

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
35th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 14-16 February 2007

DOC. SC35-3

Agenda item 5

Report of activities with International Organization Partners

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to take note of this report, and provide any comments as appropriate.

1. At its 34th meeting the Standing Committee received a report of the first of a planned regular series of meetings between the Secretariat and the chief officers of the Convention's five International Organisation Partners (IOPs) – BirdLife International, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), IUCN, WWF International, and Wetlands International. In Decision SC34-2:

The Standing Committee noted the report of the February 2006 IOPs/Secretariat meeting and encouraged the Secretariat and IOPs to institutionalize similar meetings on an annual basis. The SC urged the IOPs to establish direct contacts with the Parties' National Focal Points and to collaborate with one another when more than one is located in a Party, and it encouraged the Parties to include local officers of the IOPs in their National Ramsar/Wetlands Committees. The SC also urged SC members to explain the role of the IOPs in Ramsar to other officials in their governments. The SC urged the IOPs to assist the Parties, where appropriate, in implementing the Ramsar/CBD Joint Work Plan, and it invited the IOPs to report regularly to the SC on their relevant activities.

2. This report provides the Standing Committee with an update on the further development of collaborations between the IOPs and the Convention and its Secretariat since April 2006.

IOPs/Secretariat meeting

3. In line with Decision SC34-2, the Secretariat hosted a further meeting with the IOPs in Gland on 28 September 2006. Participants in the meeting were: Dave Pritchard (BirdLife International), Frank Rijbersman (IWMI), Ibrahim Thiaw and Mark Smith (IUCN), Jane Madgwick (Wetlands International), Gordon Shepherd and Jamie Pittock (WWF), and Peter Bridgewater, Nick Davidson, Tobias Salathe, Margarita Astrálaga (Ramsar Secretariat). In addition, the meeting was fortunate also to have the participation of Standing Committee Chairs Paul Mafabi, John Bowleg and Herb Raffaele, who were present in Gland for Secretariat meetings at that time.
4. The following paragraphs provide a summary of issues and future actions which were agreed upon by the meeting. A significant focus of discussion during this meeting concerned a range of COP10-related matters.

COP10 issues

5. Korea and coastal land-claim issues

- The Secretary General will raise this matter with the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Environment, reporting the issues raised by the IOPs and seeking a response on how the MoE would wish to handle the matter; and will keep the IOPs briefed.
- Wetlands International will report back to the IOPs and Secretariat on any discussion of the matter at the November 2006 NGOs meeting.

6. COP10 theme(s) and focus

- For COP10 the IOPs will jointly develop a linked series of events on a limited number of key issues for the COP (issues/topics to be determined later, but likely including CEPA).
- This series of events will be branded "IOP COP10 Supporting Events" or a similar title, to flag up their direct contribution to the COP's key issues, and also so as to distinguish them from the many other "side events" likely to be requested by participants.
- The overall purpose of the COP10 theme should be to lead to the Convention having increased purchase in other sectoral issues.
- The Secretary General will advise Korea on the IOPs' ideas for broad themes, and bring these forward for further discussion at SC35.

7. COP10 structural and process issues

- The processes established under Resolution VIII.45 had already helped in the preparations for COP9 and the COP9 consideration of draft Resolutions (DRs) – and the related amendments to the COP Rules of Procedure will further help to avoid the complications of last minute submission of DRs.
- The timing and focus of regional 'preparatory' meetings should be such that they a) undertake a mid-term review of implementation progress, particularly on Resolutions adopted by the previous COP; and b) identify new issues to bring to COP10, in the context of discussing the major topics of DRs being already prepared for COP by STRP and SC – and not attempt a detailed scrutiny of DRs.
- Find ways and means of balancing the COP's focus on previous and new decisions, including through providing advice to Parties on the implications for them of each DR in the context of previously adopted relevant COP decisions.

8. COP9 Resolution implementation – how can IOPs help?

- The idea of undertaking an in-depth review of implementation by all stakeholders of a few key Resolutions issue would be raised with the Standing Committee's Subgroup on the Strategic Plan when it meets in February 2007.
- Ways of showcasing to COP10 the range of the IOPs' work in implementing Resolution IX.14 – perhaps through an event or training session on any toolkits and guidelines prepared by them – will be found.

- Keep under review the UN reform process to see what it means for Ramsar, particularly in relation to water policy and management.
- Regional initiatives are a key issue for all IOPs, but there is a need to establish a clearer strategic direction and mechanisms for critical evaluation of such initiatives. The desired future and outcomes of initiatives and their further development need to be better elaborated.
- The process of developing the new Convention Strategic Plan must be as inclusive as possible, and the IOPs will play a key role in this, including though review of the current SP.

9. IOP coordination and collaboration in Convention support, including COPs

- Concerning preparation of the new Strategic Plan:
 - i) in drafting the new Strategic Plan the IOPs' MoCs and work plan areas of activity will be clearly identified, i.e., where appropriate treating the IOPs as a 'body' of the Convention for implementation purposes;
 - ii) IOPs will provide the Secretariat with early advice on their ideas for the structure and main themes/issues for priority attention in preparing the new Strategic Plan;
 - iii) the IOPs will further develop their joint monitoring document for consultation with Standing Committee and STRP; and
 - iv) A review of current requests for IOP implementation work in COP decisions will be developed (Dave Pritchard's Resolution IX.17 decisions review may provide some help in this).
- The IOPs will advise the Secretariat of any other Agenda items for the February 2007 Management Working Group meeting.
- Concerning the future schedule of IOP/Secretariat meetings, such face-to-face meetings should be planned to take place once a year, immediately before each meeting of the Standing Committee, with participation as at this meeting (IOPs, Secretariat, SC Chair and Vice-Chair and Subgroup on Finance Chair). Meetings are called by the Secretary General. It was also agreed to schedule a date for a conference call between SC meetings, so as to be able to follow up on progress and issues intersessionally.

10. Communications issues

- Continue working to find ways of linking from the Ramsar Web site to IOPs' Web sites, so as to strengthen demonstration of the relationships and links.

11. Ramsar and global water discussions

- There is need for stronger Ramsar involvement in the next World Water Forum, in Turkey, with the view expressed that Ramsar should be amongst the organizers. Ger Bergkamp (IUCN), who is a member of the organizing committee, should suggest how best to achieve this.

12. IOPs' role in transmitting Ramsar issues through their regional networks

- Discussion on this topic was deferred until the next IOPs' meeting.
13. **Training opportunities for Ramsar interns with the IOPs**
- The IOPs will consider and propose options for how such an arrangement might work.
14. **SC35 issues**
- The IOPs will consult and report back to the Secretariat on who will make their opening and closing statements to SC35.
15. It was also agreed that these regular meetings are proving a valuable opportunity for open exchange of views on issues of common concern, and that they will continue to be organized regularly between each Standing Committee meeting.

IOP support through secondments to the Secretariat

16. The Secretariat is extremely grateful to the RSPB/BirdLife International for continuing their support to the Convention through the agreement for Mr Dave Pritchard to undertake periods of secondment to the Ramsar Secretariat to work on a range of implementation issues.
17. During 2006 Mr Pritchard undertook three periods of secondment in the Secretariat (in June, August and October). He focused on contributing to the work of the Culture Working Group (see DOC. SC35-5), the Resolution IX.17 review of COP decisions (see DOC. SC35-12), and a number of priority STRP tasks, including the further development of the indicators of effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention.
18. Options for further periods of secondment to the Secretariat during 2007 are being explored.

Major IOP initiatives supporting Convention implementation

19. In addition to the wide range of IOP regional and national activities supporting Parties in different aspects of Convention implementation, several significant global or multi-regional initiatives are underway or being initiated involving IOPs working with the Secretariat, which will result in increased Ramsar implementation capacity. Further information on these is included in the Report of the Secretary General (DOC. SC35-2) and in papers under Agenda item 14 concerning COP9 outputs requiring review by SC35. These include *inter alia*:
- i) The “Wings over Wetlands” (WOW) GEF project for wetland management on African-Eurasian waterbird flyways, being implemented by Wetlands International and BirdLife International, with UNEP-WCMC;
 - ii) The 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP) GEF project, with implementation involvement of IUCN, WWF, BirdLife International and Wetlands

International, which will contribute information to the Convention's indicators of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention;

- iii) Wetlands International's "Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project" (WPRP), which in various ways will support implementation of Resolution IX.14;
- iv) The "Guidelines on Agriculture, Wetlands and Water Resources Interactions Project" (GAWI) partnership supporting implementation of aspects of Resolution VIII.34 on wetlands and agriculture, involving IWMI, Wetlands International with FAO and others;
- v) The "Marine Ecosystems of the World" (MEOW) partnership, led by the Nature Conservancy and involving IWMI, WWF and IUCN amongst others, which has developed a globally consistent coastal and shelf biogeographic regionalization scheme, which it is anticipated could provide support to Parties in their selection of coastal/marine Ramsar sites for designation; and
- vi) Work underway by IWMI, drawing *inter alia* on the MEOW work, to assess the extent of coverage and gaps in coverage globally of Ramsar sites in relation to coastal and terrestrial biogeographic regions. This will also contribute to work by Wetlands International in the further development of the Ramsar Sites Information Service (see below).

Ramsar Sites Information Service – developments and progress

- 20. As the Standing Committee will know, Wetlands International delivers the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) for the Convention, under a contractual arrangement with the Secretariat.
- 21. It is worth recalling that the Ramsar Sites Information Service delivers on six general purposes and functions of the Convention's handling of data and information provided by Contracting Parties in their designation of Wetlands of International Importance, and the accessibility of this data and information through the Web. These are as follows:
 - i) **Supporting reporting obligations.** The Ramsar Secretariat has reporting obligations to Contracting Parties at each COP under Article 8 of the Convention and under COP decisions, notably on designation status and Ramsar Information Sheet updates, reporting on Articles 3.2 and 2.5/4.2 matters, and in providing global and regional implementation report analyses to COP.
 - ii) **Supporting priority setting and decision taking in the context of the Convention.** In the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* and COP decisions, Parties have committed themselves to developing a strategic approach to designating a coherent and comprehensive national and international network of Ramsar sites. The RSIS and its database provides a key tool for assessment and gap analyses of current coverage of wetland types and other wetland-related biodiversity features, summary and indicator analyses, and assessments in relation to other conservation actions and features.

- iii) **Increasing access to information on Wetlands of International Importance.** The Ramsar Sites Database and the RSIS Web presentation provide the structure for the filing and location information, an information source and library function, and links to other Ramsar site-relevant information, including publications, maps and images.
 - iv) **Promoting scientific and technical cooperation.** The database and its linked information provides a valuable data source for those reviewing and researching wetland issues, particularly those related to protected areas and important sites.
 - v) **Helping to ensure that Ramsar sites are well recognised in other international fora.** The RSIS provides the tools to provide key information on, and full recognition of, Ramsar sites for other protected areas processes and for a, notably those with which the Convention has memoranda of cooperation and joint work plans or other collaborative work, such as the world Heritage Convention, UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (and its Biosphere Reserves), IUCN-WCPA, GTOS, and UNEP-WCMC.
 - vi) **Supporting communications, education and public awareness.** The publicly-accessible Web-based RSIS forms an important component of the Convention's CEPA delivery, in ensuring that full and up-to-date information on each designated Ramsar site is widely available so as to secure wide public recognition of this key pillar of the implementation of the Convention by its Parties.
22. The RSIS (publicly available on: <http://www.wetlands.org/rsis/>) includes the Ramsar Sites Database, which can be now searched on-line, and a number of other utilities, including a Web-mapper displaying spatial information on Ramsar sites. The RSIS now includes access on-line to all official Information Sheets on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS), and increasingly it also provides links to other relevant but unofficial information sources concerning Ramsar sites in different countries, such as external Web sites. All such links are clearly indicated as not being part of the official Ramsar site information provided by Administrative Authorities.
22. During 2006 the Secretariat and Wetlands International reviewed the current procedures and responsibilities of each organization in the checking, handling and database entry of RIS information, with a view to identifying ways and means of streamlining these procedures. The main aspect of the procedures that this review identified could be streamlined, following trials with the Secretariat staff, is that of coding and entering information from the RISs into the Ramsar Sites Database. It has therefore been agreed that as from early 2007 the work of entering this information into the Ramsar Sites Database will move from Wetlands International to be undertaken by the Secretariat – specifically the Regional Assistants immediately after they have undertaken their detailed review of each RIS as part of the current responsibilities of the Secretariat.
23. It should be stressed that under this arrangement Wetlands International continues to deliver its key role to the Convention of the maintenance and further development of the overall RSIS, its databases, and other related information products.
24. Importantly, a consequence of this reorganization of roles means that in 2007 a significant portion of the available resources can be devoted to developing a key component of RSIS

work which has been in the overall work plan for RSIS development for some years, but which it has not previously been possible to fund. This is to start preparation of a series of tools and resources designed to assist Contracting Parties more directly in their selection and prioritization of wetlands for future Ramsar site designation, so as to move towards the goal of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* of a comprehensive and coherent network of sites.

25. The priorities for this aspect of the RSIS work are currently being further developed between Wetlands International and the Secretariat. The approach will be to use the information from the Ramsar Sites Database about the current distribution and characteristics of designated Ramsar sites and analyse this in relation of other information sources concerning the global distribution of different features and important sites of the wetland resource and its biodiversity, in relation to the various Criteria for Ramsar site designation. It is planned that this aspect of the work will be developed as an increasing partnership with other organizations with relevant datasets, including the other IOPs, UNEP-WCMC, and others. To increase the accessibility of the widest range of such tools, links through the RSIS will also be established with other relevant materials such as BirdLife International's publications on Ramsar sites and Important Bird Areas (IBAs).
26. In addition, there have been initial discussions between the Secretariat, WI, and UNEP-WCMC about ways and means of better and more efficiently linking the Ramsar Sites Database to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), which is currently undergoing a major redevelopment.
27. The future directions, operations and development priorities for the RSIS will be kept under review in the coming year, particularly in the light of any outcomes and recommendations from the STRP on aspects of its priority task on reviewing the Convention's data and information needs, as they relate to the needs and handling of information concerning Ramsar sites and including any further development of partnership approaches for Ramsar site information. This work will in turn also help inform recommendations in response to the COP10 request to seek ways and means of reducing the costs to the Convention of the maintenance of the Ramsar Sites Information Service.