

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**11th Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel
Gland, Switzerland, 8-11 April 2003**

**DOC. STRP11-7
Addendum 1**

Agenda item 5.4

**STRP Support Service:
Progress Report on establishment**

Attached is a progress report provided by Wetlands International which outlines the initial steps taken for the establishment of the STRP Support Service.

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Ramsar STRP Support Service

Report to STRP11, 7th April 2003

1 Introduction

At the last Conference of the Parties (COP8) through Resolution VIII.28, Contracting Parties called for the establishment of the STRP Support Service: "working in open and transparent partnership with all International Organisation Partners (IOPs), STRP observer organisations and others". The role of the STRP Support Service is to provide increased capacity to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel in its development and implementation of its Work Plan for 2003-2005.

The Ramsar Bureau invited proposals from the IOPs in February 2003, for delivery of the Service and Wetlands International, with the agreement of IUCN, WWF International and BirdLife International, submitted a proposal to the Bureau in February 2003, for consideration by Standing Committee. The Committee accepted the proposal, subject to changes which included the need for re-formulation of the workplan and budget following STRP11, to reflect the STRP Workplan to be adopted by the STRP.

Wetlands International, is an International Non-Governmental Organisation founded in 1995, whose predecessor organisations assisted the founding of the Convention, and which is also an IOP of the Ramsar Convention. Since the inception of the STRP, Wetlands International has provided active support and input to its work, taking the lead or co-lead in the technical areas of work concerning wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring, and on peatlands, and contributing work on ecological character, dams, and on restoration.

In addition to its contractual role of providing the Support Service, Wetlands International, as an IOP contributing towards the technical work of the STRP, also proposes to make technical contributions to some of the work envisaged in DOC. STRP11-3. This work is not included or funded in the STRP Support Service activities to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

1.1 Assessment of roles and tasks

In developing our approach to the tasks outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Service (see DOC.STRP11-07), Wetlands International has drawn on a wide range of documents, particularly including COP8 Resolutions on the *Modus operandi* of the STRP (VIII.28), Strategic Plan 2003-2008 (VIII.25) and on Implementation of the Strategic Plan during 2003-2005 (VIII.26). We have also drawn on our "Review of scientific and technical support amongst partners to improve core science foundation support to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the Ramsar Convention", which was considered by the Standing Committee during 2002, and which formed the basis for the COP8 approval of the Support Service.

1.1.1 Role of the STRP Support Service

The Bureau established a Terms of Reference, defining five key roles for the provider of the Support Service, as outlined below and included in the *modus operandi* of the STRP in DOC.STRP11-4 and detailed in DOC.STRP11-7:

- a) establish improved links with, and knowledge of, existing expert networks operated by the Convention (Ramsar Experts Database, STRP National Focal Points), IOPs, and other organizations with observer status to STRP and/or with which the Convention has developed links;
- b) further develop and build the capacity of the network of STRP National Focal Points and their within-country expert networks;
- c) identify gaps in expert network coverage in relation to the STRP's work, and seek to fill those gaps through identification and establishing linkage with other existing networks and the establishment of new networks as appropriate;
- d) advise the STRP on appropriate experts from these networks to contribute to the work of the STRP; and
- e) support the work of Expert Working Groups established by the STRP, on behalf of the Bureau.

The Service will function in the period 2003-2005 before COP9, and in close cooperation with the Bureau, will support the work of STRP Members and Expert Working Groups that are established by the STRP. The key roles of the Service will be performed by Wetlands International in an accountable way, to be reported upon to the Standing Committee in a Final Report, analysing the principal tasks and roles performed, together with recommendations for future operation, should it be decided that the Service be continued.

This briefing document is intended to assist STRP members to appreciate the role and scope of the Service, and to assist them to obtain maximum benefit from the Service.

2 Summary of progress in carrying out roles and tasks to be delivered through the Service

2.1 Progress made with respect to specified roles

The following analysis responds to the five main roles outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Service (see DOC.STRP11-07).

2.1.1 Make available expert networks

Terms of reference description:

- a) establish improved links with, and knowledge of, existing expert networks operated by the Convention (Ramsar Experts Database, STRP National Focal Points), IOPs, and other organizations with observer status to STRP and/or with which the Convention has developed links.

By virtue of the COP8 Resolution on the *modus operandi* of the STRP (VIII.28), a wide range of specific Observer organisations have been invited to contribute towards the work of the STRP. Many of these maintain their own networks of expertise. Expert networks are those groupings of expertise associated with private, NGO, governmental and inter-governmental

organisations. Experts are defined as those individuals that have established proof of their expertise and competence that is acceptable to their peers, and for which relevant networks responsible for maintaining registers containing such experts, hold themselves accountable.

Wetlands International has conducted a rapid inventory of such expert networks, and has sought from IOPs and Observers their nominations for specific focal points to discuss the delivery of work that has been identified as a priority for the STRP work plan set by the 29th Meeting of the Standing Committee. The response from Observer organisations has been helpful and the names of designated focal points and means of access to expertise of the Observers largely identified. The results of the initial survey conducted have been included in the draft website described below, under the category "Rosters of Experts". The expertise identified in STRP background documents, including the Annotated Agenda (DOC.STRP11-3), has also been added to the draft website, together with links to previously developed Internet-based resources, including those on wetland restoration, Participatory Management. With respect to the Ramsar Experts Database, this has been transferred to Wetlands International for conversion to an Internet-based tool. The experts currently included in the Database will be contacted in Mid-April onwards to confirm their continued interest, while more recently identified experts will be added. Access to this database will be available to STRP Members via the STRP Support Service website.

Wetlands International intends the Service to take full advantage of existing registers, rosters or other existing mechanisms, and will not create new rosters except when a new group is authorised, or when a subset of members drawn from more than one existing roster is thought desirable. When creating a new roster, maximum use of the Internet will be made, and all databases created will be fully on-line searchable and linked into one tool for use by STRP members. This tool is the STRP Support Service website, hosted by Wetlands International and now accessible through the web address: www.wetlands.org/strp.

A programming contract to create the necessary databases, list servers and discussion forums, has been let to a Wageningen-based company, however, the prototype website is already available to demonstrate the basic functions proposed. More details about the specific functions being implemented are given in Section 3.

An IOP Steering mechanism will be created, to enable timely access to individual experts and registers associated with each IOP, and also to ensure that the IOPs are able to better coordinate the Service. IOP focal points will be asked to approve a proposal to be drafted by Wetlands International following STRP11. Following the establishment of the Steering mechanism, Observer organisations will be contacted again to seek more specific commitments of input.

2.1.2 Further develop and build national STRP focal point capacity

Terms of reference description:

- b) further develop and build the capacity of the network of STRP National Focal Points and their within-country expert networks

As defined by the Modus operandi for the STRP, National Focal Points have a pivotal role in assisting the development and implementation of the actions agreed through the STRP Work Plan, both at the global and at the national level. As individuals these focal points cannot be expected to deliver effective results without an effective in-country network, and also a fully effective network between the National Focal Points.

It is proposed that those National Focal Points which have at their disposal a National Ramsar Committee should be regarded as the highest priority for receiving assistance, in cooperation

with the National CEPA Focal point. The primary vehicle through which to channel assistance could be the cross-cutting CEPA Group that will be supported through the IOPs.

2.1.3 Identify and fill gaps in expertise

- c) identify gaps in expert network coverage in relation to the STRP's work, and seek to fill those gaps through identification and establishing linkage with other existing networks and the establishment of new networks as appropriate;

This is regarded as an immediate priority for the Support Service, which has already mapped indicative expert coverage for each of the six priority areas of work identified by the Standing Committee. However, for the lower priority areas, this has not been completed. The Support Service will, after the STRP has confirmed its priorities, continue to identify those critical gaps in expertise, for which experts are not readily accessible. It is likely that for each area of work that there is a relevant pre-existing network or group, but its identification is required, and negotiations will be necessary to enable access to the expertise. A broad scale review of expertise has already been completed and will be extended.

Other remedial actions that are under consideration include encouragement to form a group of experts including, where necessary, the identification of cost-effective consultancies, to assist in obtaining expertise in the short term while building long term capacity. At present it is considered that very few new groups need to be constituted, although there may be a need to form cross-cutting groups (non-STRP), e.g. on wise use and poverty alleviation, by drawing on memberships of several pre-existing groups.

2.1.4 Advise on appropriate experts

- d) advise the STRP on appropriate experts from these networks to contribute to the work of the STRP;

This role has two main components: the identification and verification of specific experts and also checking on availability. To successfully perform this role the IOPs have agreed to cooperate closely with each other and also with the STRP Observer organisations to assess the required work, and to identify and make contact with individual experts. The Support Service website has some details of proposed experts or sources of such experts, organised by Expert Working Group.

2.1.5 Support the work of Expert Working Groups

- e) support the work of Expert Working Groups established by the STRP, on behalf of the Bureau.

For this role, Wetlands International will primarily be acting as the secretariat to the Groups and expects to support the work of the Groups in any way that is required. Several specific tasks have been identified by the Bureau in connection with this role. The tasks identified and the required inputs are summarised below in Table 1.

Table 1. Task and input requirements

Task	Action taken to date
i) assist the Ramsar Bureau 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 planned in April
ii) support, on behalf of the Bureau, the work of the expert	See below for each sub-task

Working Groups established by the STRP, including through:	
a) providing expert advice and relevant materials to Working Groups;	Some resource materials are available electronically via the website. Specific requests are expected from April 2003 onwards
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;	Website set up and programming contract let for completion by end April for discussion groups and mid-May for full operation of Experts Database.
c) facilitating and arranging a mid-term meeting for each Working Group, as needed and resources permitting, for review of first draft materials, and including 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);	No action yet taken. Provisional dates and location to be agreed at STRP11 will enable early bookings to be made.
d) identifying to Working Groups national and international experts and organizations who might be invited to undertake a wider peer-review of draft materials prepared by the Working Group;	Partly identified through contact with Observers and others. <u>See website</u> . 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);	No action required to date. Planned for mid April to early May onwards
f) monitoring the progress of each Working Group, including the drafting of preparation by experts under contract from the Ramsar Bureau, and providing regular reports on progress from the groups to the STRP Chair and the Bureau; and	No action required to date. Awaiting formation of Working Groups
g) ensuring that all relevant materials from each Working Group are transmitted in a timely manner to the Bureau for their preparation for circulation for review by the Panel at its second meeting of the triennium.	No action required to date

2.2 Progress against specific tasks set for delivery before and at the STRP11 meeting

The progress made against tasks set out in DOC.STRP11-7 is summarised here against each task.

□ Develop a three year workplan for the STRP Support Service

The Annex shows a first draft of the indicative Workplan. All dates for events after the first STRP meeting are subject to confirmation. The Workplan does not yet indicate commitments of staff time or costs, these data will be supplied to the Bureau after the meeting. The Service

was initiated at the February 2003 Standing Committee meeting, and is expected to cease shortly after the pre-COP9 meeting of the Standing Committee, which may be held in May 2005. The total period within the years 2003-2005 that the Service will operate is therefore approximately 2 years and 5 months.

□ **Review priority tasks**

Six priority work areas were identified by the Standing Committee. Two additional areas of work were classified as cross-cutting: CEPA and agriculture. The six priority areas are identified in DOC.STRP11-5, and will require Working Groups to be established to achieve the necessary outputs. Of the high priority cross-cutting areas of work, CEPA can be delivered through working groups already established by the IOPs, which can provide appropriate input to each of the six high priority task Working Groups. For agriculture, the lead persons remain to be identified through discussion at the STRP meeting.

□ **Identify expert networks**

□ **Establish contact with networks**

Both of the above are reported on under section 2.1.1 above.

□ **Identify gaps in coverage**

In reviewing the priority tasks set by Standing Committee for the STRP, the main gaps identified in immediately available networks of expertise concern the following topics (Operational Objective in [square brackets]):

- ◆ Biogeographic regionalisation [1.2]
- ◆ Wise use, sustainable development and poverty reduction [3.1]
- ◆ Implementation of the wise use principle [3.1]
- ◆ Groundwater [3.4] (IWMI, South African experience?)
- ◆ Under-represented wetland types [10.1]
- ◆ Development of field guide on management planning [11.1]
- ◆ Change in ecological character [11.2] (but via Australia?)
- ◆ Key indicators relating to effective implementation of the Convention [17] (consider BirdLife International as coordinator to form Group?)

3 Using the STRP Support Service

Wetlands International is responsible for providing the STRP Support Service, and the focal points are as follows:

<p>Dr Douglas Taylor, email: doug.taylor@wetlands.org International Science Coordinator</p>	<p>Mr Tunde Ojei, email: tunde.ojei@wetlands.org Specialist Group Support Officer.</p>
<p>Wetlands International, P.O. Box 471, 6700 AL, Wageningen The Netherlands</p>	<p>Telephone: +31 317 478852 Fax: +31 317 478850 Website: www.wetlands.org STRP website: www.wetlands.org/strp</p>

The principal tools provided by the Service for supporting STRP Members, and National Focal Points include:

- ❑ Telephone support
- ❑ Teleconference support (also possible video-conference support)
- ❑ Mailings of reports and other hard copy source materials
- ❑ Website dedicated to STRP support with:
 - Discussion fora, one per Working Group, with automatic email notification
 - Ramsar Expert Database for general support, searchable by category, etc.
 - Identified experts per Working Group
 - Rosters of experts of Observers and other relevant organisations
 - Document uploading and downloading facility
 - Library of the most relevant documents for each Working Group
 - National STRP Focal Points List Server and discussion fora
- ❑ Clearing house role to access International Organisation Partners support

3.1 Functions that the Support Service will routinely carry out

The Support Service will continue to locate suitable expertise, reference materials and links to networks, and place this information for use on the website. It will also notify STRP Members of any materials, and other resources that are relevant to each area of work undertaken by STRP. Web-based discussion fora and associated list server facilities will be moderated and maintained in consultation with Working Group Leads. Notifications of relevant conferences and expert meetings will also be provided to STRP Members.

The Service has taken over the management of the Ramsar Experts Database from the Bureau, and will maintain this as a live database through the website. Individual experts will be invited to maintain their own records up to date. All experts identified specifically for STRP work will also be entered into the database if not already included.

Specialist (expert) Groups sponsored by the International Organisation Partners will be encouraged to contribute to the work of the STRP. This includes the Wetlands International Specialist Groups (especially the re-activated Education and Public Awareness Specialist Group which will be encouraged to actively contribute to the cross cutting issue of CEPA, and to attend the early 2004 meetings of the Working Groups). The IUCN Species Survival Commission Specialist Groups, Commission on Ecosystem Management, and the Commission on Education and Communication will be actively informed of all opportunities to contribute.

The Service will, in consultation with Working Group Leads, organise venues and provide logistical support for the early 2004 Working Group meetings, and ensure that all facilities required are made available.

With respect to STRP National Focal Points, following the STRP11 meeting, the details of the STRP Workplan will be sent to them and their input and support will be sought. The Support Service will, after taking advice from the Bureau prioritise support to Focal Points and seek to assist them in cooperation with CEPA experts.

3.2 Additional functions that may be requested by STRP Members and Leads of Groups

Upon request and provided the budget allows it, the Service will provide STRP Members with various on-demand services. These will include providing teleconference (and exceptionally, video-conferencing) facilities for Working Group discussions. The Service will also source expertise and negotiate costs with providers of expertise, including consultants, and periodically make its findings available to the Bureau for approval. In addition, additional web-based tools may be considered, if a Working Group requires them. Staff of the Support Service may be requested to attend Working Group meetings, and exceptionally meetings that are not part of the planned early 2004 series.

Finally, Wetlands International would like to emphasises that it is open to suggestions for improvements to the Service and will consider alternative and additional means of supporting the members of the STRP and of Working Groups created by the STRP. Please do not hesitate to contact the focal points for the Service or the Bureau to discuss such matters.

Annex: Indicative Workplan: STRP Support Service



