

17. In the attached financial spreadsheet (Annex 1), the actual costs incurred to run the Support Service are provided up to the end of November 2003. Regarding the first two outputs defined: Establish the Service, and Briefing and support to first STRP meeting (STRP11), the actual spent has been kept within estimates. The third category - support work through 2003-2004 - shows that SFr 44,624 (about 35%) of the total funds (SFr 125,692) allocated under this category have been spent to date, well within anticipated estimates.

18. If, by the end of 2003, confirmed savings are made on this category of Support Service work, the Standing Committee may wish to decide if these resources should be made available for support to STRP Working Group activities – notably towards preparation of substantive texts where expert consultancy is needed and/or towards full costs of holding mid-term Working Group workshops during 2004. The estimates of costs will be revised and updated in consultation with the Secretariat, and will be tabled for consideration by the Standing Committee at its 30th meeting.

Annex 1. STRP Support Service: Financial Estimates and Actuals, November 2003

Annex STRP Support Service: Updated Estimate of costs for the 2003-2005 period, with actual spend to November 2003

Costs given are actuals for weeks 1-15 of 2003

Outputs and Activities	Wetlands International staff costs					Sub-Total WI staff costs	Direct costs			SUB-TOTAL SFr	SPENT ACTUALS Categories as at Nov. 2003	SPENT ACTUALS EURO	SPENT ACTUALS SFr
SFr per day	Staff 1 761 days	Staff 2 593 days	Staff 3 346 days	travel costs actual	p.diems 235 days		Web/IT telephone	IOPs and Observers	W. Group Meetings				
Year 2003													
Output: Establish the Service (by April 2003)													
Identify relevant existing expert networks	2	3				3,300							
Identify and establish Bureau/IOP Steering Group mechanism	1					761	734						
Review priority tasks and other tasks to identify expertise required	1	1				1,353							
Negotiate availability of identified relevant expertise		2				1,185							
Review priority and other tasks for STRP Support Service plan	1	2				1,946							
Prepare 3 year costed Service Workplan	1	1				1,353					Total Staff costs	€4,268	6,264
Implement web-enabled communication systems	4					3,043	27,421				Total direct costs	€21,564	31,650
										41,096	**TOTAL**	**€25,832**	**37,914**
Output: Briefing to 1st STRP Meeting													
Identify appropriate networks and organisations	1	1				1,353							
Identify appropriate individual experts		2				1,185		8,806					
Identify appropriate global experts	1	2				1,946							
Identify gap filling needs	1	1				1,353					Total staff costs	€11,582	16,999
Prepare briefing and Report and attend STRP Meeting	5	5	2	1,321	10	11,128					Total direct costs	€3,890	5,709
										25,772	**TOTAL**	**€15,472**	**22,708**
Year 2003 through 2004, following 1st STRP Meeting													
(note that there may be some final support required in 2005)													
Develop work, monitor and support Working Groups	44	64	12			75,553							
Maintain and update STRP Support Service website	22	18	8			30,170	8,806				Total staff costs	€24,904	36,552
Liaison/co-working with Bureau over Groups and expert inputs	10	6				11,163					Total direct costs	€5,500	8,072
										125,692	**TOTAL**	**€30,404**	**44,624**
Output: Working Group activities and products													
Working Group support - 1. Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring									19,380				
Working Group support - 2. Wise Use									11,730				
Working Group support - 3. Water Resource Management									6,120				
Working Group support - 4. Site Designation guidance									12,750				
Working Group support - 5. Managing Ramsar Sites									0				
Working Group support - 6. Assess effectiveness of the Convention									1,020				
Cross-cutting and coordination meetings													
Other Working Group support (2 extra Groups)													
										51,000			
Output: briefing to Standing Committee, January 2004													
Prepare briefing and attend Standing Committee meeting	7	7	2	1,321	10	13,834							
										13,834			
Output: briefing to STRP12 Meeting, December 2004													
Prepare briefing and Report and attend STRP12 meeting	7	7	2	1,321	10	13,834							
										13,834			
Ongoing activities throughout 2003-2005 period													
Output: Strengthen STRP National Focal Points and Networks													
Review needs of STRP National Focal Points	3	8				7,024							
Regional and National support to STRP Focal Points	20	20				27,068	587						
										34,679			
Output: Expert network development													
Setting up costs for new expert networks (if approved)	2	10				7,449		5,871					
										13,319			
SFR TOTALS	101,168	94,836	8,990	3,963	7,045		37,548	14,677	51,000	319,227			
Contingency for unforeseen travel and other direct costs										10,719			
TOTAL ESTIMATED										**329,946**	**TOTAL SPENT>**	**€71,708**	**105,245**

Annex 2: STRP Support Service: Revised Indicative Workplan (November 2003)

Activity	2003	2004	2005
	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D
Prepare offer to Standing Committee	▬ (F)		
Undertake pre-meeting tasks, include:			
Identify & contact expert networks, and any gaps	▬ (F–M)		
Design and build website	▬ (F–A)		
Let programming contracts	▬ (M–A)		
Re-activate Ramsar Experts Database	▬ (A–M)		
Attend and report to STRP11 Meeting	★ (M)		
Between 1st and 2nd meeting of STRP			
Initiate temporary List Server for STRP members	★ (M)		
Initiate communication with STRP Nat FPs	★ (M)		
Discussion fora/listervers fully available to WGs	★ (A)		
Moderate discussion fora and facilitate WGs	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	▬▬
Assist the Secretariat with tasks	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	▬▬
Transmit WG progress reports to STRP Chair	★ (S)	★ (J)	
Submit progress report to Standing Committee	★ (N)		
Attend Standing Committee Meeting		★ (J)	
Organise WG meetings		▬▬▬★ (M–A)	
Assist WG post-meeting reporting		▬ (M)	
Support Secretariat in WG liaison over drafts		▬▬▬ (S–O)	
Attend and report to STRP12 meeting		★ (D)	
After STRP12 meeting			
Support Secretariat in WG liaison over drafts			▬▬▬ (J–M)
Submit full Report on Service to Sec.and SC			★ (F)
Attend Standing Committee Meeting for COP9			★ (A)
After Standing Committee meeting			
Assist Secretariat and STRP Chair re: outputs			▬▬▬ (J–A)