

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**26th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001**

DOC. SC26-27

Agenda item 12.3 (k)

Report of the Standing Committee Subgroup on the *modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

1. The Subgroup on the *modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel met during the morning of Tuesday, 4 December 2001, and completed its review of the STRP *modus operandi*.
2. Participants were: members of the Subgroup (France, Japan, Uganda (Chair), BirdLife International, the Chair of the STRP, the past Chair of the STRP, and the USA as Observer), with Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Wetlands International also attending as observers.
3. The Subgroup reconfirmed the major importance of the role of the STRP in driving forwards the vital scientific and technical agenda of the Convention, and recognised that this should be both a role responsive to the requests from Contracting Parties expressed through the Convention's Work Plan and Resolutions of the Conferences of the Parties, and a strategic role in identifying and filling key gaps in Convention guidance and responding to new and emerging issues.
4. The Subgroup supported the analysis in the review paper prepared by the Ramsar Bureau at the request of the 25th meeting of the Standing Committee which identified that there are major limitations to the capacity of the STRP to undertake its work, both procedural and financial, and supported in general the overall suite of recommendations as embodied in the draft COP8 Resolution and annexed new *modus operandi* of the STRP.
5. The Subgroup recognised that the proposed *modus operandi* of the STRP for developing its products includes both the role of reviewing materials prepared by others and that of STRP participants drafting such materials themselves. Whilst recognising that this dual approach may create some complexity in the STRP process, the Subgroup considered that this was outweighed by the benefits of flexibility so as to permit the Panel fully to capitalise on the expertise of its members.
6. The Subgroup debated the issue of the role and responsibilities of the Chair, and in particular an option of the Chair to be given more direct responsibility for managing the work of the STRP, including any budget and contracting of expert consultants to prepare materials for review by the Panel. The Subgroup considered that such an expansion of the role of the Chair would mean that the Chair would have to be willing to devote a significantly greater amount of time to the role, that this would make it difficult to find a suitable candidate with such time available, and that to take on such a role would require additional resourcing. However, the Subgroup has recommended inclusion in the revised

modus operandi of an additional responsibility of the Chair to advise the Bureau on the selection and contracting of any expert consultant to undertake such drafting work.

7. The Subgroup stressed that the STRP was currently under-resourced considering the underlying major importance of its role, and noted that its core budget, currently solely for the attendance by members from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, amounted to only approximately 5% of the overall core budget, and urged that ways be found of increasing the Panel's capacity to undertake its required programme of work.
8. In the face of potentially limited resources for the STRP to undertake its work, the Subgroup recognised the importance of the COP, Standing Committee and the STRP itself prioritising the issues and tasks it is requested to deliver, so that the Panel could work within the available capacity.
9. The Subgroup recommends that in preparing the draft STRP work plan for consideration by the COP and the Standing Committee, a plan identifying the estimated cost of the STRP delivering each task should be provided; and that Contracting Parties and others introducing a task for the STRP should be strongly encouraged to identify sources of sufficient funding for the undertaking of the task.
10. The Subgroup recognised that in any budgetary considerations for the work of the STRP there is a need to provide resources not only for the travel and subsistence costs of the Chair and Vice-Chair's representational role but also to support the Chair and Vice-Chair in their administrative costs of maintaining communication with the STRP members and Working Groups.
11. The Subgroup also stressed the importance of establishing a stronger linkage and working relationship with the expert networks of specialist groups of Wetlands International and the other International Organization Partners and with the network of STRP National Focal Points.
12. In the light of recent discussions initiated by the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention at the Wetlands International meeting of its Board of Members, the Subgroup recommends that the Standing Committee establish a Subgroup, working intersessionally, to examine options for strengthening and formalising the role of Wetlands International and other International Organisation Partners of the Convention in supporting the work of the STRP. The Standing Committee may wish to identify a mechanism for receiving the report of this Subgroup, which might be to report to the Subgroup on Finance should it decide to meet in the first half of 2002.
13. In reviewing the annexed STRP *modus operandi*, the Subgroup urged that a section should be added that clarifies the role of the Standing Committee in the work of the STRP.
14. Concerning the schedule of STRP meetings, the Subgroup considered several options. It recognised the increasing potential of electronic communication mechanisms but also stressed the value of face-to-face meetings to reach consensus in the Panel's working groups progressing their work. The Subgroup recommends that in the coming triennium the STRP should meet in plenary twice (at the start to agree its work plan and towards the end to approve its products for transmittal to the Standing Committee). The Subgroup

also recommends, resources permitting, that each working group established by the STRP should meet in a workshop approximately midway through the triennium so as to review its draft products.

15. The Subgroup recommends to the Standing Committee a number of more detailed modifications to the draft Resolution and its annexed *modus operandi* of the STRP. These are incorporated into the attached revised draft Resolution and annex (DOC. SC26/COP8-23 Revision 1).