

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

24th Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 29 November – 2 December 1999

Report of the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Stephen Hunter (Australia), Chair of the Standing Committee**, welcomed the members and observers and summarized the important issues on the agenda of this meeting. He paid tribute to the work of his predecessor in the Chair, Louise Lakos of Hungary.
2. **Maritta Koch-Weser, Director General of IUCN**, welcomed the participants to the IUCN headquarters and pledged IUCN's continued support for the work of the Convention, which thereby helps to achieve the mission of IUCN as well. She argued that the environmental battle is being lost and called for renewed efforts, particularly on the ground, offering the Ramsar Parties IUCN's assistance in the field as well as at the global level. She noted the success of the World Commission on Large Dams in bridging gaps between formerly irreconcilable interests; she looked forward to the new guidelines which the WCD will issue in June 2000 and asked for the participants' favorable consideration. She applauded the Bureau's progress in creating links with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and noted Ramsar's participation in drafting the 'Water in the 21st Century' vision to be considered at the 2nd World Water Forum. Ms Koch-Weser asked for Ramsar assistance in promoting a mountain agenda, especially in advance of the UN Year of the Mountains in 2002, and urged greater cooperation between Ramsar and the Convention on Migratory Species. She observed that real progress requires adequate resources and called for more solid funding mechanisms for Ramsar implementation; conservation generally, she said, is far too dependent upon project-based, short-term funding, and sustainable revenue streams, including the private sector, must be created.
3. The **Secretary General** welcomed the participants and noted that, in view of the needs of this expanded Standing Committee, the Bureau has been able to offer simultaneous interpretation in the three working languages. He urged the members to build upon the Convention's rapid progress of recent years.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

4. **The Chair** proposed deferring two agenda items until Thursday in order to benefit from the presence of representatives from the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Peat Society, an observer body of the STRP. The **USA** proposed that a discussion of the high rate of turnover of Standing Committee members after each COP be added as Agenda item 13.3 under 'Other business'. With those amendments, the proposed agenda was adopted.

Agenda item 3: Appointment of representatives in the Standing Committee

5. **The Chair** noted that in Resolution VII.1 the COP asked the Contracting Parties elected to serve in the Standing Committee to specify via diplomatic channels the names of the officers who would be representing them, and a reminder was sent by diplomatic notification on 7 June 1999. The Secretary General drew attention to problems that have arisen in the past when the names of representatives in the SC have not been confirmed by the Foreign Ministry and asked for action on that issue on the part of some CPs that had not yet complied with this requirement.

Agenda item 4: Admission of Observers

6. It was noted that by virtue of Resolution VII.1, Contracting Party observers and permanent observers do not require admission. Representatives of the Dominican Republic and the Global Environment Centre were admitted as observers.

Agenda item 5: Statements by International Organization Partners

7. **John O'Sullivan, BirdLife International**, observed that in April 1999 BirdLife and Ramsar concluded a Memorandum of Cooperation which defined their working relationship. He applauded the COP7's toolkit of guidelines as a real achievement but cautioned that the real challenge is to make these tools work – they must not remain on the shelves but should become dog-eared with use. He recalled that at BirdLife's 5-yearly international conference, the Ramsar Deputy Secretary General highlighted the links between Ramsar's 1000+ sites and BirdLife's network of over 5000 Important Bird Areas. He was pleased that the DSG had noted that Ramsar criteria provided for non-migratory birds as well, and non-waterbirds, and he looked forward to exploring this further. He particularly anticipated SC24's discussion of the STRP meeting's emphasis on the site boundary and compensation issues. In regard to Bureau staffing, he noted that there has been considerable change and urged understanding as new staff settle in.
8. **Robin Schaap, Wetlands International**, congratulated the Convention on the success of COP7 and pledged continued support for Ramsar's objectives. She cited WI's mission to provide sound scientific baselines and implementation of the wise use principle on the ground, and drew attention to WI's draft on correlating WI activities on a line-item basis to the Ramsar Work Plan, which also proved to be a valuable tool for identifying gaps in Wetlands International's work programme. She pointed to special areas of collaboration: a) further expansion of the Ramsar Sites Database and its products in cooperation with others, b) further work on the Global Review of Wetland Resources project, c) widening WI's technical role on the Vision for the List, especially on under-represented wetland types, and d) development of more training opportunities for wetland managers. Ms Schaap sought SC24 endorsement of a major initiative on Asian wetland inventory, and described WI's work on the Ramsar Sites Database, both on posting more graphical material on the Web and on cooperating with the CIESIN data gateway project. She urged that SC24 support creation of a Conventions Support Officer position based at Wetlands International-Asia Pacific in Kuala Lumpur to work in coordination with the Bureau's Regional Coordinator -- cofinancing is being sought for this WI position. Ms Schaap renewed Wetlands International's pledge of support for Ramsar objectives; she regretted the loss of Dr Nick Davidson but was pleased to see him joining the Bureau, and she thanked Dr Bill Phillips for his contributions to the Convention's mission.
9. **Chris Tydeman, WWF International**, anticipated fruitful cooperation with the Bureau and the Parties and referred to common targets between the Convention's Work Plan and the WWF Living Waters Campaign launched at Ramsar COP7. He faulted the World Water Vision process as technocratic and for, in early drafts, referring to ecosystems merely as alternative uses of water and failing to mention Ramsar. He welcomed Ramsar's partnerships with other conventions, but stressed that given Ramsar's growing role in global water efforts, it is no longer tenable to cobble together small budgets at each COP, that long-term resource flows must be established for the Convention. He echoed BirdLife International's attention to staffing and site boundary issues and pledged WWF's intention to work even more closely with the Convention on issues of mutual concern.

Agenda item 6: The Secretary General's report

10. **The SG** began by welcoming the accession of **Belarus** as the Convention's 117th Contracting Party, and proceeded to highlight only a few portions of DOC. SC24-2, the Secretary General's Report. He sought advice on funding possibilities for the proposed Participatory Management

Advisory Service project (¶14) and drew attention to the proposed Private Sector Working Group on Wetlands (¶20), following up on the successes of the Evian Project with the Danone Group, seeking not only to obtain additional financial resources but also to influence the impacts that the private sector can often have upon wetlands. He expressed disappointment with the Contracting Parties' responses on naming focal points for the Communication, Education, and Public Awareness network and sought the SC members' help in getting designations.

11. **The SG** drew attention to the mock-up of one of the Ramsar Handbooks (from the 'Ramsar Toolkit'), which should be published in English in January and in the other Ramsar languages not long thereafter. With help from the Government of Spain, they will be distributed free of charge to all interested parties. The Toolkit will also be sent, with the new Ramsar video and an attractively-produced 'Ministerial Briefing' brochure, to high-level officials in all the Parties. He invited translation of these materials into other languages. He briefed the meeting on World Wetlands Day preparations and sought input on 'suggested themes' for WWD 2001 and 2002. He mentioned that the Ramsar Information Pack is being renovated, both in format and in content, and described the two new Ramsar videos, that based upon the BBC Earth Report show (all three languages) and the renovated COP6 'history of Ramsar' film (English only). He described the Ramsar Web site as the Convention's key instrument for public information and mentioned the Bureau's efforts to find business sponsorship to help take some of the daily pressure off the Bureau staff who update the Web daily outside of working hours. He thanked the Government of the Netherlands for another successful RIZA-run course in wetland management in Lelystad.
12. **The SG** pointed to the Bureau's efforts to follow up on COP demands for adequate Ramsar Site data and pledged to continue pursuing unfulfilled obligations, and he noted that the Bureau is eagerly awaiting news of the 398 new designations pledged at COP7. He alerted SC24 to recent work on the new, more ambitious Joint Work Plan with the CBD, and described the IUCN paper on 'wetlands and climate change', distributed to the UNFCCC's COP5 in the six UN languages, as the most significant step since Ramsar COP7 towards international cooperation. At the UNFCCC's COP5, the SBSTA (Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice) requested the UNFCCC secretariat to work with the Ramsar Bureau to advance the IUCN paper and submit the results to the next SBSTA; the UNFCCC secretariat now has the mandate to progress further cooperation with Ramsar, and linking wetlands to climate change mitigation will help to spread the Ramsar message of the importance of wetlands much more widely. The Bureau is also working with the Africa-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and will ask the SC24 to endorse a proposal to GEF for advancing this agreement. Discussions are under way with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. The Secretary General paid particular tribute to the nearly-daily cooperation with the Convention's International Organization Partners, and particularly to IUCN for its services at the daily level; he mentioned the Bureau's new memoranda of cooperation with the Society of Wetland Scientists and Eurosite, and participation in the 'Millennium Assessment' being led by the World Resources Institute.
13. **The SG** introduced the Bureau's new Regional Coordinators, **Margarita Astrálaga** and **Tobias Salathé**, and expressed his gratitude for the contributions of the DSG, Dr **Phillips**, and the Regional Coordinator for Asia, Ms **D'Cruz**. He welcomed Dr **Nick Davidson**, who joins the Bureau in February as Deputy Secretary General, and noted recruitment plans for the new Asia officer. He shared the Partners' concern about staff turnover but expressed great pleasure in the competence of the new officers recently appointed.
14. To a query by **Hungary**, the **SG** expressed disappointment that only the UK and Turkey had responded to the Convention's request for information on invasive species (Resolution VII.14), but vowed to continue pressing the issue. Also in response to **Hungary**, he sought ideas on business candidates to be invited to join the proposed 'Private Sector Working Group': an invitation letter will be insufficient, entrée via the Administrative Authorities will be required. **The USA** suggested that the NGOs should be more involved in this process, since they have more

experience in working with the private sector, and the SG indicated that progress was being made in this direction but negotiations are still a bit too delicate to be described publicly.

15. **Japan** questioned why DOC. SC24-2 described the Convention's finances as 'healthy' when so many Contracting Parties have not yet paid their dues in full. **The SG** responded that the dues in arrears are important in principle, but not so much in practice, since the arrears of most of the Parties concerned are not very significant in monetary terms. 'Healthy' means 'not in the red'; the Bureau has suggested penalties for non-payment of dues, but past Standing Committee meetings could not reach consensus on that issue. **The SG** is not in favor of waiving dues, but would agree to making arrangements to help those Parties with large arrears to get out of debt. Despite all that, the Convention's accounts continue to be positive.
16. **Togo** lauded the Bureau's efforts in providing simultaneous interpretation for the benefit of non-English speaking members of the Standing Committee and requested, in future, translation of SC documents as well, if additional financial resources were to become available. **Spain** thanked the Bureau for excellent documentation and interpretation and announced recent efforts to facilitate the establishment of the new MedWet Coordination Function, noting that an offer from Spain will be confirmed in the near future. Spain also expressed satisfaction that its financial contribution will allow publication of the 'Ramsar Toolkit'. **IUCN** noted that the Bureau and IUCN are working to gain funding for the invasive species initiative (¶28 of the SG's report) but only half of the required SFR 220,000 has been pledged so far. IUCN noted that the Ramsar progress in working with the UNFCCC (¶63) is also a breakthrough for IUCN and a fine example of cooperative endeavors.
17. **Discussion:** Concerning simultaneous interpretation at the SC24 meeting, **France** and **Argentina** expressed thanks for the initiative. **Japan** agreed that participatory management is important but was concerned about the financial implications; the Government of Japan offers capacity-building training courses for mid-level officers and called upon other Parties to do the same, and requested that the Bureau take these existing opportunities into consideration. The **Slovak Republic** inquired about Ramsar contacts with the Helsinki convention on transboundary rivers, and **the SG** noted that no progress had been made on this issue since COP7. **Armenia** reported on recent opportunities for training in Eastern Europe, with the benefit of Ramsar/Evian funding assistance. **Costa Rica** offered further detail on its recent presidential decree, following up on Ramsar COP7, creating a high-level Wetland Council (including academics, citizens, and government personnel) with the goal of ensuring that COP7 Resolutions are implemented within the Contracting Party.

Agenda item 7.1: Bureau Work Plan 2000

18. The **Deputy Secretary General** pointed out that COP7 mandated the SC to look carefully at the Bureau's tasks relative to the available resources. Accordingly, the proposed Bureau Work Plan indicates what the Bureau believes can be accomplished with existing core resources and, in shaded boxes, what can only be achieved with additional resources. 1) The River Basins Initiative is designed to progress the COP7 guidelines on integrated river basin management, but needs further resources. 2) The proposed Participatory Management Advisory Service will require additional resources in order to become a reality. 3) The Bureau is working with IUCN on an important proposal on economic valuation and incentives, which will be a key discussion at the CBD's SBSTTA in Montreal next year. 4) The Convention's Outreach Programme is also largely shaded, because the COP's plan was extremely ambitious, but the Evian Initiative is proving to be extremely helpful in these efforts. 5) Wetlands International's efforts in seeking funding for the Global Wetland Managers' Training Initiative are extremely welcome. And 6) Wetlands International's Global Review on Wetland Inventory work on inventory, coupled with the draft MOU with the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University, USA, will make Ramsar site data available for sophisticated electronic interrogation at very little cost to the Convention.

19. The **DSG** noted that if the proposed Development Assistance Officer position was approved by the SC, a number of shaded boxes would become feasible, and that Wetlands International's complementary work plan will fulfil some other objectives. The DSG observed that increasing demands upon the Bureau, caused by an increasing number of Contracting Parties and designated sites and an increasing number of mandates from the COP, are inevitably causing an erosion in the services that the Bureau is able to fulfil, especially to the developing countries. It is not physically possible for four Regional Coordinators to serve the COP's target of 150 Parties, and this is already providing the occasion for some frustration amongst the Parties. More Bureau personnel will be required to continue the Bureau's services at the same level.

20. **Wetlands International** provided further detail on a) the Joint Work Plan concept (see ¶8 above), b) the proposed new training initiative, c) the Global Review of Wetland Resources project development, and d) further progress with the graphical profiles on the Ramsar Database and the parallel development of value-added products in cooperation with the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN).

21. **France** noted that, when these initiatives have been approved, it remained essential that the Parties implement them fully. France further suggested that the Bureau seek contacts with UNITAR, which is already conducting training courses in the field. The **SG** noted that preliminary contacts have been made with UNITAR and will be advanced soon. **Japan** suggested that the tasks considered in the Work Plan as unlikely to be fulfilled without additional resources should simply be deleted from the document, but **the SG** felt that, since they were mandated by the COP, they should not simply be forgotten and should better be kept on the larger agenda. **IUCN** suggested collaboration between the proposed River Basins Initiative and IUCN's proposals on mountain ecosystems, and will discuss this with the Bureau soon. He noted the absence of any mention of the World Commission on Dams in the Bureau's Work Plan and urged a Ramsar presence in the forthcoming International Dams Forum; **the DSG** noted that these are present in the proposed Work Plan of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and thus were omitted from the Bureau's Plan.

22. **Faizal Parish, Global Environment Centre**, described the evolution of the River Basins Initiative and the proposed launch at CBD's COP5 in Nairobi next May. He welcomed suggestions and linkages and expressed the need for further resources in order for developing countries to participate. He provided a feedback questionnaire for SC24 members to make suggestions.

23. **Spain** expressed interest in the planned River Basins Initiative and suggested that contacts be made with the appropriate authorities in Spain for the selection of the pilot sites, and **Costa Rica** suggested 'Living Rivers' as a theme for World Wetlands Day 2001. Costa Rica expressed a wish to include the Tempisque River as a pilot study.

24. **Hungary** inquired why invasive species were not mentioned in the Bureau Work Plan, and the **DSG** explained that this issue is included in the proposed STRP Work Plan instead. **Hungary** urged SC members and other Administrative Authorities to be proactive and initiate dialogue with the focal points for the other conventions within their governments. The **DSG** seconded that and noted that at the UNFCCC COP5 few delegates had any awareness of their Ramsar counterparts within their governments (though that has been rapidly changing within the CBD). The **Islamic Republic of Iran** suggested that the technical capacity of the secretariat should be strengthened with additional personnel, so that it could then participate more actively in projects. **Iran** also suggested that the Convention should solicit contributions in kind, rather than only in cash, perhaps through the establishment of regional training centres and by providing experts, etc. **Togo** agreed with Iran's remarks, noting that the increased load of more Contracting Parties, and the new fish criteria, significantly increased the Bureau's work load.

25. **The USA** pointed out that, though training is expressed as a priority, it has little presence in the proposed Work Plan. Besides the Wetlands International initiative, many more ideas might be suggested, though of course the Bureau by itself cannot provide training throughout the world. **The USA** noted that the summary of the proposed work plan of the Bureau's Regional Coordinator for the Americas includes three visits to the Caribbean and none to the mainland continent, and since a majority of the states in the Americas are already members of the Convention, this might represent an imbalance of priorities. The proposed Panama City of Knowledge is mentioned only once in the Work Plan and perhaps should receive a higher priority. **The SG** agreed with the notion of an increased emphasis on training, though the Bureau itself cannot provide that. He pointed out that the proposed priority on increasing Ramsar membership in the Caribbean and amongst Small Island Developing States is a repeated mandate from the COP. He expressed the Bureau's eagerness to work with Panama on the City of Knowledge project but noted that at present the next steps were up to the Panama Government.
26. **Panama** announced that the former military base has nearly been readied for occupation by the proposed Centre, and that the new Government of Panama installed last September has given instructions to the mission in Geneva to sign a letter of intent with the Ramsar Bureau. Following this, interested Contracting Parties in the region will be contacted within the next few weeks, in order to establish the Centre in the first half of the year 2000. **Costa Rica** offered to assist in the work of the Panama Centre, by providing field experience, for example, to complement the students' classroom programmes.
27. **Uganda** desired to see how this year's Bureau Work Plan would phase into the mandated tasks over the triennium, and hoped to see training and capacity building remain a high priority. It would be good if the Work Plan showed the order of planned events -- which tasks must be accomplished before others can be undertaken.
28. **Trinidad and Tobago**, responding to the USA's suggestions, noted that though the Caribbean area is small, its wetlands are vulnerable and should be considered 'hot spots'. Training for wetland managers in the Caribbean needs more emphasis, as does wetland inventory. He called for more communication to the political leaders in the Caribbean area, in order to increase Ramsar membership.
29. **The Chair** summarized the discussion of the Bureau's proposed Work Plan by noting that, even with shading to indicate current feasibility, it is extraordinarily ambitious; that greater emphasis upon training would be desirable, and not only in the Neotropics; that the travel priorities for the Neotropics should be reviewed; and that SC members should assist in seeking new membership in the Convention. The Chair suggested that the SC24 approve the Bureau's Work Plan 2000, subject to the Chair agreeing with the Bureau on these points, and that, in future, the proposed Work Plan will make it clearer how much resources must be applied to the various activities in the Plan, with a broad view of the human resources required for each, so that the SC can better contemplate the required trade-offs amongst priorities, and that the Plan show a better sense of timing amongst phases of the 3-year cycle. **Algeria** agreed with the Chair and endorsed the USA's emphasis upon training, and he urged the Bureau, not just to seek funds, but to reorder its priorities in that direction.

Decision SC24-1. The Standing Committee approved the Bureau's Work Plan for 2000, subject to the Chairperson's agreement upon modifications to reflect the sense of the discussion on this issue.¹

¹ The final version of the Bureau's Work Plan for 2000 is available (in English only) on the Ramsar Web site (http://ramsar.org/key_workplan_bureau_2000.htm) and in Word or hard copy versions upon request to the Ramsar Bureau.

Decision SC24-2. The Standing Committee urged the International Organization Partners to emulate Wetlands International in devising a complementary work plan based upon that of the Ramsar Bureau, showing the added valued they are able and willing to provide.

Agenda item 7.2: World Wetlands Day

30. **Dwight Peck, the Executive Assistant for Communications**, explained that the Bureau performs two roles for World Wetlands Day. The first is to **promote the concept** and provide materials to assist governments, NGOs, and individuals in celebrating the opportunity to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits. The Ramsar Web site offers “quotable” material, including inspirational statements from the SG, for use in press releases and letters to the editor, as well as tangible materials, such as posters, WWD stickers, bookmarks, etc., and an attractive new flyer that attempts to explain the “Vision for the Ramsar List” to the layperson. In addition, the Bureau undertakes a **reporting role** and provides a public forum for reports, either in advance or afterwards, of WWD activities, and SC members were encouraged to contribute to that effort as well.
31. The suggested theme for WWD 2000, by Standing Committee agreement, is “Celebrating Our Wetlands of International Importance” – the SC members were encouraged to suggest themes for WWD 2001 and 2002.
32. The **Dominican Republic** suggested that the Bureau prepare documentation on WWD showing the benefits for potential Contracting Parties in the Caribbean area. The **Republic of Korea** and **Uganda** testified to the great value of WWD as an awareness-raising mechanism and described their own plans for the great day. Uganda urged that more materials be directed to the very highest level of government, where the political cascade effect would be most effective. The **Secretary General** reminded the SC members of the COP’s Jewels in the Crown project, for a “coffee-table” book showing the most significant or outstanding wetland in each Contracting Party; Switzerland has pledged a generous part of the cost, but further contributions are needed.

Agenda item 7.3.1: Staffing

33. The **Secretary General** described recent staff rearrangements and announced that Ms **Julia Tucker** has decided to leave the Bureau after many years of loyal service. The SG very warmly thanked Ms Tucker for her contributions to the Convention. Ms **Annette Keller** has moved to a new position as Administration Coordinator.

Agenda item 7.3.2: Secretary General’s contract

34. **The Chair** proposed a three-tier approach on the SG’s contract, involving 1) open discussion of the issue with the incumbent, 2) discussion of particulars with no Bureau personnel present, and 3) closed session for voting member states only to make the decision.
35. The **Secretary General** outlined the situation, as he described it in his letter to the Chair, with copies to all voting members of the SC, dated 22 October 1999. The legal background is such that, given the position of IUCN as the legal persona of the Convention, all renewed fixed-term contracts become permanent contracts. Despite that, the SG offers to remain for three more years, but no more, and abide by the SC’s decision if that should not be desirable.
36. **Hungary**, former chair of the Standing Committee, provided background on the situation, especially concerning discussions at the time of Daniel Navid’s resignation in 1994. She noted that the suggestion of splitting the Bureau away from IUCN, and IUCN’s legal limitations, has already been thoroughly studied and found to be a costly idea. She recommended that an 8-year SG cycle should be considered ‘normal’.

37. **Costa Rica, Algeria, Argentina, and Togo** agreed that the supposed time limitations should be less important than what has been achieved. **Argentina** stressed the importance of completing a cycle that has been initiated in the Convention until COP8 at least.
38. The Standing Committee went into closed session, first with all observers present and then voting members only, and emerged with the following decision:

Decision SC24-3: The Standing Committee determined to renew Mr Delmar Blasco's contract. Noting the offer of Mr Blasco to serve a final term of three years from 1 August 2000, the SC agreed that an exchange of letters be entered between Mr Delmar Blasco, the Chair of the Standing Committee, and the IUCN Director General which will provide that Mr Delmar Blasco agrees to take early retirement from 31 July 2003.

Decision SC24-4: The SC agreed to develop for consideration by COP8 a procedure for the selection of a new Secretary General.

Agenda item 8: Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

39. **Jorge Jiménez (Costa Rica), Chair of the STRP**, reported on the Panel's 8th meeting, held in September 1999. He recorded his impression of the large number of tasks that have been assigned to this voluntary body and noted the almost complete turnover of membership. The STRP has submitted its draft Work Plan for the triennium and seeks the SC's approval. **Dr Jiménez** urged all Contracting Parties to appoint their STRP National Focal Points (NFPs) as soon as possible and emphasized the STRP's desire to participate in the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 drafting process. He described the ten Working Groups that have been proposed and enumerated their tasks. **The DSG** added that a further five Parties have nominated their STRP NFPs since the SC documentation was prepared.
40. **Nick Davidson, Wetlands International**, presented a project proposal for an Inventory of Asian Wetlands, which follows on from the COP7 Global Review of Wetland Resources project and Resolution VII.20. Its aim is to provide implementation tools, especially standard methodological models, and it will complement and collaborate with the STRP's Working Group on Wetland Inventory. The intention is to build upon the successful MedWet inventory methodology. He described the methodology and the anticipated outputs and requested the SC's endorsement for the project and its assistance in locating sources of funding. **Uganda** inquired about the project's potential applicability to Africa, and **Dr Davidson** noted that the purpose is to develop standard methods that will be broadly applicable to all parts of the world.

Decision SC24-5: The Standing Committee endorsed Wetlands International's proposed project on Inventory of Asian Wetlands.

41. **Japan** offered to provide support for the Asian Wetland Inventory project and to identify further Ramsar sites; Japan further described the serious problem with invasive species in that country, especially concerning Lake Biwa, and noted that Environment Japan will establish a code for dealing with invasive species that will embody Ramsar principles. **Argentina** requested that Working Group 1's TOR be expanded to include guidelines on the conservation of salt marshes and intertidal zones, in accordance with Resolution VII.21, which was noted. The **Chair** drew attention to the Terms of Reference of each of the proposed Working Groups in turn and sought comment. **France** inquired whether the timetable for establishment of the San José Record of Ramsar sites with exemplary management should be advanced, but **the SG**, stressing the importance of the idea, observed that the process would require that SC approve draft TOR and present them to COP8; the Working Group on Site Management Guidelines requested that the Bureau take the first step on this and will then assume responsibility for its further development.

42. **Costa Rica** pointed out the economic value of water, and **Dr Jiménez** noted that several Working Groups are considering this issue. **Algeria** urged that the STRP also make a study of existing training opportunities for wetland managers and offer suggestions for new ones. **The Chair** noted that it would be difficult to add a new Working Group now, but urged the Chair of STRP to pay particular attention to the training aspects of all the STRP's topics of study. **Argentina** suggested adding salt marshes and intertidal wetlands to the STRP's proposed work on under-represented wetland types.

Decision SC24-6: The Standing Committee approved the proposed Work Plan of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, subject to the additional suggestions mentioned during the discussion.²

43. **Uganda** suggested that the STRP National Focal Points should have an explicit role in the development of National Reports, and the words "and to provide advice in the preparation of National Reports" were added to ¶8 of the proposed Terms of Reference for NFPs.

Decision SC24-7: The Standing Committee approved the proposed Terms of Reference for STRP National Focal Points, as amended, and urged all Contracting Parties to complete their nominations of Focal Points as soon as possible.³

44. **The Chair** proposed adding the issue of continuity and turnover on the STRP to Agenda item 13.3 on turnover within SC. **Armenia** inquired about some of the names on the STRP's task list and was informed that these were additional experts who would be invited to assist in the Panel's work because of their special expertise; it was decided that, in future, the task list will show the areas of expertise of the individuals. **The Chair** conveyed the SC's gratitude to Dr Jiménez and the STRP members for their work. **The SG** noted that, now that the Work Plan has been approved, it will be translated into French and Spanish and distributed widely, including to the NFPs and to the Parties by diplomatic notification. He drew attention to the Bureau's work load in supporting the STRP Working Groups, which falls mostly to the DSG and the Regional Coordinators.
45. In relation to the **Draft Global Action Plan for Peatlands (GAPP)** endorsed by Recommendation 7.1, Dr **Jack Rieley**, representing the International Peat Society, introduced himself and Dr **Randy Milton** (Canada), both members of the STRP's Working Group on Peatlands. He presented the latest draft of the GAPP as it has emerged from the workshop just concluded in Friesing, Germany, and he described the document as similar in content but significantly improved in presentation over the version that was endorsed by Recommendation 7.1 at Ramsar COP7. The intention is to reintroduce the draft plan into the Ramsar process, and he invited the SC to accept the Plan for further study by the STRP, hopefully to proceed through further improvements to endorsement by Ramsar COP8. He offered to the STRP the assistance of the original drafters and the global network of peatlands experts and noted that the present draft will also be distributed for comment and discussion in a number of other venues, including the Millennium Wetland Event in August 2000.
46. **Dr Rieley** indicated that draft wise use principles for peatlands have been developed to serve as an annex to the GAPP. There was discussion of the use of the word "draft" in relation to the GAPP, since it remains a draft as it develops further for formal consideration as a Ramsar COP8

² The STRP Work Plan will be available in English, French, and Spanish on the Ramsar Web site at http://ramsar.org/key_strp_workplan.htm) and in Word or hard copy versions upon request to the Ramsar Bureau.

³ The terms of reference for STRP National Focal Points will be available in English, French, and Spanish on the Ramsar Web site at http://ramsar.org/key_strp_nfp_tor.htm) and in Word or hard copy versions upon request to the Ramsar Bureau. They will also be transmitted under cover of a diplomatic note to all Contracting Parties and to the Focal Points.

document, but can be considered in the meantime as a carefully thought out description of specific actions which can be brought to the attention of donor agencies as if it were a finished plan.

Decision SC24-8: The Standing Committee accepted the present version [circulated at the meeting] of the Global Action Plan for Peatlands for further study by STRP and SC with a view to bringing it for formal consideration by Ramsar COP8.⁴

Agenda item 9.1: Lessons learnt from the 7th COP

47. **The Secretary General** described the Bureau's review of COP7, which concluded that in general the COP went very well and that the same *modus operandi* should be recommended for COP8, especially the duration of nine days with one day free for the Bureau's preparation of revised documents. The only change the Bureau would urge is that the regional overviews of implementation of the Convention be left for regional meetings during the COP and only a global overview be considered in plenary, and that one morning be left free for these concurrent regional meetings.
48. **The USA** agreed that the COP went well and complimented the Bureau on its COP preparations, but noted that the cost of the COP, probably about 1.8 million US dollars (including delegate travel), made it quite an expensive undertaking. The COP considers 1) the business of the Convention and 2) the Technical Sessions (TS). **The USA** urged greater attention to regional meetings in preparation for the COP and suggested that the technical components should be transferred to these, leaving only administrative issues for the COP itself. The COP could be shortened or the freed time spent on Strategic Plan issues. **Costa Rica** noted that these two aspects of the COPs require different sorts of participants; he suggested that, with annual regional meetings, for example, Parties could arrive at the COP with their views thoroughly studied, and the COPs, which could be shortened, could be held every two years instead of every three. **Mexico** concurred that a shorter COP would reduce costs and technical issues could be better covered in regional meetings. **Togo** pointed out that annual regional meetings would be difficult for the poorer regions and that meetings between regions provide special advantages. **Uganda** suggested a special segment for ministers, with its own issues, but **Norway** urged the Bureau to consult the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity on its experience with ministerial segments. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** agreed that the COP should be less political and more technical but observed that high-level political participation at some COPs from time to time is necessary in order to attract the attention of high-level officials to wetland issues.
49. **The SG** cautioned strongly against too much innovation, since it seems to be agreed that COP7 worked well. Unlike at previous COPs, the TSs at COP7 were focused on concrete outputs that helped to shape the important resolutions and their annexes that now form the Ramsar 'toolkit'. The TSs have a key function in looking at the Convention's decisions from a technical point of view, which can then be adopted and sent round the world, not just as technical guidelines, but as policies sanctioned by the COP. He noted that regional meetings cost a lot of money, all together about as much as the COP, and they depend upon the willingness of donors. The COPs are an obligatory part of the Convention, whereas the regional gatherings are not. The most recent round of regional meetings came too early to influence the COP documents directly – they need to be held when the papers are ready, which is difficult to time since the SC's approval of COP papers would have to be advanced to allow them to be studied in the regions. The regional meetings can help to formulate common regional viewpoints, but time must still be spent at the COP in bringing these viewpoints together into common, global decisions. He cautioned against experimenting with new styles of COP, because any experiments that failed could not be corrected until 2005.

⁴ The new version of the Global Action Plan for Peatlands is available (in English only) upon request to the Ramsar Bureau.

50. **Norway** agreed that COP7 was successful but observed that the budget process was an important weakness. He was glad to see that the Bureau's recommendation for COP8 provides for ongoing budget committee deliberations throughout the COP.
51. **The DSG** noted that as delegate, host country organizer, and member of the Bureau he has seen the COPs from all angles. He expressed the belief that Ramsar COPs are models for the other conventions. The TSs are no longer parades of informative case studies but an integral part of the political process. If Ramsar were to attempt to organize annual regional meetings and COPs every two years, there would be no time for implementation of the Convention; Bureau staff would have to become full-time meeting organizers. The present number of staff could not possibly fulfil that schedule and would need to be doubled at the least. **Spain** agreed that Ramsar has found a good method of linking political resolutions with technical annexes and urged as few changes for COP8 as possible; if changes are sought, COP8 should decide upon them for the planning of COP9. **France** also affirmed that a good balance between the technical and the political has been found; she noted that if the ministers wish to attend, they can do so, as France's Minister Mme Voynet did in San José. **France** felt that Ramsar is considered to be a serious convention and good results are justifiably expected from its Conferences of the Parties.
52. **Costa Rica** urged consideration of what is best for wetlands rather than what is good for administration and voiced concern about too much stress upon administrative and budgetary questions. **Rebecca D'Cruz, the Regional Coordinator for Asia**, questioned whether in the case of Asia, a very large and diverse region, the common features amongst the region's Parties were sufficient to justify the time and costs of pan-regional meeting; she suggested turning towards thematic and subregional bases for organizing meetings.
53. **The Chair** summarized that there was a consensus that COP7 worked well, though some delegates wished to follow the same method for COP8 and others wished to build upon that success. He noted that an SC Subgroup is normally created to guide COP issues and suggested that this be done earlier than usual, if Terms of Reference can be agreed at this meeting. He proposed that the Subgroup consider the following issues: 1) the relationship between COPs and regional meetings, 2) the relationship between technical and political business, 3) issues of the duration and frequency of COPs and regional meetings, 4) the question of ministerial segments, 5) the resource implications of all suggestions for change, and 6) the agenda paper's suggestions concerning the COP's budget process and the structure of Technical Sessions. **The Chair** proposed that he and the Secretary General would draft TOR for the SC's consideration (see Agenda item 11).

Agenda item 9.2.i: Tasks of Standing Committee members

54. **The SG** drew attention to Resolution VII.1 concerning the tasks of SC members and urged the Regional Representatives of Africa, Europe, and the Neotropics to consult and apportion the Parties for which they would take 'responsibility' within their regions, and inform the Bureau. In Asia's case, India's absence from the meeting prevented consultation. He asked the Regional Representatives to assist the Bureau in reaching non-CPs with higher-level approaches and noted that the Bureau has priorities concerning the order in which non-CPs should be cultivated.
55. **Costa Rica** noted that the Dominican Republic and Cuba have expressed interest in joining the Convention and offered to assist Trinidad and Tobago in encouraging them; the representative of the **Dominican Republic** expressed appreciation for that effort. **Argentina** noted that it has taken steps to set up electronic communication throughout the region. **Togo** reported successes in convincing Benin to join the Convention and will soon be meeting with the minister in Nigeria. **Trinidad and Tobago** urged SC members to seek new Ramsar sites as well as new Parties. **Algeria** offered to take steps toward bringing Libya into the Convention and would be willing to approach the other Arab non-Parties in western Asia. He suggested that Algeria could help in

translating Ramsar documents into Arabic and could perhaps host a seminar for the Arabic-speaking states.

56. **Uganda** urged that SC members not only canvass opinions in their regions before SC meetings but also take steps to report back to the Parties afterward. **The Chair** described Australia's work with the Wetlands International Oceania Programme Ramsar liaison officer in encouraging the Pacific Island states to join. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** noted that the government will celebrate World Wetlands Day and plans to establish a training centre in the city of Ramsar which it is hoped will benefit other Parties in the region as well; he sought the cooperation of the Bureau in this regard. **Japan**, drawing attention to the difficulties caused by India's absence, suggested adding to the SC members' tasks the phrase "to ensure their attendance at SC meetings", and it was pointed out that there is already a rather strong expression of that idea in Resolution VII.1, Annex 2, ¶1. **Armenia** noted that Azerbaijan is listed as part of Asia in Annex 1 but urged that that nation be asked whether it would prefer to be considered as part of Europe, and **the Chair** suggested that Azerbaijan's view be solicited at the time of its accession.

Decision SC24-9: The Standing Committee expressed its members' willingness to consult with the Parties in their regions both before and after SC meetings so that they can fully represent their regions, voiced their willingness to encourage the adhesion of new Contracting Parties in close coordination with the Bureau's efforts, and identified which Contracting Parties the Regional Representatives will take 'responsibility' for liaison within their regions.

(**Note:** During informal consultations during the meeting, the Regional Representatives for Africa, Europe, and the Neotropics agreed upon a division of their respective regions to implement the above decision. Information on this matter is available on the Ramsar Web site and from the Ramsar Bureau.)

Agenda items 9.2.ii and iii: Articles 2.5 and 4.2 on site boundaries and compensation for wetland losses

57. **The DSG** noted that the SC and CPs have long sought guidance on these issues and described the disappointing response to the Bureau's diplomatic notification pursuant to Resolutions VII.23 and 24 requesting input, with only Australia and Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB) having contributed. **The Chair** reported on Australia's progress in preparing case studies on the Coongie Lakes and Port Phillip Bay Ramsar sites and hoped to see completed studies by the end of 2000.
58. **BirdLife International** felt that the Convention needs a clear view on the urgent national interest and boundaries issues and noted that, while other groups are working on the same questions, developers are also watching to learn the results. He urged the SC to task the STRP to study carefully and draft guidelines. **Peru** noted that, since Resolutions VII.23 and VII.24 have elicited so little response from the Parties, it may be that they are not considered sufficiently important in view of other priorities; perhaps the present method of adopting COP resolutions, in which issues can be resolved when many Parties may be unenthusiastic about them, should be re-examined. **The Chair** felt that it would be difficult for the SC to pick and choose amongst the tasks given it by the COP. **The SG** suggested that the legal issues involved lie outside of the STRP's scientific expertise and urged that IUCN's Environmental Law Centre be approached for assistance; **Argentina** voiced support for that proposal. **France, Greece, and Spain** recognized the importance and urgency of this issue, but urged caution in relying upon RSPB's draft paper on Article 6 of the European Commission's Habitats Directive; it was suggested that the EC's guidance also be sought on this issue. It was agreed to regard the submitted documents on site boundary and urgent national interest issues as for information only and to approach the European Commission to obtain other relevant documents.

Decision SC24-10: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to explore with IUCN's Environmental Law Centre how the ELC might initially take the lead in developing legal advice for the SC on the issues raised in Resolutions VII.23 and VII.24, so that the Committee can then decide how to move forward.

59. **The Secretary General** announced that the **Philippines** has just designated two new Ramsar sites, with another expected shortly. **Argentina** has just completed the process for designating a new site of 600,000 hectares in central Argentina, Lagunas de Guanacache, the first time in that federal state that two provinces have cooperated on a nomination. A Wetlands for the Future training course for managers and the community has been held, and the site is being restored according to the views of the local community.

Agenda item 9.2.iv: Regional targets in the Convention Work Plan

60. Though this issue has been covered by Decision SC24-1 adopting the Bureau's Work Plan, **the USA** indicated that the SC might be missing an opportunity to provide more input and dialogue on regional priorities in the Work Plan. **The SG** noted that the Bureau's Work Plan is drawn directly from the COP's Convention Work Plan, which leaves very little latitude for prioritizing. **The USA**, however, noted a fair amount of potential flexibility in the Work Plan for the Americas and suggested that discussion among Regional Representatives might be more productive than just commenting upon early drafts of each new Plan.

Decision SC24-11: The Standing Committee agreed that in future the Bureau's Work Plans would be circulated in time for regional consultations and input to the version included with the rest of the SC agenda papers, and that meetings to further consider the proposed Regional Work Plan would be held on the Monday prior to the next SC meeting, following the normal Subgroup on Finance meeting.

Agenda item 9.2.v: Format of National Reports

61. **The Deputy Secretary General** introduced the concept of using the National Reports (NRs) as a national planning tool. He noted that by linking the NR format to the Strategic Plan, Ramsar became the first convention able to quantify its progress, as well as to assess more accurately where more and less progress was being made. He observed that some Parties, like the UK, have already begun using the Strategic Plan as the framework for national planning. Feedback from the Parties on the NR format for COP7 was favorable but indicated that the yes/no structure precluded opportunities for Parties to describe why they might have been unable to complete actions. He noted that Parties often find the NR process burdensome, with little national benefit, but if the NR is adopted as a planning tool it can guide implementation on a day-to-day basis. He recalled that COP7 NRs were published on the Ramsar Web site, an innovation which was well received but labor intensive, and described the proposed interactive electronic NR format through which NRs could be submitted electronically and perhaps posted directly to the Web. The interactive NR could be used in either a Word-based format distributed on floppy disks or an Internet Explorer browser-based format distributed on CD-ROM. Not all Parties might be able to use these technologies at present, but most would be able to before too long, and he reported that through the Evian Project the Bureau has already been able to assist 11 Parties in gaining Internet access and would shortly assist Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Mauritania, and Niger as well.
62. **The DSG** demonstrated the "mock up" of the browser-based model that has been developed for the Bureau. The hard copy early-draft version of the full NR form has been distributed and **the Chair** suggested that the SC offer its comments to the Bureau within the next three weeks.

63. **The UK** strongly supported this approach and applauded the establishment of national targets in the planning process. The UK has focused upon synergy with other reporting requirements, such as the CBD and AEWA, and urged the Bureau to do so, too. The UK urged a balance between closed and open question structures and offered to advise the Bureau.
64. **Togo** reported on the difficulties Parties to AEWA expressed at the CMS COP in Cape Town, where few Parties submitted their reports, and **Togo** and **Algeria** described the problems facing developing countries in this regard. **Hungary** hoped that the format would be sufficiently flexible to be adapted after each COP, and **Armenia** noted that the proposed format is a further development upon the basic structure of the COP7 form. **The Chair** observed that, despite some Parties' difficulties, only a small number of COP7's National Reports were submitted in hard copy only. **Argentina** requested that the Word version of the proposed NR be supplied to the SC members on floppy disks.

Decision SC24-12: The Standing Committee members agreed to comment within three weeks (by 24 December 1999) on the details of the proposed NR form and delegated the Chair to agree upon the final form with the Bureau.

Agenda item 9.2.vi: Strategic Plan 2003-2008.

65. **The SG** recounted the drafting process for the first Strategic Plan, which worked very well. The Bureau's agenda paper proposes a similar process and timetable. **The USA** urged that in the Bureau's proposal, DOC. SC24-13, ¶5d) iii), the phrase "and incorporates input from" be added before "Standing Committee", and that in ¶5d) v) the word "compiles" be substituted for "incorporates" before "input received".
66. **The Chair** nominated the Vice-Chair, **Paul Mafabi (Uganda)**, to chair the drafting subgroup, and the Regional Representatives were urged either to choose one subgroup member from each region or to decide upon a process for doing so.

Decision SC24-13: The Standing Committee adopted the following drafting procedure to prepare the Strategic Plan 2003-2008:

- i) the Ramsar Bureau prepares a first draft, engaging, if necessary, external consultants from the Ramsar network, by 30 June 2000;
- ii) the Bureau mails the draft to the Drafting Group members for comments, with a deadline by 31 August 2000, and incorporates the input received;
- iii) the Drafting Group meets in Gland two days in advance of the Standing Committee meeting in 2000 and reports progress to and incorporates input from the Standing Committee;
- iv) the third draft is translated into French and Spanish and is distributed for comments to all Contracting Parties, other conventions, and relevant intergovernmental institutions and NGOs in January 2001, with a deadline for comments by 30 April 2001;
- v) the Bureau compiles the input received and circulates a revised draft to the Drafting Group by the end of May 2001;
- vi) the Drafting Group holds a meeting in late June/early July 2001 and adopts a final draft for submission to the Standing Committee meeting in 2001;
- vii) the Standing Committee considers and approves the final draft at its meeting in 2001 for submission to COP8 in 2002.

The SC also decided that the regional representation on the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan will be as follows: Algeria for Africa, Slovak Republic for Europe, Trinidad and Tobago for the Neotropics, the USA for North America, and Australia for Oceania. Other

members of the Subgroup will be Paul Mafabi (Uganda) as Chair, the Chairperson of the STRP, a representative of each International Organization Partner, and the Secretary General, *ex officio*.

[Note: Japan requested two weeks to consult with India about the Subgroup's representative for Asia.]

Agenda item 9.2.vii: Working partnerships with other conventions and bodies

67. **The SG** briefed the SC on recent developments in forging cooperative arrangements with other bodies. The Bureau is presently discussing cooperation with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme with Peter Bridgewater, Director a.i. of UNESCO Ecological Sciences Division. The secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification distributed to its recent COP an excellent paper on increasing cooperation with Ramsar and other conventions. Comments are welcome on the draft Joint Work Plan with the Convention on Migratory Species. The UNFCCC's subsidiary body SBSTA asked the secretariat to work with Ramsar on further developing the IUCN paper on 'Wetlands and Climate Change' and submit it to the next SBSTA meeting as an official paper upon which that body can take action. The SG has asked the Regional Coordinator for Europe to give a high priority to closer relations with the European Commission, and the Bureau would like to explore some new kind of formal relation with the EC since the Ramsar treaty text precludes the EC from becoming a Contracting Party. The SG noted the new MOC with Eurosite, under which Eurosite will provide assistance on site management in Europe and north and west Africa, and recommended Eurosite's management toolkit for inspection. He described the draft MOU among Ramsar, Wetlands International, and CIESIN.
68. **The SG** described the draft proposal by the CMS African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement to the GEF and sought the Committee's endorsement for it. The Convention has also been asked to propose some site management demonstration projects for inclusion, and the SG asked for suggestions from the Contracting Parties concerned.

Decision SC24-14: The Standing Committee endorsed the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement's project proposal to the Global Environment Facility and instructed the Secretary General to write a letter to that effect.

69. **Hungary, Japan, and Norway** supported the movement towards greater synergies amongst conventions and strongly urged Ramsar Administrative Authorities to seek opportunities for cooperation with officials within their governments who are working with other conventions. There was agreement that a formal relationship with the European Commission should be pursued. **Norway** welcomed the Bureau's efforts on wetlands and climate change, noting in particular the positive response from the UNFCCC; Norway also pointed out that this issue provides for interesting perspectives and important challenges for both conventions. **The SG** reported that preliminary talks have also been held with the Cartagena Convention.
70. **The SG** regretted that Ramsar had not been involved in the Rio 1992 process and was still disadvantaged by that absence in terms of recognition amongst the major instruments. He urged that Ramsar seek ways to achieve significant visibility in the Rio+10 process. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** seconded the importance of raising Ramsar's profile in Rio+10 and urged the Bureau to seek cooperation with UNITAR on training issues. **Argentina** and **Costa Rica** noted that at a recent UNITAR workshop on environmental law for Grulac missions in Geneva emphasis was placed upon the Ramsar and Basel Conventions.
71. **The Chair** encouraged all Parties to assist in ensuring Ramsar visibility during Rio+10 and noted that it would be far more helpful if the Parties were to make the point forcefully in relevant meetings rather than wait for Bureau staff to speak from the back rows as observers. The

Administrative Authorities should seek out the focal points of the Rio conventions in their own countries. **Austria** agreed that the Parties need to be active in linking to other focal points.

72. **WWF International** suggested that the Commission on Sustainable Development meeting in April would be an excellent opportunity to inject Ramsar into the Rio+10 process. **Japan** sought the SG's report of the UN University's July seminar in Tokyo on synergies among conventions, and **the SG** described it as a valuable brainstorming session, the printed report of which has just arrived. **The Regional Coordinator for Africa** noted that the Bureau has been working within the UNEP framework on a handbook on biodiversity-related conventions.

Decision SC24-15: The Standing Committee expressed strong support for Ramsar's work towards synergies with other conventions and a strong sense that further efforts are also needed within the Parties at national level. It also supported efforts to ensure a high Ramsar visibility in the Rio+10 process, especially at the April 2000 meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

73. In relation to the draft Joint Work Plan between Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity, **the DSG** recounted the history of formal cooperation between Ramsar and the CBD, culminating in the first Joint Work Plan (JWP), which was endorsed in 1999 by the CBD's COP4 and Ramsar's COP7. This JWP has been very successful and is widely cited as a model for other joint work plans among conventions, but it expires at the end of this year. The draft JWP for 2000-2001 has been prepared with input from the chairpersons of Ramsar's STRP and the CBD's SBSTTA, and the secretariat of the CBD is also involved in the drafting process. The draft JWP is structured in terms of the CBD's ecosystem thematics, cross-cutting issues, and institutional links. The STRP is aware of where some issues overlap with the SBSTTA agenda and intends to await the CBD's results in order to avoid duplication of effort. **The DSG** regretted that Ramsar has been pigeonholed by the CBD to lead on inland freshwater issues only and asked that the Ramsar Parties seek out the CBD focal points within their governments and explain the crucial role of wetlands in other ecosystems. He noted that the CBD has three national focal points (NFPs) and Ramsar now has its Administrative Authorities and its NFPs for the STRP and for Outreach, and he urged that all of these focal points make themselves known to one another in each country.
74. **The DSG** also noted that the draft JWP also brings synergies with other conventions by identifying linkages with others, and he called this a significant step in bringing the conventions together at the global level. He invited the Committee's input to the draft in time for its discussion at the SBSTTA meeting in Montreal in January 2000, which the STRP Chair will attend. It is expected that the SBSTTA will endorse the draft JWP and recommend it for the CBD's COP5 in Nairobi in May 2000.
75. **Norway** strongly welcomed the JWP and applauded its structure, which shows the broad impact of wetlands, and he congratulated the Convention on having come a long way over the past three years. **Uganda** commended the efforts that have gone into the JWP and hoped that the benefits would trickle down to national level. **Hungary** was assured that the Convention will be well represented at the CBD's COP5. **Spain** noted that the CBD's Working Group on Article 8(j) will meet in Sevilla in March 2000.

Decision SC24-16: The Standing Committee expressed strong support for the draft Joint Work Plan between Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity and looked forward to viewing the next draft. The Committee also urged stronger cooperation between Ramsar and the CBD at national level as well.

Agenda item 9.2.viii: Review of the Barbados Programme of Action

76. **The DSG** noted that Recommendation 7.2 grew out of the Oceania regional meeting, where non-Party Small Island Developing States (SIDS) sent a clear message that, if they were to join Ramsar, they would need assurances that Ramsar is prepared to work within the Barbados framework. He urged the SC to review the Barbados Programme of Action and identify a range of priority actions that can be communicated to the SIDS. The Bureau wishes to establish a SIDS internship within the secretariat, but requests for funding assistance for that purpose have not yet been successful, though there is some ground for hope in the new year.

Decision SC24-17: The Standing Committee determined to continue to promote membership of the Small Island Developing States in the Convention and to continue to seek resources to establish a long-term SIDS internship within the Bureau. The SC formed a Subgroup consisting of Australia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Wetlands International (Roger Jaensch, Wetlands International – Oceania) to review the Barbados Programme of Action and seek input from the SIDS, and report to the next Standing Committee meeting.

Financial matters

Agenda item 10.1: Audited accounts for FY 1998 and status of the Reserve Fund

77. **Armenia, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, introduced agenda paper DOC. SC24-24, the recommendations of Monday's meeting of the Subgroup on Finance, and reported the Subgroup's recommendations on Agenda items 10.1 through 10.4.

Decision SC24-18: The Standing Committee approved the audited accounts for FY1998 and approved the Secretary General's proposal that the excess in the Reserve Fund (SFR 76,893) be used as a start-up sum for the Voluntary Fund for the Convention's Outreach Programme.

Agenda item 10.2: Review of 1999 core and projects income and expenditure

Decision SC24-19: The Standing Committee approved the financial report for the current year and the Bureau's report on the status of current projects, and it requested the Bureau, in consultation with the authorities in Costa Rica, to produce a consolidated report of the overall costs of Ramsar COP7 for the next meeting of the Subgroup on Finance.

Agenda item 10.3.i: Small Grants Fund income and allocations for 1999

78. **The USA** indicated that its contribution of SFR 74,000 for coral reef projects could be allocated to the SGF for 1999, requesting that the project proposal from Israel related to coral reefs should be funded. **Japan** requested that the category A2 proposal from Nepal be funded out of its voluntary contribution to the Convention.

Decision SC24-20: The Standing Committee approved the statement of available resources for the SGF 1999 cycle, as shown in Annex 1 of this report, and approved funding for the category A1 projects listed in Annex 2 of this report, subject to the submission of outstanding reports of previous SGF-funded projects by 29 February 2000 or satisfactory explanations provided to the Bureau with a commitment to submit the reports by an agreed deadline. In case of non-compliance, the allocated funds should be used to support category A2 projects in the order of their listing in Annex 2. Category A2 proposals should be funded, in the order of their listing, if additional resources should become available.

Agenda item 10.3.ii and iii: Small Grants Fund Operational Guidelines

79. **Japan** inquired about progress on Resolution VII.5's final sentence, concerning the possibility that the management of the SGF could be entrusted to one of the International Organization Partners. **The SG** reported that there has been no progress on this suggestion, but that if asked the Bureau's recommendation will be strongly negative; the SGF is a Ramsar success story and one of the few very concrete things that the Convention can do for Parties – if administered by another organization it would shortly come to be identified with that body. **The Chair** noted that the obligation to evaluate this idea still remained.

Decision SC24-21: The Standing Committee approved the draft SGF Operational Guidelines 2000-2002, with amendments to require that additional co-funding for projects from foreign and in-country sources be clearly indicated as separate 'leverage effects', and it instructed the Bureau to prepare an agenda paper on the idea of the administration of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund being turned over to one of the International Organization Partners for consideration at the next SC meeting.⁵

80. **The SG** expressed the Bureau's appreciation to the departing Intern for Asia, Parastu Mirabzadeh, for her work in drafting the Operational Guidelines.

Agenda item 10.3.iv: Fundraising for the Small Grants Fund

81. **The Chair** reminded the meeting of COP7's study of the gap between fundable projects and available funding, and the volatility of funding from year to year. A donors' meeting is proposed, which would include bilateral aid agencies, NGOs, etc.

Decision SC24-22: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's proposal to explore the possibility of holding a donors' meeting to discuss possible funding mechanisms for the Small Grants Fund.

Agenda item 10.4.i: The Bureau's budget for 2000

82. **The USA** proposed amended wording for point iii) of the Decision proposed by the Subgroup on Finance, which was agreed.

Decision SC24-23: The Standing Committee approved the proposed core income and expenditure for FY2000 and requested of the Bureau that i) in future, a column with the previous year's income and expenditure be included in the document for reference; ii) it prepare a report on the use of funds under budget line 3 ('travel on official business'), corresponding to the previous fiscal year, for consideration at the next meeting of the Subgroup on Finance; and iii) that the term "core budget" in all future Ramsar documents include not only Contracting Parties' contributions but also all other non-earmarked income.

Agenda item 10.4.ii: Establishment of a Ramsar Development Assistance Officer post

83. **Armenia, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, stressed the importance attached to this issue by Resolution VII.28 and reported the Subgroup's recommendation that the Bureau's suggested TOR for the position be approved. It was noted that funding for the post is already included in the budget adopted by Decision SC24-21.

⁵ The SGF Operational Guidelines 2000-2002 will be available in the Convention's three official languages on the Ramsar Web site (http://ramsar.org/key_sgf_guide.htm) and in Word or hard copy versions upon request to the Ramsar Bureau.

Decision SC24-24: The Standing Committee approved the establishment of a Development Assistance Officer in the Ramsar Bureau and endorsed the terms of reference proposed in ¶5 of agenda paper DOC. SC24-19.⁶

Agenda item 10.4.iii: Fundraising for unfunded elements of the Convention's Work Plan

84. **Armenia** conveyed the recommendations of the Subgroup on Finance concerning the priorities in the Convention's Work Plan and the proposed Voluntary Fund for outreach activities.

Decision SC24-25: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to give priority to those activities shown in the Convention's Work Plan that have been requested and/or recommended in the Resolutions and Recommendations of COP7, and it approved the establishment and proposed terms of reference for the Voluntary Fund for the Convention's Outreach Programme 1999-2002 as shown in Annex 3 of this report.

Agenda item 10.4.iv: Invoicing of annual contributions for the year 2001

85. **The Secretary General** explained that the United Nations' biennial review of its scale of assessments will not be available until December 2000, too late for the Bureau's invoicing of 2001 contributions in August 2000. He recalled that the Bureau had tried the expedient of sending invoices in the amount of the previous year, with later a corrected invoice when the UN scale became known, and the result had been unsatisfactory. **Armenia** reported that the Subgroup recommended endorsement of the Bureau's plan to invoice for 2001 using the year 2000 amounts and to amend the 2002 invoiced amounts to account for any changes in the UN scale for 2001.

Decision SC24-26: The Standing Committee approved the practice of invoicing Contracting Parties for 2001 in the amounts of their year 2000 contributions, and then correcting for any changes in the UN scale of assessment in the invoices for 2002. Parties will be notified with the 2001 invoices that any differences caused by amendments to the UN scale will be accounted for in the invoices for 2002.

Agenda item 10.4.v: Special request from the Islamic Republic of Iran

86. **Armenia** reported that the Islamic Republic of Iran had requested a recalculation of its 1992-1999 unpaid contributions based upon the 1999 scale of assessments, which would allow it to settle its arrears with the Convention despite difficult financial circumstances. Armenia noted that there had been no consensus in the Subgroup on Finance meeting and therefore no recommendation.
87. **Japan, Hungary, and France** urged the importance of the principle of uniform treatment of all Contracting Parties; they noted that the erosion of the UN scale principle could affect the Convention's credibility with donors and other international organizations and set a precedent for other Parties experiencing financial difficulties. **France** noted that the CMS, at its COP in Cape Town, had recommended forgiving unpaid contributions since 1997 but with loss of the right to vote. **Algeria** felt that few other countries would be affected by the precedent and joined the Secretary General in urging that Iran's request be granted.
88. The **Chair** observed that, since there was no consensus on the issue, the request by the Islamic Republic of Iran lapsed. He suggested that, in accordance with Resolution VII.28's request that the SC prepare guidance for COP8 on how to deal with the problem of unpaid contributions, the Subgroup on Finance be requested to prepare a recommendation for discussion at the next SC meeting; the Subgroup should be asked to address such issues as that raised by Iran but in a policy context and not in terms of individual cases.

⁶ The vacancy announcement has been posted on the Ramsar Web site, http://ramsar.org/w.n.vacancy_bur_dao.htm, on 13 December 1999.

89. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** explained his country's extraordinary financial situation brought about by war, a fall in oil prices, and severe natural disasters and expressed his Government's desire to pay its arrears to the fullest extent possible. The representative of Iran affirmed his Government's belief in the UN scale of assessments but noted that the UN is not as rigid in its application. **France** and **Iran** seconded the Chair's proposal for further study in such a way as to take into account all countries that are experiencing financial difficulties.

Decision SC24-27: The Standing Committee requested its Subgroup on Finance to prepare a recommendation on the issue of unpaid contributions for consideration at the 25th meeting of the Committee.

90. The **Chair** thanked the Subgroup on Finance for its work on the day preceding the SC meeting and drew attention to the great extent to which the Subgroup's recommendations facilitated the work of the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 11: the 8th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

91. **Spain** described preparations for the next COP and said that COP8 was seen as an opportunity to support wetland conservation issues and projects throughout Spain and the Mediterranean area. Spain has recently adopted a strategic plan for wetland conservation that is based upon the Ramsar Strategic Plan, as part of its larger plan for the conservation of biological diversity. Spain has many wetlands and many wetland types, but many have deteriorated as a result of human activities; the new plan seeks to reverse the degradation of wetlands through incentives and wise use in coordination with all the bodies involved and through development of ecotourism and inventories.
92. **Spain** reported that the venue and dates of COP8 are still under discussion, and a number of promising possibilities are being studied. Spain is presently setting up a formal organizing committee from several sectors and looks forward to a great success. The **Secretary General** affirmed the active and cooperative responses he has received from the Government of Spain. **Costa Rica** expressed confidence that COP8 would be one of Ramsar's most successful COPs and pledged to continue assisting Spain with the benefit of its experience with COP7.
93. There was discussion of the Bureau's suggestions (DOC. SC24-20) for thematic reviews, special interventions, and Technical Sessions (TS) at COP8. Some delegates expressed the wish that the Subgroup on COP8 should study these suggestions further before adoption; it was also noted that nearly all of the proposed TS topics are derived from mandates from COP7 and the Convention's Work Plan. The **Secretary General** pointed out that some of COP7's mandates are complex and should be approved as COP8 themes as quickly as possible, so that work on them can be got under way in time for reporting to the SC by its 2001 meeting. **IUCN** and **Algeria** suggested that one of the TSs consider the issue of dams and take the opportunity to discuss ways in which to implement the guidelines expected from the World Commission on Dams in June 2000. **Argentina** stressed the importance of technical training and endorsed the proposed topics for TS5. **Japan** proposed changing topic 4D from "big business" to "business sector" and **WWF International** proposed changing topic 4C from "frogs" to "amphibians". **WWF International** noted that COP6's work on toxic chemicals has not been followed up and suggested that if that issue were added to one of the TS, WWF would be prepared to contribute tangibly to that discussion. **Spain**, recalling that most proposed TS topics were mandated by COP7, expressed his country's particular interest in several of them, including ecotourism and invasive species. **Costa Rica** proposed adding the topic of international cooperation on payment for environmental resources, especially water. **Hungary** invited the Bureau to provide the Subgroup on COP8 with an analysis of COP7's mandates for COP8. **The USA** suggested amending paragraph 1.1 of the proposed terms of reference in order to charge the Subgroup with preparing "a proposal concerning the agenda, programme, *and duration* of Ramsar COP8".

Decision SC24-28: The Standing Committee established a Subgroup on COP8 with the following terms of reference:

1. The tasks assigned to the Subgroup for submission to the year 2000 meeting of the Standing Committee are:
 - 1.1 To prepare, with the assistance of the Ramsar Bureau, a proposal concerning the agenda, programme, and duration of Ramsar COP8, taken into account the need to maintain the right balance and linkages between the technical component of the COP and its policy and administrative components.
 - 1.2 To prepare recommendations on the appropriate mechanisms to deal with some key issues at COP8, such as budget and the consideration and adoption of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008.
 - 1.3 To make recommendations on the appropriate timing, content and *modus operandi* of Ramsar regional meetings that could be held in preparation for Ramsar COP8.
 - 1.4 To analyse the advisability of including in the programme of Ramsar COP8 a “ministerial or high level segment”.
2. To approve, on behalf of the Standing Committee, the proposal to be made by the host country, in consultation with the Ramsar Bureau, concerning the dates and venue of Ramsar COP8 in 2002.
3. To prepare for consideration by the Standing Committee any possible recommendation that could be put forward to COP8 in relation to any aspect of future meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

In addition, the SC appointed the following membership to the Subgroup: Togo for Africa, France for Europe (with Slovenia as observer), Costa Rica for the Neotropics, Mexico for North America (with the USA as observer), with Spain serving as Chair. The Committee agreed that the Subgroup would prepare agenda papers for discussion at a Subgroup meeting which will be held on the one or two days preceding the Subgroup on Finance’s session in advance of the 25th meeting of the Committee in 2000. The Subgroup will be asked to study the “big picture” issues as well as the details of COP8 preparations.

(**Note:** Asia and Oceania requested an additional two weeks in order to choose their representatives in the Subgroup on COP8.)

Agenda item 12: Next meeting of the Standing Committee

Decision SC24-29: The Standing Committee chose the week of 22-27 October 2000 for its 25th meeting. The advance days allotted to the Subgroups on Finance, Strategic Plan, and COP8 and the meeting’s agenda will be decided later as work progresses.

Agenda item 13.1: Other business – Letter from the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia

94. The Standing Committee noted the letter received from the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia.

Agenda item 13.2: Other business – Request from Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

95. **The SG** drew attention to the letter from Ducks Unlimited, Inc., requesting to be recognized as an International Organization Partner (IOP) of the Convention, and he noted that the SC is being asked to make a recommendation to the COP for its decision. There was discussion of the extent of DU’s geographical coverage, and some felt that Ducks Unlimited’s affiliated organizations and its programmes with both wetlands and waterbirds in 20 countries in the Americas, whilst not

global, do meet the requirement that candidate IOPs should have programmes that cover “many countries in one or more regions of the world” (Resolution VII.3, annex).

96. **The USA, Costa Rica, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, and Togo** described the valuable work of Ducks Unlimited and urged that a favorable recommendation to the COP be endorsed at the present meeting. **Norway, France, Argentina, and IUCN** urged that a period of “getting to know one another” would be advisable before endorsement, which could be taken up at a later meeting, and recommended that the Bureau first develop a memorandum of cooperation with Ducks Unlimited. **Costa Rica** suggested that Ducks Unlimited be informed of precisely what documentary support should be supplied in order to meet the criteria specified in Resolution VII.3’s annex.

Decision SC24-30: The Standing Committee asked the Bureau to inform Ducks Unlimited of how best to put forward its case for recognition as an International Organization Partner in terms of the criteria in the annex to Resolution VII.3, and requested the Bureau to provide the Standing Committee with an analysis of this case vis-à-vis the criteria. The Standing Committee urged the Bureau to develop a memorandum of cooperation between the secretariat and Ducks Unlimited, without pre-judging the issue of recognition.

Agenda item 13.3: Other business – Continuity and turnover in Standing Committee and STRP

97. **The USA** noted that the Convention’s new structure of regional representation (Resolution VII.1) has unintentionally undermined the system of de facto succession through alternate members. The USA urged that a Subgroup be formed to study possible remedies to the problem of high turnover of representation in the Convention’s bodies and report back. **The Secretary General** urged that this issue be added to the mandate of the Subgroup on COP8 and suggested that some simple remedy, such as a proposal that ¼ or ½ of the SC and STRP members would continue into second terms to ensure continuity, would not be difficult to find.

Decision SC24-31: The Standing Committee charged its Subgroup on COP8 with crafting a proposal for consideration before COP8 on possible remedies to the problem of continuity and turnover in the Convention’s bodies.

Agenda item 13.4: Other business – Conventions Support Officer

98. **Robin Schaap, Wetlands International’s International Coordination Unit**, presented a proposal for the establishment of an Asian Conventions Support Officer, to be engaged by Wetlands International – Asia Pacific and located in its Kuala Lumpur offices, and she sought the Standing Committee’s endorsement.

Decision SC24-32: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposal for the establishment of an Asian Conventions Support Officer at Wetlands International – Asia Pacific.

Approval of the meeting’s report

Decision SC24-33: The Standing Committee adopted the draft report of the first two days of the 24th meeting of the SC, with the amendments communicated to the rapporteur, and authorized the Chairperson to approve sections corresponding to the final day’s report on the Committee’s behalf.

Agenda item 14: Closing remarks

99. **The Secretary General** expressed his appreciation to the participants for their contributions and hard work and thanked the Committee for its confidence in continuing his role at the head of the

secretariat for another three years; he pledged his greatest efforts for the success of the Convention. He expressed his enormous gratitude to Bill Phillips, the Deputy Secretary General, for his contributions to the Convention during his tenure, and he welcomed Dr Nick Davidson to the Bureau in February. He also expressed his regret at the departure of Rebecca D’Cruz, the Regional Coordinator for Asia, since she has been doing an extraordinarily good job, and once again thanked Julia Tucker on the occasion of her impending departure for having served the Convention with loyalty and dedication for many years.

100. **Stephen Hunter, the Chairperson**, expressed on behalf of the SC his deep gratitude to the Bureau staff for their work in preparation for the meeting and thanked the interpreters for their excellent work. He thanked the SC members and observers for their friendly and constructive participation and expressed special appreciation for the three Bureau members who would not be present at the SC’s next meeting, Dr Phillips, Ms D’Cruz, and Ms Tucker.