

Report of the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee

Tuesday, 9 April 2013

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening remarks were made by Dr Făcă (Romania), Chair of the Standing Committee, who formally opened the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee; Mr Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Deputy Director General of IUCN; Ms Carolina Hazin, Global Biodiversity Policy Coordinator, Birdlife International; and Mr Anada Tiéga, Secretary General.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the Agenda (DOC. SC46-01, rev. 2)

2. The **Deputy Secretary General** (DSG) introduced the revised provisional agenda, noting that agenda items 21 and 22 had been brought forward, following discussions with the host country of COP12, to Tuesday, 9 April, in order to allow for any Subgroup on COP12 that may be established to meet before reporting back on Friday 12 April. In addition, on the recommendation of the Subgroup on Finance, consideration of item 12 had been transferred from Wednesday to Friday.

Decision SC46-01: The Standing Committee adopted the agenda, as amended.

Agenda item 3: Admission of Observers

3. The **DSG** pointed out that there was no need to admit formally the representatives of Contracting Parties and the International Organization Partners or the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), as they were permanent observers. The Standing Committee did need, however, to agree to admit formally other observers, specifically for SC46 two representatives from UNEP (from the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions and the Environment Management Group) and representatives of the Ramsar Regional Centres for East Asia and for Central & West Asia.

Decision SC46-02: The SC decided to admit the following observers to the session: UNEP (two representatives) and the representatives of the Ramsar Regional Centres for East Asia and for Central & West Asia.

Agenda item 4: Matters arising from Decisions of the 44th and 45th meetings of Standing Committee (DOC. SC46-03)

4. The **Secretary General** (SG) outlined the outcomes of the 1st Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and progress in implementing its decisions and Resolution XI.6 adopted by COP11. Several Contracting Parties commented and made suggestions.

Decision SC46-03: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel to submit relevant assessment reports such

as the TEEB water and wetlands report to the IPBES catalogue of assessments; and further requested both bodies to initiate the preparation of the interim guidelines requested by COP11 in Resolution XI.6 and to circulate these guidelines electronically for Standing Committee approval.

Agenda item 5: Matters arising from COP11 Resolutions (DOCs. SC46-04 & SC46-22)

5. The Standing Committee considered document SC46-04 and the introduction by the DSG who outlined the other issues that had arisen since COP11.

Decision SC46-04: The Standing Committee noted the report on matters arising for the Standing Committee from the Resolutions adopted by COP11 (DOC. SC46-04) and confirmed that the items on the agenda of the current meeting responded to all the tasks requested by COP11.

6. In view of the rapid development of events since COP11, the Secretariat had prepared DOC.SC46-22 concerning a wetland cities accreditation mechanism regarding the request in Resolution XI.11 and in the light of the discussions of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) on wetlands and urbanization at its 17th meeting. The Secretariat outlined some of the elements that should be considered in establishing a mechanism for accrediting wetland cities, and sought advice from the Standing Committee on how to proceed.
7. Strong support for the proposals was expressed by the Republic of Korea, Uganda, and Tunisia, and in the light of the representatives' comments the Standing Committee adopted the following decision.

Decision SC46-05: The Standing Committee welcomed the offer of the Republic of Korea to host a workshop on potential wetland city accreditation mechanisms. The Standing Committee also encouraged the Secretariat to gather and disseminate information on comparable initiatives and, within the limits of available resources, to work with interested Contracting Parties on the further development of the accreditation initiative and approach.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Secretary General (DOC. SC46-05)

8. The **Secretary General** presented a detailed, comprehensive review and analysis of the achievements over the past two triennial periods during his tenure and the challenges facing the Convention and its Secretariat. The Standing Committee congratulated the Secretary General on the progress made and his leadership. The achievements included a healthy financial position of the Secretariat, higher visibility of the Convention and good communication; in addition the number of Contracting Parties had continued to grow. Challenges included further educational and communication initiatives, the need to increase visibility even more and to find opportunities for integrating wetlands into national priorities, creating and realizing synergies, and the importance of working across sectors including the juridical sector for legal matters.

Decision SC46-06: The Standing Committee expressed appreciation to the Secretary General for his contribution to advancing the work of the Ramsar

Convention during his six-year tenure and took note of the Secretary General's detailed and comprehensive report.

Agenda item 21: COP12: Report on preparations (DOC. SC46-20)

9. The representative of the country hosting COP12, **Uruguay**, gave a detailed presentation of the state of national preparations for the meeting, and said that "Wetlands and biodiversity" was being considered as its theme, although the Standing Committee might wish to consider other themes. Work was underway in Uruguay and the Secretariat on drafting a hosting agreement. Other matters being considered included the possible inclusion of a high-level/ministerial segment and the duration and scheduling of the session. Concern was expressed at the Secretariat's lack of budgetary provision for the extra work involved in preparing for COP12 and the elements of work and the financial responsibilities that the host country was being expected to bear.

Decision SC46-07: The Standing Committee took note of the report and urged the Secretariat to continue working with Uruguay to finalize and sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

Agenda item 22: Establishment of a Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12

10. The **DSG**, explaining that it was established practice to set up a subgroup to advise and provide support for the preparations of each COP, set out a series of questions that needed answers. Such a subgroup, if it were established, would focus on logistics and preparations for COP12. He outlined the process for submitting Draft Resolutions for consideration by the Standing Committee and COP, noting that over the years the number of Draft Resolutions submitted to COPs had been significantly reduced. The Standing Committee agreed to the establishment of such a subgroup, whose membership would be decided in regional discussions during the session and reported back to the Committee.

Decision SC46-08: The Standing Committee agreed to establish a subgroup on the preparation of COP12. The membership of the Subgroup would comprise one member of the Standing Committee from each region, with the host country, Uruguay, as Chair. Members are: COP12 host country, Uruguay (Chair), Cambodia, Fiji, France, Guatemala, Mexico, South Africa, and Romania (COP11 host country).

Agenda item 7: Secretariat Work Plan 2013 (DOC. SC46-06)

11. The **Secretary General** introduced the draft work plan for 2013. The Standing Committee requested that an element of flexibility be introduced in view of the fact that a new Secretary General would be taking up office later in the year. The Standing Committee discussed matters that appeared not to be included in the plan, such as the proposed process for accrediting wetland cities and work on the next Strategic Plan. The Secretariat confirmed that it would take into account the Standing Committee's comments and observations.

Decision SC46-09: The Standing Committee adopted the Secretariat's work plan for 2013 as the basis of its programme of work, noting that it could be modified in line

with the comments made by members of the Standing Committee and with the approval of the Executive Team (the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance) and further noting the need to allow for flexibility pending its review by the incoming Secretary General later in 2013.

Agenda item 8: Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat: follow up to Resolution XI.1 (DOC. SC46-08)

12. The **Secretary General** outlined a proposal for the establishment of a small IUCN/Ramsar Secretariat working group to review administrative, financial and technical support and collaboration in response to the request by Contracting Parties in Resolution XI.1 for continued improvement and development of support provided by IUCN to the Secretariat. **IUCN** presented initial proposals for joint “Ramsar Convention Initiatives for Wetland Conservation”. The Standing Committee considered both these proposals.

Decision SC46-10: The Standing Committee welcomed and noted the suggestions of the Ramsar Secretariat and IUCN about ways and means of implementing the terms of Resolution XI.1 on the institutional hosting of the Secretariat, and requested that progress be reported to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting through the Management Working Group.

Wednesday, 10 April 2013

Agenda item 9: Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016 onwards (DOC. SC46-09)

13. The **DSG** introduced the paper prepared by the Secretariat on the processes for preparing the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan, for 2016 onwards, with an option for the Standing Committee to establish a working group. He outlined various fundamental questions that the Standing Committee was being invited to consider. What should be the structure of the 4th Strategic Plan? Should it follow the form of the existing Plan or should it be a more high-level strategy? What should be the time period covered by the Plan? What should be the scope and focus, including the prominence of cross-sectoral recognition of wetland services, and should it contain explicit targets? What should the title of the Plan be? Should the Plan focus more on the Ramsar Convention or on wetland issues more broadly? How much should the Strategic Plan be aligned with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Targets, which is largely silent about specific implementation strategies and actions? Should the approach adopted in Resolution XI.3 concerning the Aichi Targets be followed also for the next Plan?
14. Participants made many general comments and specific observations on the various issues set out. It was agreed that informal discussions and further regional consultations would be held and the Standing Committee would reconsider the matter later in the meeting.

Decision SC46-11: The Standing Committee established a Strategic Plan Working Group, to include Contracting Parties, STRP, the CEPA Oversight Panel, International Organization Partners, Regional Initiatives and other Ramsar stakeholders, in order to take forward the preparation of the 4th Strategic Plan.

Agenda item 10: Governance, planning and funding of activities on culture and wetlands in the framework of the Ramsar Convention (DOC. SC46-10)

15. The **Senior Adviser for Europe** introduced a report from the coordinators of the Ramsar Culture Working Group, prepared in consultation with the Secretariat, which outlined the activities of the Working Group and made proposals to revitalize its work. Several Contracting Parties welcomed the work of the Culture Working Group and its proposals. Comments included the need for the COP to consider the governance proposals and for the Working Group to take into consideration any mechanism established for accrediting wetland cities.

Decision SC46-12: The Standing Committee welcomed the work of the Culture Working Group and encouraged it to continue its work and to report progress to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting; called for the Culture Working Group's contribution to the Secretariat's work to be appropriately reflected in the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan, for 2016 onwards; and requested the Culture Working Group to take into account and cooperate with the development of a wetland cities accreditation mechanism referred to in Decision SC46-05.

Agenda Item 11: Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution XI.5) (DOC. SC46-11)

16. The **Senior Adviser for Europe** introduced the draft revised Operational Guidelines 2013-2015 for the Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention. He also presented the 15 Initiatives themselves, details of which were available on the Ramsar website, and set out the requests from eligible Regional Initiatives for additional funding from the core budget for 2013. After comments from Contracting Parties and requests for regional discussions, it was determined that further consideration by the Standing Committee of the revised Operational Guidelines and the allocation of funds from the Secretariat's core budget be deferred to Friday, 12 April.

Decision SC46-13: The Standing Committee

- i) **endorsed the 15 Regional Initiatives listed in DOC. SC46-11 as meeting the Operational Guidelines 2009-2012 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and within the framework of the Convention during 2013;**
- ii) **noting the shortcomings and priority areas for action identified in the annual reports of the Regional Initiatives, requested the Regional Initiatives to report, through the Secretariat, on the remedial steps they had taken to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting.**

(See also Decisions SC46-23 and SC46-28 concerning the allocation of core budget funds to Regional Initiatives for 2013 and the revised Operational Guidelines for 2013-2015.)

Agenda item 15: Scientific and Technical Review Panel: Report of the STRP Oversight Committee (DOC. SC46-15)

17. The **DSG** introduced the report of the STRP Oversight Committee. The main activity since COP11 had been the successful appointment of the members of the STRP for the

triennium 2013-2015; as before, members are appointed in their own right for their wetland expertise, and not as representatives of any organization or country. The newly-constituted Panel held its first meeting of the triennium in late February/early March 2013, at which it developed the Panel's work plan for 2013-2015 from the mandates and priorities given it in Resolution XI.17. The Panel positions indicated in DOC. SC46-15 as vacant had subsequently been appointed by the Oversight Committee, namely Dr Vicky Jones for Birdlife International and Dr Amiro Perez-Leroux as the Neotropics Invited Expert). **Chile** highlighted the difficulty of identifying experts from that region who both had the necessary time available and spoke English.

Agenda item 16: Scientific and Technical Review Panel: Report of the STRP Chair and draft STRP 2013-2015 Work Plan (DOC. SC46-16)

18. The **Chair of STRP** presented his report and the draft work plan for the Panel for 2013-2015, in which tasks were prioritized. He also introduced the elaborated and expanded Terms of Reference for STRP Members, Invited Experts and Observer Organization Representatives, which had been drafted in order to clarify existing procedures and responsibilities and increase the transparency and efficiency of the Panel's work; they also provide general guidance about the Panel's products, processes and schedules. The report also contained recommendations for aspects of the implementation of the 2012 revision of the Ramsar Information Sheet requested by Resolution XI.8, and a call on the Secretariat to find ways of reducing the gap between available resources and the cost of implementing the proposed work plan. In recognition of the limited resources available, the STRP are recommending that particular attention for 2013-2015 be given to eight of its tasks, as the highest priority.
19. The **Chair** proposed that discussion of agenda items 15 and 16 be deferred to the next day, and the Standing Committee agreed.

Agenda item 26: Any other business

20. The **Secretary General** signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ramsar Secretariat and Conservation International (CI), which had already been signed by that organization.

Thursday, 11 April 2013

Agenda item 14: Appointment of the next Secretary General

21. In response to several questions and comments about the process of selecting candidates for the post of Secretary General, the incumbent Secretary General and the Chair of the Standing Committee provided further information and clarifications. (See also the resumption of this Agenda item on Friday, 12 April 2013.)

Agenda items 15 & 16 (continued): STRP Scientific and Technical Review Panel: Report of the STRP Oversight Committee (DOC. SC46-15) and Report of the STRP Chair and draft STRP 2013-2015 Work Plan (DOC. SC46-16)

22. The Standing Committee welcomed the report of the Chair of the STRP and the extensive information it contained, including the draft Terms of Reference for STRP Members, Invited Experts and Observer Organization Representatives. It was recognized that the entire document (DOC. SC46-16) had been prepared rapidly after the end of the Panel's 17th meeting in early March, and that it would be finalized after the Standing Committee's approval under this Agenda item. It was suggested that the Terms of Reference together with the *modus operandi* adopted by COP11 in Resolution XI.18 could be consolidated for COP12 consideration.
23. Discussions focused on the STRP Work Plan's Top Priority tasks, and its recommendation that of those tasks, the tasks listed in DOC.SC46-16, paragraph 17, but not ranked in order of priority, should be afforded the highest priority, and the question of whether these could or should be further prioritized? The Chair of STRP indicated that their cost amounted to some CHF 400,000 and acknowledged that further resource mobilization would be needed. All speakers agreed on the need to undertake capacity building for Ramsar National Focal Points (pursuant to Resolution XI.18), including training. The Standing Committee welcomed the offer from UNEP to use its good offices to facilitate proposals from Ramsar for funding to the Global Environment Facility for such activities.
24. The Committee considered that a further STRP task, the review of the state of the world's wetlands, urgently needs completion so as to inform the preparation of the next Strategic Plan. Its preparation and publication would add a further CHF 100,000 to the costs mentioned above. The Committee also considered it important that the Secretariat and STRP have the ability to react to major events and developments, for instance to respond to media requests. The **Chair of STRP** said that the Panel would work closely with the Secretariat to prepare rapid responses for the media to major developments in the world affecting wetlands and ecosystem services. He also undertook to improve the timeliness of submission of Draft Resolutions to the Standing Committee.
25. The Standing Committee accepted the Panel's recommendation for retaining the format of the Ramsar information Sheet - 2012 revision and not further changing its content.

Decision SC46-14: The Standing Committee

- i) **noted the report of the Chair of STRP and welcomed the Terms of Reference for STRP Members, Invited Experts and Observer Organization Representatives, requesting the Secretariat to prepare a compilation of the existing *modus operandi* and the new Terms of Reference for COP12 consideration;**
- ii) **endorsed the STRP's recommendations concerning the Ramsar Information Sheet (2012 revision), namely that its format should be retained with no additional subfields to be added at this time;**
- iii) **approved the STRP 2013-2015 Work Plan for finalization;**
- iv) **endorsed the proposals for the highest priority tasks for attention (as listed in DOC. SC46-16, paragraph 17), with the addition of the preparation of a report on the state of the world's wetlands; and**
- v) **urged Contracting Parties and other partners and donors to provide, through voluntary contributions, the resources needed to enable the completion of these tasks.**

Agenda item 8: Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat: follow up to Resolution XI.1 (DOC. SC46-08) (continued)

26. Regional Representatives reported the outcomes of their discussions on the follow up to Resolution XI.1 concerning Convention languages, visibility and ministerial COP segments, enhancing synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and UNEP. The European Region proposed that the work be taken up by subgroups for which terms of reference would be prepared and which would report through the Management Working Group to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting. Suggestions for membership and possible chairs of three subgroups were requested.

Decision SC46-15: The Standing Committee, having considered the feedback from regional groups on the composition of subgroups that will follow up Resolution XI.1 paragraph 17 on administrative reform, decided on the following Subgroups and their membership and chairs:

- i) **Subgroup 1, on accommodation of United Nations languages into the Ramsar Convention: Africa - Tunisia; Asia - United Arab Emirates (Chair), with China and Japan as observers; Europe - Denmark; Neotropics - Guatemala and Ecuador; North America - United States of America; and Oceania – Australia, with Fiji after the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee;**
 - ii) **Subgroup 2, on elevating the visibility and stature of the Ramsar Convention: Africa - South Africa; Asia - Thailand; Europe - Denmark and Switzerland; Neotropics - Cuba and Guatemala; North America - Mexico; and Oceania – Australia, with Fiji after the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee;**
 - iii) **Subgroup 3 on enhancing synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities: Africa - Burundi; Asia - Islamic Republic of Iran, with China and Japan as observers; Europe - Denmark and Finland; Neotropics - Cuba and Guatemala; North America - United States of America; and Oceania – Australia, with Fiji after the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee.**
27. The chairs for subgroups 2 and 3 remain to be decided.

Agenda item 17: Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance (DOC. SC46-17)

28. Several Contracting Parties provided information about Ramsar Sites that had been newly designated or were in the process of being designated, changes to existing Sites, and actions taken to reverse negative changes to Sites induced by human activity. Concerns were also expressed about the potential impact of urbanization and extractive industries development on some Sites, although the need to find a balance between conservation and economic development was recognized.
29. The value of Ramsar Advisory Missions was underlined, and it was proposed that a video that had been made by WWF about one such Mission could well be used to promote the Convention and that aspect of its work.

30. Questions were raised about the periodicity of updating the Ramsar Information Sheet, and it was noted that any such change would have to be made by COP decision.

Decision SC46-16: The Standing Committee noted the report by the Secretariat and welcomed the information provided by Contracting Parties about further designated Ramsar Sites and progress made on other issues related to Ramsar Sites.

31. The Secretariat gave an presentation on the planned new structure for the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS), which must be designed to handle the full data and information from the RIS – 2012 revision format. Under the current contractual arrangements, Wetlands International had prepared a technical and financial needs assessment to form the basis for the preparation by the Secretariat of a Request for Proposals (RPF). This had been issued, and tenders for the development of the new, interoperable system were in the process of being reviewed. The timetable for implementing the project is to have the database developed and being tested by July 2014 and the whole system fully functional by 1 January 2015, as required by Resolution XI.8. There were provisions in Ramsar's core budget for some of the expenditures foreseen for 2014 and 2015, but some further resource mobilization would be needed. The continuing commitment and work of Wetlands International on Ramsar Sites data and information was strongly acknowledged. The Secretariat assured Contracting Parties that there would be no request for them to re-enter any data for already-designated Ramsar Sites.

Decision SC46-17: The Standing Committee noted the approach and welcomed the progress made so far in the redevelopment of the Ramsar Sites Information Service.

Agenda item 18: Report of the CEPA Oversight Panel (DOC. SC46-18)

32. The value of the Panel's work and its alignment with that of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel was acknowledged. Several speakers discussed the name of the Panel, given that the "P" in CEPA had changed from "Public" to "Participation and", and recognized that it was essential to reach politicians and decision-makers. The CEPA approach and tools should be applied as part of the strategic implementation process and were recognized by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel as complementary and supportive to its work.

Decision SC46-18: The Standing Committee endorsed the composition of the CEPA Oversight Panel as set out in DOC. SC46-18, and approved the Panel's Work Plan for 2013-2015 as contained in Annex 2 of that document.

33. The Secretariat said that, given that decision, the Work Plan would be considered at the Panel's meeting starting on 12 April 2013.

Agenda item 19: World Wetlands Day themes for 2014 and 2015

34. The Secretariat gave an illustrated presentation of the proposals for themes for World Wetlands Days for 2014 and 2015. Speakers, after debating possible titles besides that proposed by the Secretariat for the 2014 Day, agreed on "Wetlands and agriculture". The value of partnerships was emphasized, it being noted that past experience had been

entirely positive. The fact that illustrative material that the Secretariat provides is designed to be adapted to local contexts and issued in local languages was appreciated.

35. It was noted that the year of World Wetlands Day 2015 and COP12 coincided. The Standing Committee affirmed the value of linking the two events through related themes. The Committee felt that further discussion should be undertaken by the Host Country of COP12 and the Secretariat on the broad theme proposed of “wetlands and biodiversity”.

Decision SC46-19: The Standing Committee endorsed the theme of “wetlands and agriculture” for World Wetlands Day 2014. For World Wetlands Day 2015, it recommended that the theme should be complementary with that of COP12 on the broad theme of “wetlands and biodiversity”, and requested progress to be reported at its 47th meeting.

Agenda item 20: New Ramsar website

36. For strategic, practical and technical reasons, the Convention’s existing website needed renovation. The Secretariat gave an illustrated presentation on the proposed new website and the steps that have been taken to realize the project. At the time of the meeting, a shortlist of suppliers had been drawn up with a view to interviews in the week after the Standing Committee’s meeting. It was requested that Contracting Parties be involved in the pilot testing of the new site, whose launch is scheduled for October 2013.

Decision SC46-20: The Standing Committee welcomed the progress that had been made to date and thanked the project leaders for restructuring and redesigning the Ramsar Convention’s website.

Agenda item 14: Appointment of the next Secretary General (resumed)

37. The **Chair of the Standing Committee** reported that there had been no further news of the progress of the negotiations between the employer, IUCN, and the candidate who had been identified after the interview process as suitable for the post of Secretary General. The task was being complicated by geographical and time differences. The Committee discussed possible ways to proceed in the event of different scenarios, and adjourned the discussion until the following day.

Friday, 12 April 2013

Agenda item 23: National Report Format for COP12 (DOC.SC46-21)

38. The **Deputy Secretary General** described the process followed in preparing the draft format of National Reports for COP12, taking into account feedback from Contracting Parties about the COP11 format. He noted that the Secretariat had sought to further reduce Parties’ reporting burden by simplifying and shortening the format; as a result the number of indicator questions had been reduced to 66, a 20% reduction compared with the COP11 format. Timelines for issuing the format and the submission of reports were proposed, noting that the final dates of COP12 had not yet been decided upon.

39. The **DSG** noted that, although the Standing Committee had not commented on the possibility raised of developing online national reporting to COP12, the Secretariat would be continuing its participation in the UNEP Information & Knowledge Management for MEAs (IKM) initiative and its subgroup on online reporting systems for conventions, and would provide an update on that process to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting.

Decision SC46-21: The Standing Committee approved the COP12 National Report format as presented in DOC.SC46-21; requested the Secretariat to finalize and distribute the format to Contracting Parties by mid-2013; and confirmed that the deadline for submission of completed reports to the Secretariat would be at nine months before the beginning of COP12, provisionally September 2014 pending the dates of the COP being confirmed.

Agenda item 22a: Report of the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12

40. The representative of the Host Country of COP12, **Uruguay**, presented the report of the newly-formed Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12, highlighting important issues including the dates of the meeting, the Host Country/Secretariat agreement, budget allocations, seeking to reduce the workload of the COP including the need to reduce the number of Resolutions. Recognizing that many delegations at COPs consist of only one person, the Subgroup recommended that parallel COP sessions and other processes be kept to a minimum. The importance of regional preparatory meetings was stressed, as well as the participation of the same delegates at those meetings and the COP itself. The Secretariat confirmed that efforts would be made to secure funding for eligible participants to COP12.
41. Participants commented on the importance of selecting dates for COP12 that did not clash with major meetings of other multilateral environmental agreements, intergovernmental bodies, and other such bodies, as well as of trying to seek synergies by harmonizing the timing of COP12 with other such gatherings, e.g., the World Heritage meetings. Budgetary issues needed timely resolution, and a plea was made for assistance to be provided with applications for visas in order to avoid problems that have occurred for previous COPs. The importance of engaging participation of both civil society and young people in COP12 was recognized. Previous Ramsar COPs and conferences of other conventions should be further analysed in order to provide recommendations for future practice.
42. **Uruguay** said that the Committee's comments would be taken into account in its further work with the Secretariat in preparing COP12. The **SC Chair** encouraged Parties and other interested stakeholders to send further comments to the Host Country and the Secretariat.

Decision SC46-22: The Standing Committee

- i) **reiterated its thanks to Uruguay for offering to host COP12; noted with appreciation the progress reported by the Host Country; requested the Host Country and the Secretariat to consider carefully the length and scheduling of COP12, in particular in relation to participation by one-person delegations; and requested the Secretariat to prepare a list of anticipated draft COP12 Resolutions, with the aim of reducing the number to be submitted to COP12; and**

- ii) recognized the concerns and challenges due to the lack of a Ramsar core budget allocation for the preparation and running of a COP; urged the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12 and the Secretariat to resolve the issues of funding; and also urged the Host Country and the Secretariat to continue their negotiations and finalize the hosting agreement, and to report intersessionally to the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12 on progress made.

Agenda item 12: Report of the Subgroup on Finance

- 43. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, Canada**, presented the report of the Subgroup. The Subgroup Chair drew attention to the healthy state of the finances of the Secretariat for the year 2012. In response to a question from **Argentina**, she outlined the reasons for the 2012 surplus, a combination of savings in certain budget lines and a Reserve Fund excess.
- 44. It was noted that the Small Grants Fund 2013 had been closed to new applications, but that Norway had recently made a CHF 250,000 commitment to revitalise the Fund.
- 45. Several Contracting Parties introduced amendments to the membership of the three Resolution XI.1 subgroups established in Decision SC46-15, and both **Birdlife International**, on behalf of the International Organization Partners, and **UNEP** asked that their participation be permitted.

Decision SC46-23: The Standing Committee

- i) approved the audited final 2012 financial statements, subject to finalization of the audit, noting the healthy Reserve Fund balance of CHF 812,000 at the beginning of the triennium 2013-2015; and urged the Secretary General to ensure that all staff take their allocated annual leave, so as to minimize any future financial liability;
- ii) decided that there would be no change to the core budget allocations for 2013 approved by COP11 Resolution XI.2;
- iii) decided that the forecasted savings of CHF 326,000 be used to fund the prioritized COP-approved non-core budget items immediately and at a later date in 2013, as follows:
 - a. CHF 163,000 to be reallocated immediately to:
 - Science review (Resolution XI.16): CHF 80,000 (from Reserve Fund excess at 31 December 2012);
 - Ramsar Sites Information Service redevelopment: CHF 53,000 (from 2013 line items);
 - Preparation of new Strategic Plan: CHF 30,000 (from 2013 line items);
 - and

- b. CHF 163,000 to be reallocated later in 2013, at the discretion of the Secretary General, to fund the following non-Core priorities, in no particular order:
 - Ramsar Advisory Missions (non-Core 2013 budget is CHF 150,000);
 - Scientific and technical services (non-Core 2013 budget is CHF 635,000);
 - Ramsar Sites Information Service redevelopment (balance of 2013 non-Core budget);
 - Preparation of new Strategic Plan (balance of 2013 non-Core budget);
- iv) decided that there would be no change to the non-core budget allocations for 2013 as approved by COP11 Resolution XI.2 (noting that the non-core budget list in Resolution XI.2, Annex III, was not ranked in any order of priority);
- v) decided to allocate from the Ramsar core budget 2013, line D, Support to Regional Initiative networks and centres (Resolution XI.2, Annex I), a total of CHF 129,719 to the following six Regional Initiatives, as requested for their activities in 2013:
 - East African centre CHF 35,000
 - Niger river basin network CHF 30,000
 - La Plata river basin network CHF 16,700
 - Caribbean network CHF 15,000
 - American mangroves and reefs network CHF 20,000
 - Carpathian Wetland Initiative CHF 13,019;
- vi) decided that the Terms of Reference for a new Partnership Coordinator should clearly specify the expectation to raise funds;
- vii) agreed not to formally re-launch the Small Grants Fund for 2014; but requested the Secretariat to review the status of the current Small Grants Funds portfolio and seek ways of refreshing it, pending further review and redevelopment of mechanisms for funding small projects of national priority (in relation to the terms of Resolution XI.2 and the finalization of the Strategic Framework for Ramsar Partnerships), for consideration by the Standing Committee; and
- viii) noted the current status of Contracting Parties' outstanding annual contributions (DOC.SC46-13) and encouraged the Secretariat, working with members of the Subgroup on Finance, to continue to take actions to resolve this situation.

Agenda item 13: Report of the Management Working Group (including Resolution XI.1 subgroups and Resolution XI.16 review committee)

46. The **Chair** invited the DSG to introduce the report of the meeting of the Management Working Group. The **DSG** noted that a start had already been made during this Standing Committee meeting on a number of the Group's recommendations, some of which had been introduced under earlier agenda items (see Decisions SC46-11 and SC46-15).

47. The Group had focused its deliberations on the results which needed to be produced before COP12, particularly in relation to the terms of Resolutions XI.1 (paragraphs 17 and 18), Resolution XI.16, and the need to prepare a new Strategic Plan, and had discussed the most efficient ways to undertake this work and the operational steps needed. The Group has recommended that these matters would be most efficiently progressed through the establishment of a number of specific task forces (or subgroups), with identification of their lead Parties and the drafting of terms of references and work plans in the immediate future, in order that these subgroups could report their first substantive results to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting (anticipated to be held in March 2014). Thereafter, wider and open-ended consultations with all Parties and others would be anticipated in order to finalize the respective proposals for COP12 consideration.

Decision SC46-24: The Standing Committee

- i) **decided that the Management Working Group would act as the umbrella group responsible for coordinating the operational processes for work on the issues raised in Resolutions XI.1 and XI.16, and for ensuring reporting on progress on these issues to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting and to COP12; and**
 - ii) **requested the Secretariat to progress the negotiations between the Ramsar Secretariat and IUCN on improving operations by establishing a small task force (with three members from each organisation) on administrative, financial and scientific and technical issues; recommended that that task force pursue these matters with the involvement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee, the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, and the Chair of the STRP; and requested that the task force report on progress to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting.**
48. Concerning Resolution XI.16, the Management Working Group had recommended the establishment of the review committee on the delivery of scientific and technical advice called for in that Resolution, including the participation of two Parties from each Ramsar region, the STRP Chair and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance. Work had already been initiated during the week, with the USA offering to act as lead Party. The **USA** reported that draft terms of reference had been prepared, on which comments were welcome, and a plan of future activities had been mapped out. Review committee members would work electronically, only holding a face-to-face meeting at COP12.

Decision SC46-25: The Standing Committee confirmed the establishment of the review committee on the delivery of scientific and technical advice (Resolution XI.16), with the United States of America as the lead Party, regional representation of other Parties, the STRP Chair and the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance; and requested that its terms of reference, once finalized, be provided to the Secretariat for posting with other relevant documents on the Ramsar website.

Agenda item 9: Report of the Strategic Plan Working Group (continued)

49. At the request of the **Chair**, the **DSG** reported on the progress of the Strategic Plan Working Group established through Decision SC46-11, with Finland and France as co-leaders of the Group. The group had developed some initial views on different aspects of

the scope, content and structure of the Plan, and anticipated the need to engage a consultant to facilitate the further scoping and drafting processes. The Working Group stressed the importance of having contextual information on the status and trends of wetlands available to inform and guide the drafting process, and reinforced the importance of Decision SC46-14 in adding the preparation of a State of the World's Wetlands report as a highest priority for the work of the STRP.

Decision SC46-26: The Standing Committee noted the progress reported by the Strategic Plan Working Group.

Agenda item 8: Report of the Resolution XI.1 Subgroup 1 on Languages (continued)

50. The **United Arab Emirates** presented the report of the Subgroup (established through Decision SC46-15), which supported the addition of Arabic as an official language of the Convention, observing that such a move should encourage more Arabic-speaking countries to become Contracting Parties. The Subgroup had recognized that inclusion of Arabic would increase costs. Support of both the Secretariat and the region would be needed in estimating those costs and obtaining the necessary funding or contributions for long-term sustainability.

Decision SC46-27: The Standing Committee noted the report of the Subgroup 1 on Languages.

Agenda item 11: Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention (Resolution XI.5): revised Operational Guidelines and budget allocations

51. The Standing Committee agreed that any further comments on the revised text should be submitted to the Secretariat for finalization of the revised Operational Guidelines. **Cuba, Republic of Korea, and South Africa** said that they would be submitting proposed amendments. In response to the **representative of the Regional Centre for West & Central Asia, Denmark** said that only the COP could decide on the overall level of funding for Regional Initiatives; the Standing Committee could not make exceptions.

Decision SC46-28: The Standing Committee endorsed the revised Operational Guidelines 2013-2015 for Regional Initiatives and requested the Secretariat to finalise and issue the guidelines, taking into account any further amendments received from Parties.

Agenda item 14: Appointment of the next Secretary General (continued)

52. An extensive discussion took place about the implications of a closed session of the Standing Committee as programmed in the agenda, covering issues including who could participate, the definition and specific roles of "voting members", the role and functions of observers, the Rules of Procedure and their legal interpretation, the question of precedents at previous meetings, and the implications of not involving the Standing Committee in the selection process. The **Chair** briefly suspended the plenary for consultations with voting members. The Committee then met in closed session with the participation as observers of a representative of any other Party who wished to participate after having signed a confidentiality agreement.

53. The Standing Committee then met in open session. The **Chair** announced that the Standing Committee had approved the selected candidate as the next Secretary General, and reported that there had been positive developments in the process of appointing the next Secretary General, but that the final stages of a contractual agreement between IUCN and the successful candidate remained to be concluded. It was requested that the details remain confidential, but it was expected that a public announcement could be made later in April 2013.

Agenda item 24: Date and venue of the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee

54. The **DSG** recalled that Resolution XI.19 (Annex 4) provided an indicative time line for the intersessional meetings of the Standing Committee for the 2013-2015 triennium. He recommended that the provisional dates for the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee should be 24-28 March 2014, with an option for the subsequent week (31 March - 4 April 2014). Contracting Parties were invited to advise the Secretariat of any other considerations concerning these dates.

Decision SC46-29: The Standing Committee decided that the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee would be held in Gland, Switzerland, on 24-28 March 2014, with possible alternative dates of 31 March - 4 April 2014.

Agenda item 25: Adoption of the report of the meeting

55. The Standing Committee reviewed the draft reports of decisions for the first three days of the meeting. The **DSG** read out amendments received and proposals for finalizing the text for agenda items 11, 17, 19 and 22. The reports, as amended, were adopted. It was also agreed to delegate authority to the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee to approve the report of the final day's decisions.
56. The **DSG** reminded participants that a fuller report would also be prepared and circulated for comment before being finalized and published on the Ramsar website.

Agenda items 26 and 27: Any other business and closing remarks

57. The **Chair** announced that there was no other business.
58. In valedictory remarks, the **Secretary General** expressed his sense of privilege for having been able to work for six years for the Convention in that role and offered his services for assistance in implementing the policies adopted. Both the **Chair** and **Denmark**, on behalf of the Standing Committee, expressed appreciation for Mr Tièga's contribution, which was attested by the growing number of sites and their acreage and the increasing number of Contracting Parties during his tenure.
59. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the **Chair** declared the meeting closed.