

Review of the process for recruitment of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to review the procedures used in the past concerning recruitment of the Secretary General and instruct the Secretariat on any further steps required.

1. At its 40th meeting (2009), in Decision SC40-5, “The Standing Committee determined that the Executive Team should be asked to review the most recent process for recruitment of any new Secretary General and a) ensure that it is fully documented and b) make any recommendations for improvements, with the advice of IUCN Human Resources staff, for consideration by Standing Committee.
2. To assist in that process, the Secretariat’s Administrative Officer, who has responsibility for personnel matters, with the advice of a representative of IUCN’s Human Resources Department, reviewed the procedures used in the recent past and gathered some of the relevant documents.

Choosing a Secretary General to ensure effective leadership of the Ramsar Convention

3. Selecting a new Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention is one of the Standing Committee’s major responsibilities. The Standing Committee relies on the Secretary General to carry out the day-to-day management of the Secretariat and to take the lead on determining which issues should be brought before the Committee, and ultimately the Contracting Parties, for consideration.
4. The Convention (including Contracting Parties, Standing Committee and the Secretariat) depends on the Secretary General for dynamic, visionary, and responsible leadership of the current staff of twenty employees. The Secretary General must have proven management experience and skills and, desirably, evidence of professional training in management.
5. If the search and selection process is conducted thoroughly and carefully, it can strengthen the Convention, but if the process is flawed, an inappropriate choice could jeopardize the Convention for years to come.
6. It is the Standing Committee’s responsibility to conduct the search for a new Secretary General in a way that will attract highly qualified candidates. Its goal is to hire the best-qualified person for the job, regardless of gender, age, or nationality. The post should not be a political appointment.

Process for recruitment of current Secretary General (2006/7)

7. The previous Secretary General’s departure was announced to all Contracting Parties and International Organization Partners by diplomatic notification dated 30 November 2006,

on the Ramsar Web site, and via the Ramsar electronic mail lists. This is the text of the diplomatic notification:

“Contracting Parties will be aware that the contract of the Secretary General of the Convention, Mr. Peter Bridgewater, expires on 31 July 2007. Dr Bridgewater has indicated that, as he wishes to pursue other activities, he will not be seeking a further contract. Attached to this diplomatic notification is the vacancy announcement including selection criteria and application instructions.

Contracting Parties are encouraged to identify suitable candidates for the post and invite them to apply. It should be noted that the procedure agreed by the Standing Committee does not require that candidates be submitted and/or formally endorsed by Contracting Parties. Any individual who considers that he or she meets the requirements for the post may apply. The deadline for applications is 12 January 2007. All applications will be received, acknowledged and processed by IUCN Human Resources Department in line with the established Secretariat staff recruitment procedures under the host service agreement between the Secretariat and IUCN.

The process agreed by the Standing Committee for the selection of the new Secretary General is as follows:

The Standing Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance will meet on 9 February 2007 to review all applications and agree a “long” shortlist of candidates.

Prior to Standing Committee 35, on 13 February 2007, members of the Management Working Group (MWG) established under COP9 Resolution IX.24 will meet to consider this “long” shortlist and to prepare a recommended shortlist of candidates. The current membership of the MWG is attached to this notification.

The Standing Committee, at its 35th meeting from 14-16 February 2007, will act as the “first selection panel” under Standing Committee Decision SC26-45. This first selection panel will agree the short list of candidates to be invited for interview.

SC35 will also appoint the “second selection panel” (SC26-45) to conduct the interview process and select the candidate to be appointed.

The SC35 Agenda is being adjusted to permit sufficient time for these processes.

Interviews will be carried out by the Second Selection Panel on 22-23 March 2007. The name and profile of the successful candidate will then be circulated to the Standing Committee members, with a deadline for approval of 30 March 2007.

The decision of the Standing Committee should be communicated to the selected candidate in the week of 2 April 2007. All Contracting Parties will be informed by diplomatic notification as soon as the Secretariat has received written acceptance of the offer.”

Additional notes on the most recent recruitment process:

8. The Secretariat had very little direct involvement in the selection process beyond spreading word of the vacancy announcement and providing information on how to apply, if asked. A Secretariat staff member was present at the interviews of the short-listed candidates, but had no voice in the decisions made. Staff views of the short-listed candidates were sought collectively and were said to have been taken into account by the selection committee.
9. The SC Chair informed Standing Committee of the selection process in writing. He was required to spell out that any conflict of interest should be declared, i.e. if a member of the search committee were also a candidate.
10. IUCN's Human Resources Department was responsible for the following logistical aspects of the process:
 - Preparation of a complete table of candidates, identifying experience and qualifications that matched the selection requirements and screening out of invalid or incomplete applications;
 - Advice to the selection panel on interview questions and preparation of a briefing note for the selection of the Secretary General;
 - Invitation of shortlisted candidates to attend an interview and any subsequent correspondence with the candidates;
 - Arranging travel and hotel for the candidates;
 - Preparing the files for the selection committee;
 - Organizing the schedule of interviews and orchestrating the greeting of candidates;
 - Organizing meetings of interview candidates with Ramsar staff for up to about one hour for each candidate (this was done during the last SG selection process);
 - A Senior IUCN HR Officer made the official reference checks in writing and followed up with phone calls, and presented the findings to the selection panel.
11. The Ramsar Secretariat was responsible for:
 - making travel and hotel arrangements for the selection panel, where appropriate, or liaising with the panel members about accommodation;
 - selecting a Ramsar Secretariat representative for the selection panel and also the Secretariat person who will present the consolidation of the staff views to the selection panel;
 - arranging refreshment during the interview days.

Changes in recruitment tools since the current Secretary General was appointed

12. For the past year, applications for Ramsar staff vacancies have been online via the IUCN website recruitment portal. When the deadline for applications is reached, the IUCN portal is closed and no further applications are accepted. Candidates applying online are able to track the status of their applications. Presumably the same process will be used for future Secretary General recruitments.

Suggestions for improvements in the recruitment process

13. The services of a professional recruitment specialist could be considered in the light of the new online recruitment method, which might mean that many more applications are received than in the past (32 valid applications were received within the deadline during the last recruitment process). Such a professional could read all the on-line applications (in cooperation with IUCN Human Resources) and prepare a “long short list” of possible candidates for further consideration – in other words, unqualified candidates would be screened out at this stage. It is important that the person charged with this initial triage should have a thorough knowledge of the needs of the Convention. This is an important stage in the process and, depending upon the number of applications, can be very time-consuming.
14. The search for a new Secretary General is most likely to be accomplished with ease and success if a planning process is in place. It is essential to get the selection criteria right. A strategic plan will help Standing Committee to refine its sense of the leadership qualities and experiences needed in a new Secretary General. Therefore Standing Committee should give attention early in the process to defining these qualities with the aid of the following questions:
 - a) Where do we want the Convention to be in the next decade? What should it be doing or not doing?
 - b) What are the emerging trends in ecosystem management, and how will these trends impact on the focus of the Secretariat?
 - b) What are the critical issues we are facing now and in the next five to ten years?
 - c) In what areas are we succeeding? Where are we weak?
 - d) What behaviour is expected, taken for granted or not acceptable?
 - e) What personal attitudes, values, experiences and work styles fit well with Ramsar?
15. Addressing these questions early on in the process will be beneficial for the screening and selection of the new Secretary General.

Annex I – Current Terms of Reference of the Secretary General

**SECRETARY GENERAL
RAMSAR CONVENTION SECRETARIAT
Gland, Switzerland**

RESPONSIBILITIES / DUTIES

The post is the most senior position in the 20-member Ramsar Convention Secretariat which was established pursuant to Article 8 of the Convention. The principal responsibilities of the Secretary General are:

1. To implement those decisions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the Standing Committee that concern the Secretary General/Ramsar Secretariat.
2. To provide leadership to the Ramsar Secretariat in the implementation of work plans approved by the Standing Committee and/or the Conference of the Parties.

3. To ensure an effective management of the Ramsar Secretariat budget, including the submission of audited accounts for each financial year to all Contracting Parties, through the Standing Committee.
4. To raise additional funds beyond the Ramsar Secretariat core budget for project implementation.
5. To represent the Convention in international fora and to act as the Convention's spokesperson.
6. To provide leadership for the further implementation of the Convention by all Contracting Parties, and to this end to bring initiatives for consideration by the Standing Committee and/or the Conference of the Parties.
7. To promote and ensure effective synergies with the Biodiversity liaison group and other environment-related treaties, appropriate intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions, and the private sector.
8. To prepare the annual meetings of the Standing Committee and the triennial meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.
9. To maintain effective and harmonious working relations with the host institution of the Ramsar Secretariat.

The Secretary General is answerable to the Standing Committee of the Convention and ultimately to the Conference of the Parties.

REQUIREMENTS

1. The principal qualities required of the incumbent are enthusiasm, a commitment to nature conservation and sustainable use, proven leadership qualities, demonstrated high level representational skills in an international context, and the ability to motivate staff and others.
2. Applicants should have a university degree (preferably a post-graduate degree) or an equivalent demonstrated level of knowledge in at least one subject relevant to wetland conservation and sustainable use, such as geography, biology, hydrology, marine sciences, natural resources management, land-use planning, and socio-economic aspects of sustainable development.
3. Extensive work experience and evidence of achievements in the area of nature conservation and/or sustainable use issues, and a minimum of ten years' work experience in senior positions, are indispensable. Experience and evidence of achievements in the areas of policy development, financial and people management, and programme administration within government agencies or inter-governmental organizations will be an advantage.
4. Exposure to and a good understanding of world current affairs is necessary, including the workings of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other intergovernmental

institutions, in particular the UN system. Familiarity with and understanding of the workings of national and international non-governmental organizations are also important requirements.

5. Candidates are also required to have a solid understanding of cultural diversity and gender issues and should be naturally inclined to take them into account in the management of the Ramsar Secretariat and in their relations with the Ramsar constituency.
6. Applicants should have well-developed computer skills and be able and prepared to perform the duties of the position in a fairly independent manner, with limited assistance from support staff.
7. The Ramsar Secretariat's working languages are English, French, and Spanish. The ability to work independently in English is essential and knowledge of at least one of the other two languages will be strongly preferred. An ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing is essential.
8. The incumbent should be prepared to travel extensively to all parts of the world, noting that the class of travel offered is economy.

While the Convention on Wetlands is fully recognized by the international community as an intergovernmental agreement, its secretariat is currently under the special circumstance of being administered by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), and shares the premises provided to both IUCN and the Convention by the Government of Switzerland, located in Gland. However, the Ramsar Secretariat is under the authority of the Standing Committee of the Convention and ultimately of its Conference of the Parties.

Legally, Ramsar Secretariat staff, including the Secretary General, are IUCN employees, and their contracts are governed by the IUCN Global Human Resources Policy, Guidelines and Procedures for Expatriates, Conditions of Service for Switzerland, and Swiss labor law. IUCN does not have the status of an intergovernmental organization under a host country agreement in Switzerland: consequently, IUCN must obtain a Swiss work permit for non-Swiss staff. IUCN and Ramsar staff do not have diplomatic immunity or international civil servant (UN) status.

Annex II: Timeline 2009-2010 Secretary General's evaluation and contract

The following time-line was sent for information to members of the SC Executive by Valerie Higgins in May 2009:

Timeline 2009-2010 Secretary General's evaluation and contract

11-15 May 2009 – 40th Standing Committee meeting.

The Management Working Group decides upon a 360° appraisal of the SG for 2008, to take place as expeditiously as possible. Input from Secretariat staff and IOPs. Follow-up by conference call to SG including current Chair of SC, previous Chair of SC, previous Chair of Finance Subgroup.

Secretary General's current contract ends **22 July 2010**, with a 2-month notice period. Therefore SG should be informed of Standing Committee decision about his contract **before 22 May 2010**. However, a much earlier decision is desirable.

SC Executive to consider, in the light of the SG's 2008 performance review, whether to recommend to SC his reappointment and to discuss with the SG whether he wishes to seek contract extension. If SC Executive determines to recommend contract extension, an intersessional procedure with the SC members will need to be established by late 2009/early 2010. If the Executive considers contract extension not appropriate, the agreement of SC members likewise will need to be sought and a recruitment process for the new SG put in place not later than September/October 2009 with a view that any interviews could be undertaken to coincide with Standing Committee 41 (to be held in week beginning **26 April 2010**).

COP11 to be held in Romania in **Spring 2012**