

16th Meeting of the Standing Committee  
Brisbane, Australia: 12-14 September 1995

Minutes

Agenda item 1: Opening and Welcoming Remarks

Australia:

1. Welcomed all the participants and conveyed the country's pleasure in hosting the forthcoming 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, for which preparations were well advanced;
2. was also pleased to have participated in the development of the Strategic Plan, an important milestone in the Convention's development; and reiterated its firm commitment to the Convention;
3. made reference to the country's initiative calling for Contracting Parties to make pledges to a fund, on the occasion of the Convention's 25th Anniversary, for the implementation of the Strategic Plan, targeted at SFR 25 million;
4. noted the growing interest of Oceanian countries in the Convention and their probable strong attendance at the next Conference, as well as the support which the Wetland Conservation Fund could provide in this area;
5. emphasized that there was a great potential for collaboration and joint activities between the environmental conventions, in order to advance more powerfully each of their objectives.

Hungary (Chair):

6. Commended Australia's arrangements for the next Conference and noted the importance of the decisions taken at this Standing Committee meeting in preparation for the next Conference;
7. thanked the former Interim Secretary General, James McCuaig, for his contribution to the Convention and welcomed the new Secretary General.

IUCN:

8. Through a written statement, expressed the Director General's regret at not being able to attend the meeting and his firm commitment to attend the Brisbane Conference;
9. referred to his involvement in the recruitment process for the new Secretary General and expressed his satisfaction at the appointment of Mr Delmar Blasco;
10. paid tribute to the Chair of the Standing Committee for her exceptional contribution in resolving some difficult issues over the past year;
11. reiterated IUCN's strong commitment to improving and strengthening support to the Ramsar Bureau at administrative, technical and human levels;

12. confirmed that IUCN's current regionalization and decentralization would play an important role in this increased support, given the strong wetland conservation component in the IUCN regional offices; pooling of the biome programmes would further strengthen IUCN's technical support;

13. referred to the attachment to the Director General's statement, listing areas of work where IUCN could assist in the implementation of the proposed Strategic Plan for the Convention.

IWRB:

14. Conveyed greetings to the meeting on behalf of the partnership of IWRB, Wetlands for the Americas (WA), and the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB);

15. welcomed the appointment of the new Secretary General and conveyed the hope that, at this opportune moment in the Convention's development, he would be able to rise to the many challenges it faced;

16. noted that the adoption of the Strategic Plan would be an important step forward and pledged the wetland alliance's full technical support in its implementation;

17. referred to the report on IWRB's technical support to the Convention in 1994/5, highlighting some of the main activities implemented;

18. reported on the proposed formal launch of the IWRB alliance with AWB and WA; this alliance of three organizations focusing specifically on wetlands world-wide would imply the provision of increased technical assistance to the Bureau.

AWB:

19. Reported on technical support activities in the Asia/Pacific region, and noted that the Wetland Conservation Fund had assisted considerably in promoting the Convention in the region, as manifested by the increased interest from new and potential Contracting Parties (Malaysia had just become a signatory to the Convention and Cambodia had showed a strong interest in becoming a Contracting Party);

20. noted that the technical discussions at the forthcoming International Conference on Wetlands and Development in Malaysia could be of direct relevance to the technical discussions at the Brisbane Conference.

WWF International:

21. Indicated that the Director General of WWF hoped to head in person a large delegation at the Brisbane Conference;

22. pledged support to the Convention and the new Secretary General;

23. noted that WWF was strengthening its freshwater and wetland activities and stressed the importance of community based initiatives.

The Secretary General (SG):

24. Expressed his honour at being appointed, hoping that his broader environment and development background would prove beneficial to the Convention; and pledged his full commitment to serve the Convention with absolute loyalty and to the best of his abilities;

25. noted that the development of the Strategic Plan and the Australian initiative to solicit pledges to the 25th Anniversary fund would provide important opportunities to raise the status of the Convention considerably, and assist in underlining the specific contribution it could make in the realm of international treaties and multilateral institutions;

26. indicated that fostering closer relationships with these institutions and other Conventions, notably the Biodiversity and Climate Change Conventions, would be one of his priorities;

27. reported that addressing the budget deficit would also be of utmost priority; he would endeavour to practise a transparent management style;

28. looked forward to increased cooperation with the Convention's NGO partner organizations;

29. extended his thanks to the Government of Australia and the Ramsar Conference Organizing Committee for their excellent preparations for the meeting, which were a clear indication of the high quality to be expected of the actual Conference.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of Agenda

30. A new item was added as Agenda Item 12(d): Venue of next Conference of the Parties. The agenda was adopted by consensus, with some changes in the order of business.

Agenda item 3: Admission of Observers

31. France, Austria, and USA were welcomed as Contracting Party observers.

32. The following NGOs were admitted as observers: Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB), Australian Marine Conservation Society, WWF International

Agenda item 4: Matters arising from the Minutes of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Standing Committee

33. None were identified.

Agenda item 5 (Formerly Agenda Item 6)

Review of Administrative Matters

5(a) Personnel Issues

The SG:

34. Reported on the review he had carried out of the working procedures of the Bureau and

technical staff responsibilities. Mr Mike Smart would continue as Senior Policy Advisor until 30 June 1996; his position would be reviewed further immediately after the Brisbane Conference.

35. With the exception of Mr Tim Jones, who would devote his attention exclusively to Europe, including an increased involvement with MedWet matters, the responsibilities of the other Technical Officers would remain as before.

36. The group composed of the Secretary General, the Senior Policy Advisor and the Technical Officers would be called the Policy and Technical Staff Group (PTG).

37. In the future there were likely to be some rearrangement of the support staff responsibilities.

38. Following IUCN's recent review of grades and salaries, the Bureau was undertaking a similar exercise, that hopefully would be finalized in October 1995.

39. As the technical staff were already over-burdened and lacked an appropriate level of junior support, the possibility of internships and secondments would be explored.

40. Responding to an enquiry of the UK on the identical salary grades of the Communications Officer and the Communications Assistant at the Ramsar Bureau, the Administrator explained that this was because the Assistant, who worked on a full-time basis, had been appointed to complement the Officer when she started to work only 80%.

41. In response to another inquiry of the UK on how IUCN salary scale related to the United Nations scales, the SG further reported that the IUCN review had taken into account the salary scales of similar organizations in the Geneva area. The former Interim Secretary General reported that IUCN salaries were around 80% of the UN level.

42. With respect to a third query from the UK on the likely introduction of performance related remuneration, the SG reported on IUCN's desire to move in this direction in the near future.

#### 5(b) Relations with IUCN

43. The SG referred to the services provided by IUCN, the goodwill demonstrated by the different units in the Union in cooperating with the Ramsar Bureau, and his conviction that the present arrangements are beneficial to the Convention.

44. Australia endorsed the latter point.

45. IUCN noted that the current restructuring of the Union would foster increased cooperation with the Convention.

46. Hungary (Chair) expressed appreciation for IUCN's services and the hope that the Convention could profit from changes resulting from the restructuring.

#### 5(c) Secretary General Recruitment Process

Hungary (Chair):

47. Referred to the report contained in the supporting documentation and noted that the report would serve as a useful guide to future Standing Committees;

48. highlighted the introduction of the Secretary General's appointment on a fixed term;

49. thanked the Standing Committee for their trust in the Chair during this difficult period, and the members of the Selection Panel for their commitment;

50. expressed sincere appreciation for the contribution made by Mr Jim McCuaig as Interim Secretary General and the firm belief that the correct decision had been taken in selecting Mr Delmar Blasco as the new Secretary General.

Agenda item 6 (Formerly Agenda Item 5)

Review of Convention Finances

6(a) Reserve Fund: Moved to Agenda Item 12.

The following agenda items were treated as a group of interrelated issues:

6(b) 1995 Core Income

6(c) 1995 Core Expenditure

6(d) 1995 Project Income and Expenditure

6(e) 1996 Core Income Projections

6(f) 1966 Priorities for Core Expenditure

The SG:

51. Referred the Standing Committee to the additional paper related to core income and expenditure for 1995 and 1996 and regretted having to table it at the meeting; however, he had realized the need for making available the information contained in the document since taking up his position on 2 August, after the papers for the meeting had already been sent out;

52. indicated that in his view, the new report provided a more accurate picture of the actual financial status of core income and expenditure, and noted that income was now recorded on an accruals basis;

53. assured that all efforts would be made to reduce the projected deficits, noting that the restricted number of staff attending the present meeting was an indication of the commitment to do so.

Hungary (Chair):

54. Noted the additional expenditure caused by costs related to the recruitment of the new

Secretary General and the unavoidable costs related to travels to various meetings to maintain a high profile for the Convention;

55. requested members of the Standing Committee to pursue outstanding 1995 contributions owed by Contracting Parties in their region.

56. Germany expressed concern at the fact that the projected deficits had not been foreseen sooner and hoped that the suggestions of the Finance Subgroup (see below) could be implemented to rectify the situation.

Hungary (Chair):

57. Reminded the meeting that, at the Chair's request, Australia, Kenya (Vice Chair), the UK, and Uruguay had agreed to constitute an informal Subgroup on Finance, chaired by Kenya, to meet in Brisbane just prior to the present meeting, with assistance from the former Interim Secretary General and the Secretary General. The aim had been to start analyzing financial matters related to (a) 1995 and 1996, (b) the proposed budget to be submitted to the 6th Conference of the Parties for the 1997-1999 triennium, and (c) the 1995 allocations from the Wetland Conservation Fund in order to facilitate deliberations at the Standing Committee meeting. The informal Subgroup had met in Brisbane on 9 and 10 September;

58. noted that, subsequently, at an informal meeting of the Standing Committee called by the Chair on the evening of 11 September, the membership of the Subgroup had been expanded.

59. The Standing Committee then retrospectively confirmed the following:

Decision SC16.1: The Standing Committee decides to establish a Subgroup on Finance of the Standing Committee, chaired by Kenya, with the participation of Australia, Germany, India, the Russian Federation, the UK, and Uruguay, to analyse in advance of the 16th Meeting of the Standing Committee all financial matters and to prepare recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee.

60. Kenya (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance) introduced the Subgroup on Finance's analysis of the papers related to the 1995 and 1996 budgets, which indicated for 1995 a projected deficit of some SFR 63,000; and for 1996 a likely deficit of some SFR 265,000. Both budgets showed staff costs and travel expenditure well in excess of the budget agreed at the Kushiro Conference; IUCN's administrative charges were larger than planned in this budget, especially for 1996; for 1995 there were one-off costs associated with the resignation and replacement of the Secretary General, exchange losses had been severe, and the move to accruals accounting meant an additional, considerable bad debts provision.

61. The Subgroup had been advised that the budgets presented were more transparent than in previous years, and also that projected deficits for past years had not in fact occurred.

62. The Subgroup had noted that making no allocation from core funds to the Wetland Conservation Fund would eliminate the projected 1995 deficit, and much reduced that projected for 1996, but the Subgroup was strongly opposed to this course.

63. On the recommendation of the Subgroup on Finance, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.2: The Standing Committee approves the 1995 and 1996 expenditure forecasts tabled at the meeting by the Secretary General. The Secretary General, in endeavouring to balance both budgets, should take the following actions:

- 1) continue to reduce expenditure, especially on travel;
- 2) establish whether a higher proportion of certain staff costs could be charged to project funds, thus directly relieving pressures on the core budget, and reducing IUCN charges related to core-funded posts;
- 3) seek a more favourable arrangement with IUCN;
- 4) consider leaving vacant posts unfilled.

#### 6(g) Auditors' Report 1994

64. On the recommendation of the Subgroup on Finance, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.3: The Standing Committee notes the Auditors' Report for fiscal year 1994 as acceptable and appropriate.

#### Agenda item 7: Review of Communications Activities

The SG:

65. Emphasized the importance of communications activities and the need to improve the current output of the Bureau, with closer involvement of the technical staff.

66. The large component of the draft Strategic Plan on Education and Public Awareness (EPA) was an important step forward.

67. The Newsletter was a key area for improvement; the next issue would be a special one focusing on the Brisbane Conference.

68. Responding to the permanent observer from the UK, the SG noted that the reason for reporting in the Newsletter on the Technical Sessions of the Conference was that the circulation list for the Newsletter was much wider than that for the Conference documentation.

General discussion:

69. Some time was devoted to the address list of National Ramsar and/or National Wetland Committees that was circulated at the meeting, and several amendments were requested;

70. AWB referred to the coalition of 23 Australian NGOs involved in the Australian Wetland Alliance;

71 WWF International suggested that the list be further improved by providing a complete list of addresses of members of national committees, including NGOs involved in each Committee;

72. Austria noted that the existing committees varied greatly in their composition;

73. Hungary (Chair) noted that guidance had been given to the Contracting Parties in establishing national wetland committees, but ultimately it was up to each Contracting Party to decide on their composition and activities.

Decision SC16.4: The Standing Committee requests the Bureau to revise the list of National Ramsar and/or National Wetland Committees on the basis of the input received at this meeting, to update the list regularly and to distribute it periodically to Contracting Parties.

#### Agenda item 8: Review of Conservation Activities

##### 8(a) Review of Ramsar List (30 June 1995)

The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor:

74. Reported that Togo, Latvia, and Namibia, in that order, had become Contracting Parties and that the total number of listed sites had risen to 750, which included the designation of Mai Po Marshes and Inner Deep Bay (Hong Kong) by the UK. The Netherlands had listed Krammer Volkerak, Verdrongen Land van Saeftinge, and Zwarte Meer;

75. Noted that whilst the listing of additional sites was always welcomed, it was even more important to comply with the obligation to maintain the sites' ecological character.

76. France reported on the designation of Les Marais salants de Guérande et du Més.

77. The UK reported that the Minister of the Environment was that day announcing the listing of three new sites: Dersingham Bog, Wicken Fen, and Woodwalton Fen.

78. Austria, Canada, Germany, Japan, and Russia gave details of proposed site designations in the near future.

##### 8(b) Status of Montreux Record

The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor:

79. Noted that much of the discussion related to this agenda item would coincide with that for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) as the Panel had been establishing draft guidelines for identifying and monitoring change in ecological character of listed sites;

80. indicated that it would be useful for the STRP to review the mechanism whereby Contracting Parties can submit documentation detailing the remedial actions implemented successfully at a site.

81. WWF International felt that this issue was the most important agenda item. Adding more sites to the list was pointless if problems at existing sites were not addressed. The involvement of local communities using the wetlands was an important factor in this process.

##### 8(c) Ramsar Database: Progress Report

IWRB:

82. Conveyed greetings from Mr Scott Frazier, the Database Manager, who had regrettably not been able to attend the meeting due to financial restrictions and work commitments;

83. referred the meeting to the key points of the progress report on the database circulated in advance.

84. Two major developments had been: a) the agreement to produce an overview of the world's Ramsar sites in commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention, with financial support from the Netherlands; and b) an update of the regional directories for distribution at the Brisbane Conference.

85. The lack of or poor quality of the data supplied by the Contracting Parties was still a matter of concern and the importance given to the database in the draft Strategic Plan was to be welcomed.

86. Another concern was the need to seek additional funds to improve the database as the funds available to IWRB were only sufficient to maintain the data and for the day-to-day running of the database.

The SG:

87. Was very concerned to learn that so many sites had such poor data and maps and called for the support of the Standing Committee to establish how this could be improved;

88. indicated he would be visiting IWRB headquarters in the coming weeks and on this occasion would review thoroughly the database operation and establish how improvements could be made.

89. Switzerland proposed preparation of a list detailing those sites for which data were lacking and suggested that the Conference of the Parties should adopt a recommendation on this issue.

90. The Bureau's Technical Officer for Europe noted that the Bureau had taken the opportunity of regional meetings to request missing information. The highest priority should be given to those sites for which no map has been submitted.

91. He conveyed the Bureau's appreciation to Mr Scott Frazier for his remarkable personal contribution to the management and improvement of the database.

General Discussion:

92. Discussion ensued on the possibility of charging for requests for information from the database. It was felt that it would be difficult to differentiate between consultancy groups and organizations interested in wetland conservation. In conclusion, it was agreed that the Secretary General should discuss this matter further with IWRB.

93. The previous issue prompted a discussion on the degree of general access to the

information held in the Ramsar database. The prevailing opinion was that this type of information should be considered as public information and consequently free for access to everyone.

#### 8(d) Review of Monitoring Procedure

The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor:

94. Noted the increased sophistication of recent monitoring procedure missions with the involvement of Bureau staff, members of the STRP, consultants, and Contracting Parties;

95. emphasized that the 'Review of Monitoring Procedure 1988-1994' circulated to the Standing Committee needed further improvement before it was ready for further distribution and that it was not proposed to circulate it as a Conference paper but at another appropriate time in the future;

96. noted the proposed change of name from 'Monitoring Procedure' to 'Management Guidance Procedure';

97. reported on the STRP's recommendation that after submission of a monitoring procedure report Contracting Parties should provide information concerning follow-up and implementation of recommendations;

98. noted that as the monitoring procedure became a more sophisticated tool, its execution would require a more standardized approach to each case.

#### 8(e) Wise Use

The SG:

99. Noted that other matters had recently taken priority over this issue, but momentum had not been lost; a Technical Session at the Conference of the Parties would concentrate on wise use and national wetland policies and, in collaboration with IUCN's Social Policy Unit, a paper had been prepared on community participation in wetland management;

100. noted with pleasure the importance assigned to the wise use guidelines by the Strategic Plan.

#### Agenda item 9: Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

9(a) Developments

9(b) Presentation of proposals

9(c) Future Membership

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101. Hungary (chair) welcomed the two STRP members present at the meeting: Dr Max Finlayson (Oceania Region) and Mr Mihály Véghe (Eastern Europe Region), and pointed out that Mr Véghe's participation had been made possible through the generous support of the Government of Germany.

The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor:

102. Drew attention to the Kushiro Resolution establishing the STRP, and emphasized that the STRP was an advisory body for the Standing Committee and the Bureau and that members were elected to serve on the Panel in an individual capacity, on the basis of their scientific expertise;

103. indicated that unfortunately the STRP Chairman, Mr Tom Dahl, had been unable to attend the last two STRP meetings and the present meeting. Mr Mihály Végh, Chair of the meetings held in Mr Dahl's absence, would present the Panel's report in his place.

104. Mr Mihály Végh, STRP member for Eastern Europe tabled a written report to be circulated as the STRP report to the Conference and briefly introduced the draft criteria to identify wetlands of international importance on the basis of their relevance for fish and fisheries.

105. Dr Max Finlayson, STRP member for Oceania, introduced the draft papers on 'ecological character' and 'change in ecological character'.

106. Australia felt that the paper on criteria for fish and fisheries was a useful contribution, but that further work was needed, was concerned that there remained some lack of clarity over terminology, and stressed the need for harmonizing work being done on this issue under the Ramsar Convention with that being carried out under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The paper should be re-structured to make presentation of the criteria clearer.

107 The UK concurred with the general thrust of Australia's intervention and noted that detailed guidelines supporting the new criteria would be useful in aiding their application at the national level.

108. It was suggested that the Secretary General liaise with the Executive Secretary of the CBD.

109. Both Australia and the UK were asked to provide detailed written comments to the Bureau as soon as possible.

110. Hungary (Chair) pointed out that the draft fish and fisheries criterion 4(c) that reads "{a wetland} is of special value in supporting a sustainable fishery on which a local community is dependent", introduced social and economic factors into the Ramsar criteria for the first time.

General discussion:

111. With contributions from Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, Senegal, AWB, WWF, and the Bureau, points were raised both in favour of retaining this criterion and of removing it. No clear consensus was reached, so it was decided to keep it in the draft on the basis that it would be a key discussion point for the relevant Technical Session at the Brisbane Conference.

112. The UK thanked STRP members for their work over the past two years, but raised a

number of serious concerns with regard to the paper on ecological character. A lot more work was needed to bring the paper to the required level for submission to the Contracting Parties. In particular the paper was confusing, mixing a whole range of different issues and concepts. It was unfortunate that, unlike the fish criteria document, the totality of these proposals had not been circulated beforehand and had thus not benefited from a wide range of prior consultation.

113. Dr Max Finlayson pointed out that particular difficulties stemmed from the fact that the Convention had already developed various tools, such as the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands and the Montreux Record, before any definition on 'ecological character' and 'change in ecological character'. The STRP had therefore been faced with having to work 'backwards' on the problem.

114. Australia supported the concerns expressed by the UK, especially with regard to a lack of clarity in the document. There was also a special problem with the mechanism suggested by the STRP for adding and removing sites to/from the Montreux Record. As currently worded, the draft suggested that the STRP would have a decision-making role. This would not be acceptable to Contracting Parties. The STRP's role was to advise, support, and help; it was not to be judge and jury.

115. Canada supported these comments by Australia.

116. IWRB noted that the issue of monitoring needed careful handling. The current draft was in danger of over-emphasizing monitoring techniques which required financial and personnel resources beyond the reach of most countries.

117. The SG asked participants to provide written comments on the ecological character paper as soon as possible, and in any case, within two weeks. The Bureau would work with Dr Finlayson to redraft the paper and would circulate it to the Standing Committee for further comments, prior to its distribution as a Conference paper.

Decision SC16.5: The Standing Committee requests the Bureau to prepare for submission to the 6th COP new drafts of the papers on fish and fisheries criteria, and on ecological character, in consultation with the concerned STRP members and members of the Standing Committee who have expressed an interest in providing input on this matter.

118. The Standing Committee was then asked to consider future membership of the STRP. Following extensive discussion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.6: The Standing Committee:

1) recommends to the Conference of the Parties to appoint alternate members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel for each region, in order to help ensure fuller participation at STRP meetings, with the proviso that the alternate should only participate when the member was unable to;

2) after consideration of the candidatures submitted by Contracting Parties, recommends the following experts to the Conference of the Parties for election as members and alternates to the STRP for the 1997-1999 triennium:

Region	Proposed Member	Proposed Alternate
Africa	Y. Ntiamoah Baidu (Ghana)	A. Aboubacar (Niger)
Asia	M. Komoda (Japan)	C. Trisal (India)
Eastern Europe	M. Véghe (Hungary)	M. Lisicky (Slovak Rep.)
Neotropics	R. Schlatter (Chile)	P. Bacon (Trinidad & Tobago)
North America	A. Smith (Canada)	M. Cervantes (Mexico)
Oceania	K. Thompson (New Zealand)	pending
Western Europe	F. Letourneux (France)	Pending

3) further recommends that the Conference consider appointing all other candidates submitted by the Contracting Parties as members of a network that should receive all relevant documentation generated for and by the STRP and be invited to provide inputs, as appropriate.

#### Agenda item 10: 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

##### 10(a) Presentation by the Australian Delegation and the Bureau

119. Representatives of the Federal and State Agencies, of the Brisbane City Council and of the NGO Wetlands Alliance made general presentations on preparations for the Conference, followed by a guided visit to the Brisbane Convention Centre, venue for the Conference.

120. Hungary (Chair) expressed the complete satisfaction of the Standing Committee with all aspects of the preparations for the Conference and thanked the Organizing Committee most warmly for all its efforts.

##### 10(b) 25th Anniversary

121. Australia referred to the letters sent by the Federal Environment Minister inviting the Contracting Parties to pledge support to the 25th Anniversary fund. Australia hoped for the full support of other countries in this important initiative, in particular to meet the challenge of implementing the Strategic Plan.

The SG:

122. Highlighted the main activities planned by the Bureau, notably the production of a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary logo, publications on wetlands and biodiversity, and economic evaluation, a French version of the Ramsar manual, and a special issue of the Newsletter publicizing the 25th Anniversary;

123. expressed his appreciation to India for the offer to absorb the cost of printing the book on wetlands and biodiversity, to Switzerland for meeting the costs of producing the Ramsar manual in French, and to the UK for the contribution towards the production of the publication on economic valuation of wetlands.

#### Agenda item 11: Review of Brisbane Conference Programme and Agenda

124. The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor introduced the documentation provided and drew special attention to the series of short interventions on key wetland issues that the Bureau was proposing for inclusion during Plenary Sessions.

General Discussion:

125. Addressed the possible topics for presentation during Plenary Sessions: water resources management; toxic pollution and wetlands; education, public awareness and training; conservation of migratory birds; underrepresented wetland types; MedWet as an example of regional cooperation; buffer zones around wetlands; indigenous wise use of wetlands. In conclusion the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.7: The Standing Committee endorses the Bureau's proposal to include five short presentations in Plenary Sessions during the Conference on topical issues not covered in the agenda of the Plenary Sessions or the Technical Sessions, and requests the Bureau to take into account the input received from the Standing Committee when finalizing the list and content of these presentations.

126. Hungary (Chair) raised the issue of the difficulties encountered by the Credentials Committee at the Kushiro Conference and proposed that steps were being taken to ensure that Government delegates arrived with adequate credentials.

127. Senegal, having acted as Chair of the Credentials Committee at the Kushiro Conference, explained the difficulties encountered.

128. Following discussion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.8: The Standing Committee requests the Bureau to issue a Diplomatic Notification stressing that credentials are essential and that they should be signed by the Head of State or Government or by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Agenda item 12: Review of Brisbane Conference Draft Documentation

12(a) Strategic Plan 1997-2002

129. Kenya (Chair of the Strategic Planning Subgroup) reported that the Strategic Planning Subgroup had met in Brisbane on 8 and 9 September and produced a revised draft of the Strategic Plan, which had been distributed to participants in the present meeting.

General discussion:

1 30. The new draft was discussed page by page and a number of amendments were agreed. On this basis the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.9: The Standing Committee requests the Bureau to finalize the draft of the Strategic Plan 1997-2002 on the basis of the discussions held at this meeting and circulate it as a final draft for consideration at the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

12(b) Programme 1997-1999

131. The SG explained that the document before the Standing Committee had been prepared on the basis of an earlier draft of the Strategic Plan. A new Programme document should be prepared on the basis of the final draft of the Strategic Plan approved by the Standing Committee.

General discussion:

132. It was noted that the Strategic Plan shows the long-term and medium-term objectives and the actions required to attain them. It was a comprehensive description of what is necessary for optimal implementation of the Convention. It was possible however that the scarcity of available resources would impede the implementation of the whole range of tasks described in the Plan, including those assigned to the Bureau. It would be necessary to set out priorities in order to keep within agreed budgetary allocations.

133. After a general exchange of views on this matter, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.10: The Standing Committee agrees that the Secretary General should prepare a draft Programme 1997-1999, on the basis of the final draft of the Strategic Plan, for circulation as a Conference paper. The paper should include an indication of the staff time and resources that will be devoted by the Bureau to each operational objective where Bureau involvement is indicated. This allocation could be made on the basis of calculating the number of man/woman hours over the triennium and the indicative cost of each hour (total triennial budget amount divided by total number of man/woman hours).

12(c) Budget 1997-1999

134. The SG introduced the 'Additional Note by the Secretary General' tabled at the meeting, in which the SG brought to the attention of the Standing Committee his concern regarding the level of funding specified in the proposed 1997-1999 budget, circulated in advance to the Standing Committee, and explained the reasons for tabling a new indicative budget.

135. Kenya (Chair of the Subgroup on Finance) introduced the analysis and recommendations of the Subgroup on Finance concerning this issue.

136. The Subgroup noted that the projected budget prepared by the SG for the next triennium, in the light of additional information, implied a 49% increase over the current triennium. The Subgroup considered the projected budget accurate and reasonable. The only significant new item was the proposal to recruit a Development Assistance Officer, whose main role would be to liaise with donor agencies - in line with the recommendations of the draft Strategic Plan.

137. The Subgroup did not consider a subscription increase of almost 50% acceptable. It accepted the SG's assurance that large cuts in the budget could not be achieved without reducing the quality and quantity of the Bureau's work, but noted that he would examine the budget carefully to see if some savings or reallocations could be achieved.

138. The Subgroup further noted the initiative by the Government of Australia inviting

Contracting Parties to pledge financial support to the Convention totaling SFR 25 million. It was much too early to say whether this initiative, coupled with the challenge posed by the Strategic Plan, would attract significant levels of funding.

139. The Subgroup accordingly recommended to the Standing Committee that a subscription increase of no more than 25% be put to the Conference, whilst recognizing that the proposed budget was required to maintain the current levels of activity, subject to any savings or reallocations that might be achieved.

140. The Secretary General should be asked to set out the implications (including staff cuts in the Bureau) of (i) a subscription increase of no more than 25%, and (ii) a cost-of-living increase of approximately 13%, both of which should be reported to the Contracting Parties in the Conference papers.

141. The Committee's previous decision to recommend to the Conference to determine Parties' subscriptions by following the United Nations scale should be reaffirmed.

142. Germany was of the opinion that the draft budget should at least incorporate the following elements: options allowing for rates of increase markedly below 25%, with one of these options representing an increase that would merely cover a cost-of-living increase; options with and without the recruitment of the Development Assistance Officer; and comparisons with the budgets of previous triennia. A new draft budget should also propose and describe measures and instruments which would help to avoid new and unexpected budget deficits.

General discussion:

143. Germany, Canada, France, Japan, Austria, Switzerland and the USA expressed their serious concern that a new budget proposal had been tabled by the new Secretary General, as well as their severe misgivings over the percentage increase in the new indicative budget;

144. recalling the extensive debate on the budget increase at the Kushiro Conference, it was recommended that every effort should be made to ensure that the budget discussion at the Brisbane Conference be more focused; this could be achieved if regional consensus had already been reached beforehand;

145. the Standing Committee's responsibility to recommend a specific budget option to the Conference was re-emphasized;

146. there was general consensus on the important role of the regional technical officers and on the need to try to include these positions in the core budget rather than to rely on more fluctuating project funds;

147. opinions were divided as to whether a penalty should be introduced for those Contracting Parties failing to submit their annual contributions, e.g. restricting their Conference voting rights;

148. there was an exchange of views on the possibility of raising the minimum annual contribution to be paid by all countries to SFR 1,000 (the minimum in the current 1993-1995 triennium being SFR 223 per year). Some Regional Representatives were prepared to take up

the matter with concerned countries in their regions.

149. Taking into account the recommendations of the Subgroup on Finance and on the basis of this discussion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.11: The Standing Committee:

1) requests the Secretary General to prepare a Conference paper addressing the budget for the 1997-1999 triennium, with three options, clearly indicating the implications of each option for Bureau output: Option 1, with a 49% increase over the current triennial budget; Option 2, with a 25% increase; and Option 3 with a 13% (cost-of-living) increase. This paper should be circulated to the Contracting Parties as soon as possible to allow ample time for consultations;

2) invites the Subgroup on Finance established at the present meeting of the Standing Committee to continue functioning and advise the Secretary General (by correspondence) in the preparation and presentation of the above-mentioned Conference paper. Understanding that Kenya has already made a significant contribution in time and resources to the work of the Standing Committee, for which the Committee is most thankful, the United Kingdom is Invited to consider taking up the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance;

3) requests the Subgroup on Finance to seek reactions from Contracting Parties to the Conference paper referred to in 1) above and to hold a meeting in Brisbane on 17 March 1996 to prepare a recommendation to the Standing Committee on the budget for the next triennium;

4) decides to consider, at its meeting on 18 March 1996 (see Decision 16.22), the advice of the Subgroup on Finance in order to adopt a firm recommendation to the Conference on the budget for the next triennium.

150. Kenya introduced the analysis and recommendations of the Subgroup on Finance concerning the establishment of a Reserve Fund on the basis of the documentation submitted.

151 The Subgroup had noted the previous Standing Committee meeting's request that the Bureau should consider whether such a Fund should be established, and on what basis. The Bureau had recommended that a Fund should be set up to cover items such as exchange losses and unemployment indemnities payable to former non-Swiss staff, and that it should amount to SFR 260,000. This was in line with the auditors' advice.

152. After discussion, and on the basis of the Subgroup recommendation, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.12: The Standing Committee:

1) decides to recommend to the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties that:

- a) a Reserve Fund should be established with no implications for the core budget;
- b) the Fund's sources of income should be:

- i) savings which result from limiting expenditures or efficiencies realized within the budget of the previous fiscal year;
  - ii) Contracting Party subscriptions that had been written off as bad debts;
  - iii) interest earned on funds received, with the approval of the donor.
- c) the Bureau should be authorized to seek funds from a donor at a level of SFR 300,000, in the form of an interest-free loan, until the Fund balance reached an equivalent amount from other sources, when the loan should be repaid;
- d) the Fund should be administered as set out in the document submitted by the Bureau to the Standing Committee;

2) requests the Bureau to prepare, on the basis of 1) above, an Annex to the budget paper to be submitted to the Conference.

#### 12(d) Venue of the next Conference of the Parties

153. New Zealand introduced the paper on options for funding the 1999 and future Conferences and noted that the Subgroup on Finance had considered the paper and observed that no firm offer had as yet been received to host the 1999 Conference. If a developing country was to consider hosting the Conference, it was likely that financial assistance would be needed, at least to cover the Bureau's costs related to the preparation and running of the Conference, which would amount to some SFR 800,000.

#### General discussion:

154. A clear indication emerged that, for the time being there was no consensus for including the Bureau's costs related to the Meetings of the Conference of the Parties in the core budget, since this would imply a further increase in the subscriptions.

155. In conclusion, the Standing Committee took the following:

#### Decision SC16.13: The Standing Committee:

- 1) decides that an annex to the Conference budget paper should be added, on the basis of the paper prepared by New Zealand for the Standing Committee, on options for financing future COPs;
- 2) requests the Bureau to compile a paper detailing the basic costs of convening a Conference of the Parties, which could be distributed at the Conference as an information paper.

156. Australia recalled the SFR 25 million challenge issued by Senator Faulkner as a means of supporting implementation of the Strategic Plan. All members of the Standing Committee were urged to promote the initiative within their regions in an effort to reach the target. This was a once-only opportunity in celebration of the Convention's 25th Anniversary; the opportunity should not be missed.

157. On the basis of this intervention, the Standing Committee took the following

#### Decision SC16.14: The Standing Committee:

1) acknowledges with gratitude the initiative of Australia to invite Contracting Parties to make pledges, which would be announced on the gala evening to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention to take place on 23 March 1996 within the framework of the Brisbane Conference, to a SFR 25 million fund for the implementation of the proposed 1997-2002 Strategic Plan;

2) endorses this important initiative;

3) invites Contracting Parties to consider a positive response to the Australian initiative.

#### 12(e) Status of submission of National Reports and Information from Regional Representatives

158. The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor reported on the timely receipt of national reports for the forthcoming Conference (27 reports had already been submitted) and presented a proposal on how to submit these reports to the next Conference of the Parties.

##### Decision SC16.15: The Standing Committee:

1) endorses the Bureau's proposal that, on the basis of the national reports submitted by the CPs, overviews of no more than 10 pages for each of the seven regions should be prepared for submission to the Conference in the official languages. The Bureau's Technical Officers would be responsible for drafting each regional overview and the draft would then be circulated to the Regional Representatives for comment and completion. The overviews would be submitted to the Conference under the responsibility of each Regional Representative;

2) decides that national reports would be circulated to countries within each region, but not globally, even though all reports would be available to the Contracting Parties upon request.

159. The Bureau accepted with appreciation New Zealand's offer to prepare the regional overview for Oceania.

#### 12(f) Technical Session Overview Papers

160. The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor referred the meeting to the supporting documentation with details of the programme for each of the Technical Sessions. Each of these Sessions would be organized by a Bureau staff member in conjunction with a facilitator or coordinator. Each session would have a clear product, e.g. a specific publication or a recommendation to be put forward to the Plenary.

##### General discussion:

161. There was general feeling that each Session was trying to tackle too many complex issues and would therefore not allow adequate time for detailed discussion.

162. In conclusion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.16: The Standing Committee approves the general thrust of the

Technical Sessions as proposed by the Bureau and requests the Bureau to refine further the preparations for each one, in the light of the input received during discussion.

#### 12(g) Other papers

Decision SC16.17: The Standing Committee authorizes the Bureau to finalize, as appropriate, and circulate as Conference papers the following documents presented in draft form:

- Rules of Procedure
- Admission of Observers
- Report of the Standing Committee
- Ramsar Convention Bureau Triennial Report (which should be merged with the proposed document entitled "Report of the Convention Bureau")
- Oceania Day - Overview Paper

#### Agenda item 13: Review of Brisbane Conference Draft Resolutions and Recommendations

163. The SG noted that draft resolutions and recommendations were submitted with the Standing Committee documentation in relation to several agenda items: financial and budgetary matters; national wetland inventories and candidate sites for listing; information on threats to listed sites; environmental impact assessment; guidelines on environmental impact assessment as an aid to the wise use of wetlands; adoption of specific criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance based on fish and fisheries; involving local people in the management of Ramsar wetlands; and Secretary General matters. In addition, the following draft resolutions and recommendations were also distributed to the Standing Committee. establishing a network of listed sites along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway; early warning systems to detect changes to the ecological character of Ramsar sites and other wetlands; promoting the establishment of further wetland manager training programmes; establishment of regionally based Ramsar Officers; conservation and wise use of coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves (or coastal zones); and thanks to the Australian hosts. Finally, there was an additional recommendation submitted by Canada on global mires and peatlands.

Decision SC16.18: The Standing Committee agrees that the draft Resolutions and Recommendations received so far should be distributed with the Conference papers, provided that they have been sponsored by at least one Contracting Party. The sponsor(s) of each draft Resolution and Recommendation should appear after the title.

#### Agenda item 14: Approval of 1996 Business Plan

164. Hungary (Chair) noted that the Business Plan had been prepared under the supervision of the former Interim Secretary General, who had offered his expertise and assisted the Bureau already in 1994 to set up the previous plan; the 1996 Business Plan - built under the present conditions and Bureau structure - seemed appropriate. If conditions and/or structures were to change, the new SG of course would have to make the necessary adjustments.

165. The SG noted that he had not been able to give the Business Plan his full attention before it was dispatched to the Standing Committee, only two weeks after he had taken over his position; and proposed that, as he became more familiar with the work of the Bureau, he would announce any necessary changes at the next Standing Committee meeting.

166. Switzerland proposed that the document might be improved by presenting the triennium on one page in order to see more clearly the development of the Bureau's workplan.

Decision SC16.19: The Standing Committee approves the Bureau's Business Plan for 1996 and takes note of the Secretary General's statement on the matter.

Agenda item 15: Review of Convention Projects outside the Wetland Conservation Fund

15(a) Review of project activities

167. The SG drew the attention of the Standing Committee to a document and a chart summarizing the implementation and financial status of all projects managed by the Bureau, noting that the amount of project money in the bank at 31 July 1995 amounted to SFR 2,140,764.

15(b) Funding of Projects in Countries whose economies are in transition

168. The Bureau's Technical Officer for Europe tabled a paper on this matter. In accordance with Kushiuro Resolution 5.8, the Bureau had continued to seek financial assistance for activities in countries whose economies are in transition. Very limited success had been met in securing funding through the Ramsar Bureau for activities in these countries, which had no access to the Wetland Conservation Fund. Consequently, the Bureau was recommending that a proposal be submitted to the next COP to provide such access.

169. Following discussion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.20: The Standing Committee:

1) notes the analysis made by the Bureau in the paper entitled 'Funding of projects in countries whose economies are undergoing transition' and accepts the recommendation therein that in accordance with the OECD categories for development assistance, countries with economies in transition (Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, and Ukraine) should have access to the Wetland Conservation Fund on an equal basis to developing countries of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Neotropical region;

2) requests that the substance of this decision and its rationale be incorporated in any draft resolution concerning the WCF.

Agenda item 16: Wetland Conservation Fund

The Bureau's Senior Policy Advisor:

170. Introduced the documentation concerning the projects that had been submitted for funding under the WCF; taking into account the technical and conservation merits as well as policy and regional priorities concerning the 29 proposals that were received, the Bureau had drawn up a tentative list of priorities for the consideration of the Standing Committee: 13 projects had been included in the Priority A list, 11 projects had been included in the Priority

B list, and the rest in the Priority C list;

171. noted that since the list of priorities had been compiled, the Oceanian region had decided to submit a joint package, to the value of SFR 50,000, covering preparatory projects for the accession to the Convention of five South Pacific states; if this package was included under 'Priority A' in place of separate projects for the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, this would bring the total cost of projects in that category to about SFR 410,000. The total amount available for distribution was only SFR 368,870;

172. noted that the 29 projects submitted for funding amounted to SFR 817,150 (not including the 10% administration charge).

173. The UK hoped to be able to support directly one or two of the projects included under Priority A; this might help reduce the difference between the funds available and the amount needed to cover the whole of that category.

174. The SG tabled a paper conveying to the Standing Committee the analysis of the Bureau Policy and Technical Staff Group of the functioning of the WCF and a series of recommendations on possible changes in the way that the Fund operates, including a proposal to change its name to 'Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF)'

175. Uruguay conveyed the request of the Neotropical region that projects submitted to the WCF should be reviewed by the STRP in line with Resolution 5.5 of the 5th Meeting of the COP.

176. Following extensive discussion, the Standing Committee took the following:

Decision SC16.21: The Standing Committee:

1) decides that the funds available to the WCF for project funding in 1995 shall be allocated to all 'Priority A' projects and that the amount requested for each project shall be reduced by a standard percentage, if the sum available is not enough to fund all projects in full (including the 10% administration charge). The final result of the UK's and possibly other Parties' efforts to fund some of the other projects directly shall be taken into account before allocating the available funds;

2) concerning 'Priority B' projects the Standing Committee, having discussed the following options:

a) that the projects are of high technical quality, and that the Bureau would certify to any outside funding agency that they are worthy of funding (without the Bureau itself devoting time to seeking such funding sources);

b) that the projects are of high technical quality, and that the Bureau will actively seek alternative funding sources outside the Wetland Conservation Fund for these projects;

c) that the projects are of high technical quality, and that they should be funded from Wetland Conservation Fund sources, as additional income for the WCF is acquired in the course of the coming months;

decides to address the issue again and take a firm decision at the next meeting.

3) decides that a draft resolution on the WCF should be prepared for the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties taking into account the Bureau's recommendations. The draft resolution will be prepared on behalf of the Standing Committee by an ad hoc group composed of Japan, Jordan, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Senegal, the UK, Uruguay, and USA, with the Secretary General as ex officio member in charge of preparing the first draft text. The ad hoc group will work by correspondence.

Uruguay:

177. In spite of the fact that the Neotropical Region joined in the consensus concerning funding for the 1995 WCF projects, the Region wanted to put on record its firm disagreement - as expressed during the debate - with the principle of providing WCF funding for projects from countries that are not yet Contracting Parties, even in cases where the projects were to facilitate preparations for accession to the Convention, when projects submitted by Contracting Parties remained unfunded because of lack of resources in the Fund.

178. New Zealand thanked Uruguay for the goodwill shown by joining the consensus on funding of the 1995 WCF projects

Agenda item 17: Next Meetings of the Standing Committee

Decision SC16.22: The Standing Committee:

1) decides that this Committee should meet on 18 March 1996, just prior to the start of the Brisbane Conference;

2) proposes that a brief meeting of the new Standing Committee should be organized at the end of the Brisbane Conference, on 27 March 1996, with a first full meeting to be held in Gland in the last quarter of the year.

Agenda item 18: Any Other Business

179. India announced that a letter from the Minister of Environment of India had been received in Brisbane with a formal invitation and commitment to host the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in India in 1999.

Hungary (Chair):

180. Thanked the representative of India warmly for this welcome news and asked the Bureau to liaise with the Government of India for further discussions;

181. noted that the final decision on the venue for the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties would be taken by the Brisbane Conference.

182. Senegal thanked India for this indication of support to the Convention but reiterated the interest of the African Region to host the next Conference of the Parties. To that effect some

countries of the region were actively considering the possibility of issuing an invitation to do so.

#### Agenda item 19: Closing Remarks

Hungary (Chair):

183. Closed the meeting by reviewing the progress made in what had been a busy and, at times, daunting term of office;

184. noted that whilst the Conference of the Parties would be the final judge, substantive work had been carried out on developing the Strategic Plan, Bureau Business Plan, operation of the Wetland Conservation Fund, supervision of the STRP, supervision of the 1994-96 budget, development of the next triennial budget, and handling of difficult personnel issues;

185. expressed gratitude for the support that she had received from fellow Standing Committee members whilst carrying out her duties, also thanking the STRP, partner organizations, and the Bureau, especially the former Interim Secretary General, Mr Jim McCuaig, and his successor, Mr Delmar Blasco;

186. thanked the Australian hosts for their excellent work and hospitality throughout the present meeting, and for the remarkable efforts being put into preparations for the Brisbane Conference, which would be held in just six months' time.