

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
37th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 2-6 June 2008

Meeting of the Management Working Group

Monday, 2 June, 10h00-13h30
Chair: Paul Mafabi

DR on the Establishment of a Transition Committee of the Management Working Group

The MWG confirmed the need to replace the time-limited Res. IX.24 (establishing a MWG for the current triennium) with a not time-limited Resolution to maintain the MWG and its Transition Committee for the future. The TC has proven to be invaluable tool to assure continuity between subsequent Standing Committees and the MWG provides a helpful forum to discuss and improve draft documents with a strategic importance for the operations of the Convention. Based on the proposal by Switzerland, minor modifications were included in the DR, to better highlight the specific roles that Ramsar's IOPs should play. This will be distributed as **DOC.SC37-1 rev.**

DR on the Legal status of the Secretariat

The SG explained progress with work on compiling substantive information on the benefits and costs of all three options pursued. He particularly highlighted the consultations with the Swiss authorities in March. Switzerland introduced the complements and corrections to DOC. SC37-2 they submitted last week to the Secretariat. The document was **distributed** to arriving delegates **at the registration desk**. Switzerland reiterated their continuing will to help the Secretariat to find the best solution. From the different interventions, it was concluded that professional legal advice and a comparative analysis by an actuary was needed to gather sufficient elements of comparison of the costs and benefits between the three options and the legal aspects of the possible transition procedure in time before COP10. The SG outlined that obtaining this expert advice will create costs in the order of 50,000 CHF, and that the Secretariat is pledging Parties to make voluntary contributions to cover this, as it cannot be accommodated within the current, rather stretched budget.

DR on Facilitating the operations of the Ramsar Secretariat

The DR addresses **two** of the **current operational problems** of Secretariat staff: 1) the need to be recognized as the Secretariat of an intergovernmental treaty, rather than an NGO (being legally still part of IUCN) when participating in international meetings, and 2) the need to facilitate the obtention of travel documents (visas) when on official business. The DR is intended to provide a formal reference document for Ramsar Administrative Authorities to instruct other parts of their Gouvernement to help facilitate these processes. The MWG considers this DR a useful tool, to be adopted rapidly, independent of, and not precluding the outcomes, of the process of establishing a legal status for the Secretariat.

DR on the Frequency and timing of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties

Austria introduced this DR, and there was substantial discussion on its different points. The MWG concluded that it is essential to recognize **four different issues** in this DR, and that they can be decided upon separately:

- 1) the organizational advantage of having future COPs again in May-June (as was the case until COP7), rather than in October-November (with COP11 likely in May-June 2012),
- 2) the proposal to have COPs in a four-year, rather than the current three-year cycle (receiving different reactions from Parties),
- 3) the proposal to give Regional Meetings more prominence and to have them, if possible, mid-term between two COPs to address progress with implementation of the Convention and to start the preparation, well in advance of the next COP, of new DR and recommendations for the work of the COP (which remains the only major decision-making body of the Convention), and
- 4) the proposal to hold SC meetings in different regions (not always in Gland, as became custom lately), to provide the Convention with more visibility to the Convention in different countries, if a host country can be found to cover the small additional costs (essentially for travel of Secretariat staff).

DR on Future Secretariat structure and staffing

The DR is a revision of the document submitted to SC36 in the light of the decisions taken in February. In the discussion, some Parties reiterated their wish to simplify the senior management structure. The Secretariat tried to incorporate this in the revised proposal, while accommodating the real need for coordination by senior managers, a task that unfortunately cannot simply be undertaken by junior staff.

The MWG reiterated that this staff structure proposal provides a vision for the future, that not all posts will be filled as of January 2009, nor do all of them necessarily need to be covered by the core budget. It was concluded that the search for innovating solutions to cover staff costs outside from the core budget, e.g. through secondments or specific grants from donor countries or the private sector, need to be pursued, and that the conclusions on the desirable future Secretariat structure and staffing (with a mid to long-term vision) should be arrived at independently from the budget discussions.

Rapporteur: Tobias Salathe