

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

25th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 23- 27 October 2000

Report of the 25th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Stephen Hunter (Australia), Chair of the Standing Committee** (SC), welcomed the participants and conveyed the best wishes of his predecessor as Chairperson, Ms Louise Lakos (Hungary). Observing that this meeting falls in the “danger zone” halfway between Conferences of the Parties, he pointed to the challenge of keeping the Parties fully engaged in the Convention, especially between Conferences of the Parties (COPs). He highlighted the particularly significant issues on the agenda and conveyed his gratitude to the Bureau’s staff for the meeting’s preparations.
2. **Ed Wilson, IUCN Programme and Policy Coordinator**, speaking for the Director General of IUCN, welcomed the participants to the IUCN headquarters and introduced himself and his new post, describing his long involvement with Ramsar issues, particularly in his work with WWF in Eastern and Southern Africa. He noted that by the terms of its Quadrennial Programme, recently adopted in Amman, IUCN will continue to provide support to the Convention, particularly on issues of site designation, wise use, restoration, water allocation, participatory management, assessments, incentives, and legal issues, as well as with daily assistance to in-country focal points.
3. Mr Wilson stressed the importance for Ramsar of two matters in particular. 1) The 2nd World Water Forum in the Hague, March 2000, was dedicated to the World Water Vision, with IUCN contributing the Vision for Water and Nature launched on that occasion by IUCN Patron Queen Noor. In furtherance of that vision IUCN has recently launched its Water and Nature Initiative, intended to demonstrate improved ecosystem management practices at the catchment level. This will foster involvement of non-traditional conservation partners from the water sector and should provide better assistance to the River Basin Initiative being developed under CBD and Ramsar. 2) The report of the World Commission on Dams is due to be launched on 16 November 2000; IUCN intends to set up a task force to analyze the WCD report, and he invited Ramsar, through the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), to join in that effort.
4. **The Secretary General (SG)** welcomed the participants and shared the Chair’s sense that this meeting comes at a sensitive point, between the enthusiasms of the COPs in Costa Rica and Spain. He was extremely happy to see all SC members present, many with more than one delegate, and felt that the presence of so many Observer Contracting Parties (CPs) indicated the growing importance of the Convention’s work.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

5. The Draft Agenda was adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 3: Admission of Observers

6. It was noted that by virtue of Resolution VII.1, Contracting Parties that are not members of the SC do not require admission as observers. The observers from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and

from two non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Fundación para el Desarrollo de los Ecosistemas Mayas, Guatemala, and VIDA, Costa Rica, were admitted as observers.

Agenda item 4: Statements by the International Organization Partners

7. **David Pritchard, BirdLife International**, congratulated the Bureau on its preparations for the meeting and drew the participants' attention to several contributions from BirdLife International in the agenda papers, particularly in regard to legal interpretations of the treaty, cultural values of wetlands, and the draft Strategic Plan. He briefly developed three strategic points.
8. First, he observed that Ramsar has become a superlative global forum for evolving wisdom on wetland issues, but wished for increased awareness that it is also a treaty, with formal commitments that need to be honored. Article 3.2 on ecological change, for example, merits more attention. BirdLife urges more emphasis upon national policy and legislation, environmental impact assessment, statutory systems for protected areas, and mechanisms for responding to threat.
9. Secondly, Mr Pritchard also urged that the next Strategic Plan include more attention to qualitative measures of wetland status, in addition to quantitative progress. Thirdly, he hoped to see the Ramsar agenda come to be shared by broader and higher levels of the population. He felt that the Convention's outreach effort has been significantly aided by the efforts of Bureau staff in developing the first class Ramsar Web site. He paid special tribute to the Ramsar Webmaster, Dwight Peck. He expressed the view that, at the technical level, Ramsar is "second to none" and urged continued efforts during this meeting at making Ramsar count where it needs to, at political level.
10. **Simon Nash, Wetlands International**, focused on this meeting as critical for "mainstreaming" wetland issues in poverty alleviation, in which wetland restoration and rehabilitation are crucial. He listed some of the many ways in which Wetlands International continues to support implementation of the Convention, including applied research, training and capacity-building, assisting in accessions and site designations, managing data on Ramsar sites and other wetlands, assisting the STRP and the application of the Ramsar Advisory Mission procedure. He noted the continued upgrading of the Ramsar Sites Database, maintained by Wetlands International under contract, collaboration with CIESIN at Columbia University on the Ramsar Data Gateway, support for inventory work (including development of an Asian Wetland Inventory database), similar work on peatlands and wet grasslands, and support for the River Basin Initiative.
11. Mr Nash pointed to other issues for which Wetlands International would be seeking SC support during the week: the proposed Wetlands Training Framework and Advisory Service, the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy 2001-2005, development of the Global Review of Wetland Inventories stage 2 (GROWI-2) and of a roundtable on Wetlands Stewardship.
12. Mr Nash regretted that some organizational disruptions have meant that Wetlands International has recently been unable to deliver services at the high levels normally expected of them. A complete institutional review is currently under way to ensure that the organization will soon once again reflect and meet the needs of all of its partners. He restated Wetlands International's belief that the Convention is the most important international tool for harnessing governmental commitment for wetland conservation and wise use. He reaffirmed its commitment also to working closely with BirdLife, IUCN, and WWF in support of the Convention.
13. **Biksham Gujja, World Wide Fund for Nature – International**, drew attention to WWF's many activities that directly and indirectly support the Convention, including some 35 million Swiss francs spent on freshwater conservation projects in more than 70 countries. He pointed especially to the very close developing relationship between Ramsar and WWF's Living Waters Campaign, which was launched at COP7 (San José, 1999), already with considerable success (e.g., Lake Chad,

Danube Green Corridor, designation of Andean wetlands, etc.). WWF has also contributed significantly to Convention goals respecting the transboundary Prespa Lakes Park, Doñana, and resistance to the Vistula and Odra River dams in Poland. Mr Gujja expressed concern that only 7% of the Ramsar Site designation commitments made at COP7 have so far been fulfilled and that many Montreux Record sites have not reported progress since original listing in the early 1990s.

14. Mr Gujja suggested setting some new goals, including calling upon governments to reach a total of 100 million hectares of Ramsar sites by COP8 (in which the Living Waters Campaign intends to assist), and fulfilling all COP7 pledges for new designations. He also urged a timeframe for improving the character of Montreux Record sites and urged a target of removing 40 sites from the Record before COP8.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Secretary General

15. **The SG** cited his report, DOC. SC25-2, and its addenda and corrigenda and proposed only to highlight certain items. In terms of the Strategic Plan's General Objectives, under "universal membership", he announced that Nigeria has now become the Convention's 123rd Party and paid tribute to the hard work of the Bureau's Regional Coordinator for Africa, Anada Tiéga, in facilitating that process. He listed six other new Parties and welcomed Libya's representatives to their first SC meeting as a Contracting Party. He indicated that Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean remain priorities for recruitment, and welcomed the two Observer States from the Caribbean area, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Under "Wise Use", he drew attention to the River Basin Initiative, relations with the Wetland Restoration working group of PIANC (the first time Ramsar has been involved at the working level with the private sector), the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project in Iran (as "international services provider" under contract with UNDP), and the MedWet Coast GEF project, all to be discussed later in the agenda. He also announced IUCN's Central America regional office project to develop a regional wetland policy for six Central American states.
16. Under "Awareness Efforts", the SG noted that the Bureau has engaged a Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) consultant to develop guidelines, and sought SC advice on the other new outreach plans described in his report. The new Ramsar exhibit, recently shown in Kenya, Canada, Japan, and Jordan, has not yet returned, but the Bureau has produced a replica of the exhibit on eight posters, financed by the Danone Group, in the three Ramsar languages. These are available for the SC participants, and copies are available to all bodies that are significantly advancing the Ramsar message. For World Wetlands Day (WWD), the Bureau is producing a number of supportive items and will once again report on WWD activities round the world on our Web site. He invited suggestions on what more can be done to capitalize upon and publicize the 30th Anniversary of the Convention. He expressed pride in the Ramsar Web site and sought help in attracting one or more corporate sponsors for it, in order to create funding for an assistant to the present Webmaster.
17. Under "Capacity Building", the SG highlighted the positive feedback so far received about the usefulness of the Ramsar Toolkit, containing all of the Convention's guidance to the Parties. English and Spanish have been available for some time, and the French edition is expected next week. He thanked Sandra Hails for her editorship of the series and the Government of Spain for financing both publication and distribution. Under "Listed Sites", he highlighted the recent MOU with Wetlands International and CIESIN, the GEF projects for Lakes Fitri and Nguru, a potential site in Cameroon, and another GEF project in support of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) involving Ramsar sites in Africa and Europe. He cited the new tripartite Prespa Park, and the report of the recent Ramsar-sponsored working meeting in Tirana, as examples of practical activities on the ground.

18. Concerning the Montreux Record (MR), the SG noted that, since the preparation of his report, the UK has requested an additional MR listing. He highlighted the fact that, as shown in his report, of the many alerts concerning change in the ecological character of Ramsar sites, all have come from NGOs and none from the Parties in accordance with Article 3.2. He described the Bureau's follow-up on questions about Ramsar Site 1000 in Honduras. Under the heading "Designation of New Sites", he applauded new sites since SC24, but voiced concern that, in terms of the COP7 pledges of new sites and the COP's target of 2000 sites by 2005, the present pace is distressingly slow. He paid tribute to the role of the WWF Living Waters Campaign in assisting in the designation of new sites. He displayed the print edition of the Annotated Ramsar List, updated frequently with one-paragraph descriptions of all Ramsar sites, and also available on the Ramsar Web site; each entry also includes information on human uses of the site.
19. Under "International Cooperation", the SG introduced **Alain Lambert**, the new Senior Adviser on Environment and Development Cooperation (SAEDC), a new position authorized by SC24. He emphasized that the SAEDC's role is not to generate funds for the Bureau, but to encourage multilateral and bilateral donor agencies to include wetland values in their planning and to promote specific initiatives within that context. He expressed the Bureau's frustration at the inadequate level of funding for the Small Grants Fund (SGF), which leads to demoralizing Bureau efforts in assessing projects for which funding may not exist and to disenchantment amongst the Parties hopeful of Ramsar support. The SAEDC feels that expanded funding may be possible for the SGF, but the SG once again urged the Administrative Authorities (AAs) in donor countries to collaborate in establishing a solid financial foundation for the SGF. The SGF mechanism has been shown to be excellent, but the support from the donor Parties has not been sufficient or reliable.
20. Concerning the Rio+10 process, the SG noted that Ramsar has been invited to contribute to the preparation of the report of the UN Secretary General on wetland issues. He mentioned the recent MOC with The Nature Conservancy, an important US-based NGO, as a ready vehicle for extending the work of the Convention into new areas. The SG paid special tribute to the excellent cooperation from the International Organization Partners. Under the heading "Institutional Mechanisms", he emphasized the growing importance of MedWet, and he reported that the Bureau's financial situation is very healthy.
21. **Argentina** provided information concerning Llancanelo; in an issue involving exploration for and exploitation of oil, the Administrative Authority (AA) has visited the site often and attended a public meeting on the issue. The company will be required to take all steps to monitor effects in advance and implement a mitigation plan, in accordance with Ramsar Article 3.
22. **China** announced its new National Strategic Plan for wetland conservation and wise use, to be unveiled next week; some 16 new Ramsar sites are in preparation by the end of 2001.
23. **Japan** asked whether SC members will be given an opportunity to provide input to the Bureau's two Rio+10 documents requested for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. **The SG** welcomed the offer and said that, after an expert consultant has prepared a draft, the documents will be circulated to all SC members for input and approval.
24. **Japan** also drew attention to the Bureau staff chart and urged that a universal principle of equitable geographical distribution be applied, since the Convention is now global and no longer merely European in significance. **The SG** emphasized his personal concern to ensure such distribution: all Regional Coordinators, and all Interns, must come from their own regions, and the Deputy Secretary General, during this SG's tenure, cannot come from Latin America.
25. **India** noted that, with the help of WWF, its pledged site designations would be fulfilled: 6 sites have been listed, 6 are in the final stages, and 7 more are planned for WWD.

26. **Norway** has distributed the Ramsar “Toolkits” to all its Ramsar Site managers and has received positive feedback. Norway drew attention to the addendum on the Ørlandet Ramsar site and noted that Montreux Record listing for the Tautra Ramsar site is being considered.
27. **Islamic Republic of Iran** voiced appreciation for the involvement of the GEF in Ramsar issues; the GEF project in Iran is a good beginning and a comprehensive report on the first phase of the project will be ready soon. Iran also expressed concern about the low level of funding for the SGF, bearing in mind its demonstrated effectiveness particularly in developing countries. Iran stressed the need for increased funding and agreed that the SGF function should remain within the Bureau. Iran noted that the increasing number of Ramsar sites and Parties must be stressing the capacities of the secretariat, which has not changed in resource levels since COP5 in 1993, and felt that increasing numbers of Montreux sites needing special care are a matter of concern.

Agenda item 6: Reports on the role of Regional Representatives

28. **The Chair** reported that, in Oceania, **Australia** has consulted with New Zealand and Papua New Guinea on SC issues. Australia has also contracted with Wetlands International to work with potential new Parties in the Pacific, most promisingly Micronesia, Palau, and Fiji.
29. **Argentina** has set up a Neotropics Forum e-mail discussion group to reach all CPs in the region, but noted that the lack of response, except for Costa Rica and Ecuador, may suggest a more general problem of communication. Argentina sought advice on other mechanisms to elicit communications amongst CPs in the region.
30. **Algeria** reported that communications limitations have prevented fulfilment of this pledge. It was noted that the Bureau has assisted in setting up e-mail facilities for some Parties in the region. Algeria, as promised, has contacted other Arab countries about accession and hopes for some results soon.
31. **Uganda** has set up a database of contacts, but noted the problems of communicating within the region, with little response so far. Presentations have been made in Ethiopia and Rwanda regarding accession and help with a National Wetland Policy (NWP) for Rwanda. Benin and Zambia have also been assisted in developing NWPs.
32. **Trinidad and Tobago** described efforts to communicate SC24 results in the region and has promoted the Convention at recent workshops. A training workshop is planned for 11-15 December and will deliberate on the benefits of the Ramsar resolutions vis-à-vis the SPAW Protocol.
33. **Mexico** noted that meetings are held in North America annually to coordinate efforts on wetlands and migratory birds.
34. **Armenia** has been involved in a specialist workshop in Georgia and training programmes in Ukraine, in cooperation with RIZA (Netherlands) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Exchanges are continuing with Russia, and less successfully, with Belarus and Moldova.
35. **Costa Rica** noted that a meeting will be held with the seven CPs in Central America to prepare for the Ramsar Regional Meeting next year, and two training courses have recently been held. Communications problems with the other AAs have also been encountered.
36. **Togo** has assisted Benin and tried to help Nigeria; the French NGO OMPO has been very helpful in training personnel.

37. **France** reported similar communications problems, with little feedback from European nations on Ramsar issues. France follows up progress on numerous projects, included those of the Tour du Valat and ministry regional offices assisting in the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe with technology transfer. France supports MedWet and wishes to increase its assistance. Regarding transboundary sites, France pursues the long-awaited Rhine and Rhône efforts but notes that, however great the national will, it takes time to incorporate local sensibilities; nonetheless, progress is anticipated.
38. **Norway** contacted the northern European Parties following SC24 and before SC25, and they all seem to be quite satisfied with the Convention's progress.
39. The **Slovak Republic** reported discussions on Strategic Plan and SC25 issues and has met with AAs from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia, and local officials of Poland. New Ramsar sites in Poland and Hungary were discussed, and appointment of National Focal Points for CEPA and STRP was urged.
40. **Spain** has played an active role in preparing for COP8 but was disappointed with the very few comments received concerning the draft agenda and programme.
41. **Japan** has been active in the Asia region, especially in the context of the Asian Wetland Inventory Database (with Wetlands International) and the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 2001-2005 (refer to Ramsar Recommendation 7.3). Last week's workshop in Okinawa, organized by the Environment Agency of Japan, Environment Australia, and Wetlands International-Asia Pacific, discussed recent achievements, approved the draft of the Strategy for 2001-2005, and agreed to establish still more new flyway networks. The Environment Agency of Japan is also assisting in a National Wetlands Inventory for Myanmar and hopes to help Myanmar join the Ramsar Convention.
42. **The Chair** was encouraged by the extent of the efforts by Regional Representatives and took note of the difficulties of communication between them. **The SG** observed that, thanks to the Evian Project of the Danone Group, the Bureau has been able to fund the setting up of electronic communications in at least 13 CPs so far and will try to help still more.

Agenda item 7: Resolution VII.12 on the status of sites on the Ramsar List

43. The **Philippines** was proud to announce that it had fulfilled its pledge of 3 new sites. Philippines noted that the ability of developing countries to deliver on their pledges often depends upon available resources, and urged that SGF assistance should receive greater emphasis.
44. **Argentina** described the transboundary potential of its new High Andean Ramsar site, developed with Wetlands for the Future and Small Grants Fund support, and indicated that Montreux Record status may soon be requested for Laguna de Llancanelo.
45. **Spain** drew attention to two errors in the Bureau's reporting on missing information on the Salinas de Ibiza y Formentera Ramsar site; these errors were already signalled at the last SC meeting and it is hoped that they will be corrected.
46. **India** confirmed its pledge of 24 new Ramsar sites before COP8. Information on the Chilika Montreux Record site will soon be provided and a mission is expected, and studies are continuing on the other two MR sites.
47. **Slovak Republic** referred to pledges of 2 new sites, but because of their transboundary nature, complications with Hungary need to be resolved; it is hoped that designation on WWD 2001 will

be possible. A trilateral agreement amongst the Slovak and Czech Republics and Austria is being developed for three Ramsar sites in these countries.

- 48. **WWF** observed that 50% of Montreux Record sites have not been reviewed since 1994 and urged Parties to take their obligations more seriously. For COP8, WWF urges 1) a comprehensive review of all MR sites, 2) a comprehensive review of MR mechanisms (and whether they should remain voluntary or become obligatory), and 3) a time limit on Montreux Record status.
- 49. **Costa Rica** is continuing work on its two pledged new sites, both high mountain. The problems at Palo Verde are greater than foreseen and involve the whole catchment; solutions are in progress, with assistance from the Government of Japan. The Ramsar site may be expanded to include all wetlands in that river basin.
- 50. **Libya**'s RIS for two sites have been sent and suitable maps are being drawn. Libya has good contacts with the MedWet Coordinator and expects a visit soon. Whilst planning a wetland inventory, Libya seeks technical assistance on inventory and management planning.

Decision SC25-1: The Standing Committee decided to:

- a) request the Bureau to make further contacts with Contracting Parties about their actions concerning their commitments embodied in Resolution VII.12, in order to obtain the most up-to-date information and encourage their further action;
- b) invite SC members to encourage Parties in the respective regions to follow up on those commitments; and
- c) receive the Bureau's report on Resolution VII.12 implementation at SC26, and then decide how best to deal with the remaining issues in advance of COP8.

- 51. **BirdLife International**, referring to Article 3.2, noted that the same reporting and compliance questions have cropped up in other conventions, and cited the treaty's implied need for Parties to equip themselves with a monitoring mechanism in order to inform themselves of changes and inform the Bureau "without delay". In terms of the Ramsar treaty, it is actually a breach of the Convention to fail to inform the Bureau of impending change. BirdLife urges a list of all Article 3.2 notifications, either as an expanded Montreux Record or as a "3.2 List" (with the Montreux Record, like the San José Record, reserved for special cases).
- 52. **Uganda** pointed to the need to determine, after sites are designated and management plans set in place, whether these plans are effective. Does the RIS provide the right information for monitoring? Should there be a system of annual review of sites, since the triennial National Reports may not reveal threats in time? This raises questions of institutional capacity. It must be remembered that the MR is not a black list: CPs have inscribed MR sites in hopes of attracting international assistance, and efforts should be made to prevent the MR from becoming a source of embarrassment, lest the Parties cease to inscribe MR sites.
- 53. **Iran** noted that, according to the relevant documents, the Montreux Record is only for sites affected by human causes, and suggested expanding that to include natural causes. There is a need to track what happens to MR sites after listing: the aim is to attract international attention and contribution, and it would be helpful to learn whether that has occurred and what the results have been.
- 54. **France** echoed Uganda in cautioning against legislating new procedures before careful rethinking of the balance between cooperative measures, in the Ramsar tradition, and strict systematic compliance mechanisms. Appointment of a technical working group on this issue was urged.

Decision 25-2: Recognizing the need to give increased attention to the fuller implementation of Article 3.2 of the Convention, the Standing Committee requested the

Bureau, with the assistance of the members of the Standing Committee, BirdLife International and other International Organization Partners, and the STRP's Expert Working Group on Ecological character, to prepare a paper for consideration by the 26th Meeting of the Standing Committee, for possible consideration by COP8. The paper should:

- (a) propose guidance to Contracting Parties concerning their identification and reporting of change in ecological character and likely change in ecological character, in full accordance with Article 3.2; and
- (b) propose options for response to reported change, or likely change, in ecological character, to include *inter alia* the *modus operandi* of the Montreux Record, the National Planning Tool, and other mechanisms.

Agenda item 8: National Planning Tool and National Reporting

- 55. **The SG** provided background on the National Planning Tool, which was approved by the SC and sent by diplomatic notification to the Parties and AAs on paper and diskette. He observed that there has been little feedback and sought the SC's guidance on what to do next.
- 56. **The Chair** reported that Australia is working through reporting requirements with its states and territories, has already set national targets, and expects to make good use of the Planning Tool.
- 57. **Uganda** judged that the National Planning Tool is a good instrument but would like to see a place for Parties to provide a summary of their main achievements.
- 58. **The Chair** indicated that the Regional Coordinators will continue to engage the Parties in using the Planning Tool. He took note of the wider issue of communication amongst Parties.

Agenda item 9: Joint Work Plan with the Convention on Biological Diversity

- 59. **The Deputy Secretary General** described the first Joint Work Plan (JWP) as a groundbreaking step among conventions and felt that the second JWP, which goes well beyond the original focus on inland waters, is another major step. The new plan, endorsed by CBD's COP5, includes a number of other themes and cross-cutting issues, upon which CBD has recognized that Ramsar can deliver. Collaboration between secretariats and subsidiary bodies will mean that guidance to the Parties of both conventions will be more harmonized. He noted that the widespread adoption of the JWP as a model for cooperation among conventions affects the Bureau's and STRP's workloads and may have resource implications. The second JWP runs to the end of 2001, and he sought SC advice on a third Plan, to be drafted during 2001.
- 60. **Japan, Norway, Argentina, and Spain** applauded the Bureau's efforts in cooperating more closely with the CBD and encouraged the Bureau to pursue similar synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements. **India** inquired about what tangible benefits have followed from this cooperation; **the DSG** pointed to increased GEF accessibility for wetland-related activities, increased visibility of wetland issues in other environmental agendas, and increased awareness of Ramsar values among national focal points of other conventions, in addition to a considerable number of concrete actions, such as the River Basin Initiative and the PathFinder workshops, that are reported elsewhere in this meeting. A preliminary assessment of JWP1 was presented to SBSTTA-4 and is available on the Ramsar Web site.
- 61. **Argentina** also urged the importance of transferring this synergistic momentum to the national level, and **Spain** urged greater emphasis upon conservation in arid and semi-arid lands and tourism in addition to the other interests under joint discussion.

Decision SC25-3: The Standing Committee expressed its support for the Bureau's efforts to develop synergies with the Convention on Biological Diversity and endorsed further work towards a third Joint Work Plan to succeed the present one.

Agenda item 10: Synergies with other conventions and organizations

62. **The DSG** highlighted the status of bilateral cooperative arrangements with a number of other global and regional instruments and organizations, as described in DOC. SC25-6, and mentioned several recent cooperative actions, for example, joint advisory missions to Ichkeul and Djoudj. He also indicated Ramsar participation in movement toward multilateral cooperation among environmental instruments, for example in ongoing UNEP-led discussions on streamlining reporting requirements. He described the way in which the development of the Ramsar Data Gateway, in cooperation with CIESIN and Wetlands International, has focused attention on the kinds and structure of the site data required, particularly regarding digitized site boundaries which have been contributed by WCMC for 700 Ramsar sites, and is prompting a revision of the Ramsar Sites Database. This may make it desirable to rethink the kinds of data requested from the Parties, the structure of the RIS, and the relationship between official data on Ramsar sites from the Parties and unofficial data from other sources.
63. **The SG** noted that Ramsar has been recognized as a leader in developing synergies amongst instruments, but there has been a considerable cost in terms of staff time and resources. He welcomed the Chair's suggestion that SC members might be able to assist by representing the Convention in international fora.
64. **India** emphasized that the primary objective of such cooperation must be practical benefits to the Parties.
65. **Togo** described the burden on some countries when responsibility for CITES, CMS, MAB, Ramsar and other instruments lies all within one department, and he stressed the need for greater harmonization of reporting and synergy at national level.
66. **Norway** strongly supported cooperation among environmental conventions and urged giving priority to global processes, particularly among Ramsar, CBD, and UNFCCC, in order to press for the ecosystem approach and the need for harmonized reporting. Ramsar can contribute to UNFCCC particularly on issues of carbon sequestration.
67. **The Slovak Republic** urged developing links with the Council of Europe's Bern Convention, especially with respect to its Emerald Network of sites, many of which are wetlands. He noted that this is already included in the Work Plan for the Regional Coordinator for Europe.
68. **Japan** urged that the concrete results and achievements of such synergies should be reported as part of the Rio+10 process.
69. **Uganda** noted that his government has set up a Working Group on environment-related conventions, including national focal points of Ramsar, CBD, CCD, and UNFCCC, the first priority of which is to translate the four convention texts into layman's language.
70. **Argentina** attached great importance to promoting such synergies in order to avoid duplication of efforts, facilitate exchange of information, and assist to support the effective participation of developing countries in this Convention. Emphasis was placed upon the need to keep open communication lines and facilitate joint work at national level.
71. **Philippines** applauded the efforts described but expressed concern about the effect of expanded workloads on the budget. She noted that if the Administrative Authorities were to assist in

representing the Convention, many of them might need administrative support. She echoed India's concern that in the end the most important aim should be practical benefits to the Parties. She noted that all national focal points need to be aware of linkages amongst conventions in the country, enhancing capacity at national level.

72. **The SG** agreed on the importance of producing direct benefits to the Parties but also noted intangible benefits, such as injecting wetland values into the agendas of other conventions and processes. By now most focal points of other instruments recognize Ramsar values and how they impact on the work of other conventions, whereas until recently that was not the case. Concerning budgetary implications, the SG noted that, besides the obvious trade-offs in staff time, there is little financial cost to these efforts except a small amount for travel. He mentioned IUCN's work in bringing Ramsar and UNFCCC together as an example of how non-Bureau entities can contribute to these synergies, and he encouraged SC members to consider opportunities to represent the Convention explicitly in other fora.

Decision SC25-4: The Standing Committee registered its support for the Bureau's cooperative efforts with other related conventions and institutions, in particular with the global treaties, and looked forward to observing benefits from these efforts flowing to the Contracting Parties. The Standing Committee members expressed their willingness to play a role in such cooperation, for example, by contacts in-country with the national focal points of other conventions.

Agenda item 11: Priority actions in the Barbados Programme of Action

73. **The Chair** provided background to the process of inviting Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to join the Convention and the necessity of demonstrating to them the value of joining in terms of the Barbados Programme of Action. The table in DOC. SC25-7 shows elements of the BPA to which Ramsar can contribute based on its existing Work Plans. Some consultations have been held with the SIDS and more will be desirable, but if agreement can be reached on common interests, these priorities can be injected as actions into the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008.
74. **Trinidad and Tobago** noted that this document will be discussed and commented upon at the Caribbean meeting set for December 2000.
75. **France** expressed gratitude for this concrete proposal and noted the presence of priorities that are shared with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and with actions to be carried out at national level (e.g., by France's Coral Reef Committee); further linkages could be achieved along these lines.

Decision SC25-5: The Standing Committee determined that the priorities in the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States should be adopted as a focus for the development of specific actions to be considered for incorporation in the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008, and it urged further consultations with the Small Island Developing States on their needs relative to wetlands. The Committee welcomed the intention of Trinidad and Tobago to bring the "Review of the Role of the Ramsar Convention in Relation to the Barbados Programme of Action" to the consideration of the Caribbean meeting to be held in December 2000.

Agenda item 12: Analysis and recommendations of IUCN's Environmental Law Centre (ELC) on revisions to Ramsar site boundaries and interpretation of Articles 2.5 and 4.2

76. **The SG** explained that in furtherance of Decision SC24-10 the ELC was asked to study the Ramsar concepts of 'urgent national interest' (Article 2.5) and 'compensation' (Article 4.2) in terms

of international law and practice. He reported that ELC's analysis suggested a need for guidance for the Parties on these issues.

77. **India** expressed the view that the present analysis already provides adequate guidelines and should be adopted and placed at the disposal of the Parties as soon as possible.
78. **BirdLife International** is pleased to see work on these issues progressing, since there is no consistency in the world's courts and decision-making bodies. He stressed that the object is not to make the rules as tight as possible, but to develop a system of rules that allows some flexibility, e.g., to distinguish insignificant or 'unstoppable' losses from untested assertions by vested interests. BirdLife offered to contribute to the ELC's further work on these issues. He noted, however, that there is a third issue from Resolution VII.23 which has not been addressed in this analysis: Standing Committee was requested also to propose guidance on boundary reviews "for reasons other than urgent national interest", for example, restriction of boundaries by virtue of trivial adjustments or improved boundary measurement methods, or delisting of sites that never met Ramsar Criteria. The COP should be provided with guidance on defining such cases and preventing their use as loopholes, with procedures for consulting the Bureau, STRP, or Standing Committee on a case-by-case basis.
79. **The USA** cautioned against the Convention's becoming too legalistic in this regard. Ramsar has always been known as a friendly Convention, and it has been relatively simple to add new sites, which is all to the good. But by moving toward a stricter approach at this time, there is a 'fish trap' effect in which Parties acceded and designated sites under certain assumptions and then find those assumptions changed. The US Congress is presently considering legislation that might effectively preclude the designation of new Ramsar sites, and it is only Ramsar's reputation as a friendly Convention that might deter such measures. Probably many other Parties are in similar situations, and greater legalism could seriously affect their willingness to designate future sites.
80. **The Chair** observed that at COP7 Australia promised to provide relevant case studies, and these are planned for completion by June 2001.
81. **The SG** suggested that the ELC's analysis be circulated to the Parties for comment, and that the ELC be asked to revise the document in the light of the Parties' input. **Argentina** supported this plan, citing the need for more time for study and comment.
82. **Costa Rica** noted that it would be helpful also to examine national legislation on the protection of Ramsar sites
82. **France** sympathized with the need for guidelines but seconded the USA in cautioning against adoption of too strict a legalistic approach. The guidance should give general principles, in terms of international law, but not close any doors. Protection is implemented through the national legislation of sovereign states, and we must work with that fact.
83. **Uganda** brought up further complexities, especially in the way that boundaries are originally determined – if on a functional basis, a proposal to reduce boundaries will also involve how the functions might be affected. In fact, some wetlands have moving boundaries.
84. **WWF** suggested that sometimes ambiguity helps, whereas strict guidelines might be abused. No one questions that the Parties are sovereign states, so it might be better if each Party dealt with the Bureau directly on such cases rather than through universal guidelines.
85. **Spain** supported the need for a further year of study of this complex and delicate issue. He referred to the EU standards on modifying designated sites because of development projects that emerge subsequent to listing.

Decision SC25-6: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to translate the Environmental Law Centre's analytical paper into French and Spanish and circulate it to the Contracting Parties for comment; to convey any comments received to the ELC for consideration in a further draft of the paper; and to present that revised draft to the Standing Committee's next meeting for transmittal to COP8. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the ELC for its work thus far.

Decision SC25-7: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau, with assistance from BirdLife International, to prepare an analysis of the issue of "a procedure for the review of Ramsar site boundaries for reasons other than urgent national interest, without prejudice to other international obligations" (Resolution VII.23, para. 9).

Agenda item 13: Implementation of Resolution VII.8 on participation of local communities and indigenous people in wetland management

86. **The SG** outlined developments in establishing the Participatory Management Networking Service (PMNS) jointly among Ramsar, WWF, and IUCN, to be hosted by IUCN's Social Policy Programme.
87. **Spain** drew attention to the similar profile of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation's special ARAUCARIA programme for fostering cooperation between biodiversity and poverty alleviation actions. Spain could suggest projects in Latin American countries in this regard.
88. **The Philippines** lauded this initiative and described that Party's task force to integrate stakeholders needs. The Philippines needs such assistance and urges that the present project be extended beyond Africa and Latin American to include Asia as well. **Benin** applauded the initiative, especially in light of the fact that many small African countries need assistance just in learning where they can go for funding sources, guidance, and other help. **Wetlands International** expressed full support for this initiative and saw it as a key aid to its proposed Wetland Training initiative.

Decision SC25-8: The Standing Committee welcomed and supported the joint initiative by IUCN, WWF, and the Ramsar Bureau to establish a Participatory Management Networking Service (PMNS), to be managed by IUCN's Social Policy Programme.

Agenda item 14: Implementation of the Convention's Outreach Programme

89. **The SG** reviewed recent steps in furtherance of outreach planning, including engagement of a consultant whose guidance should be ready for review by mid-December; it will be translated and distributed to the Parties for comment in January. An e-mail discussion group on issues of communications, education, and public awareness (CEPA) will soon be set up, and Web-based links to other good CEPA Web sites are under development. The SG's letter to the Parties asked them to appoint governmental and non-governmental national focal points and invited them to review their wetland needs and priorities and develop a CEPA plan of their own. The Bureau has limited resources to pursue this much further, and he reminded the Committee of the Voluntary Fund for Outreach set up by Resolution VII.28, which has so far enjoyed no support from the Parties.
90. To **Argentina's** question whether the Bureau's programme includes producing material for the Parties, **the SG** described plans for a leaflet describing what Ramsar sites are, etc., an information pack on wetland values and functions which will have longer-term use after World Wetlands Day, and research on examples of the inclusion of wetland issues in school curricula, which could be

disseminated in some form. Argentina requested that for Parties which have not yet chosen their CEPA national focal points, Ramsar materials be sent directly to the Administrative Authorities.

Agenda item 15: Status of implementation of the River Basin Initiative

- 91. **The DSG** recalled Resolution VII.18 on river basins and drew attention to two consequent activities: 1) the work of the STRP Expert Working Group on water allocation and management, and 2) the River Basin Initiative (RBI) proposed jointly by the Ramsar Bureau and SCBD, the first formal joint action between them. The latter's basic aim is to assist countries in getting good-practice information, and it has drawn significant interest, not only from the wetland community, but from the water management community as well, thus helping to bring these two sectors together. The next steps include inviting partners; preparing funding proposals; and establishing a management group. The RBI will be complementary to WWF's Living Waters Campaign and IUCN's Water and Nature Initiative.
- 92. **Costa Rica** noted that that country's Council on Wetlands has discussed the RBI and agreed to support it; he encouraged the Bureau to continue its efforts.
- 93. **Japan** supported the initiative as well, but pointed out that, since management of river basins is so complex and cross-sectoral, cooperation with other actors as partners, e.g. UN agencies, would be desirable. Japan expressed interest in the inclusion of Lake Biwa amongst potential pilot targets in Annex V and hopes for further communication with the initiative on this matter.
- 94. The **DSG** urged that SC members offer more suggestions of potential good practice examples, recalling that not all examples need to illustrate all good practices.
- 95. **Trinidad and Tobago** noted the absence of small islands from the list of potential targets, and **Armenia** suggested a further addition to the list in Annex V; **Spain** noted that the presence of its site in Annex V has been communicated to the competent authorities. **The DSG** explained that initial letters will go out at the global level for planning purposes, with an open invitation for national focal points to review suggested targets and suggest additions to the list.

Decision SC25-9: The Standing Committee welcomed the news of recent progress in establishing the River Basin Initiative, jointly supported by the Conventions on Biological Diversity and on Wetlands.

Agenda item 16: Report of the 9th meeting of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

- 96. STRP member **Dave Pritchard, BirdLife International**, speaking on behalf of the STRP Chair Jorge Jiménez, expressed gratitude to the USA for its financial contribution to the work of the STRP and reported that, in general, the Panel is on schedule to deliver the products requested by COP7, although some additional products will require further resourcing. The STRP suggests the creation of two new Working Groups and other amendments to the STRP Work Plan adopted by SC24, and urges the inclusion of two new subjects in the Technical Sessions of COP8.
- 97. Mr Pritchard drew attention to Dr Jiménez's letter distributed to all participants and described several concerns about the STRP's *modus operandi*: the difficulty of coordinating the network of STRP focal points, which strains Bureau capacities; the high triennial STRP turnover, which consumes time in orienting new members and the Chair; the heavy STRP workload, often calling for the creation of new products rather than merely their "review", and the lack of a mechanism whereby the COP can assess the cumulative burden of desired tasks.
- 98. **Slovenia** reported experience with using the MedWet wetland inventory database, in a Small Grants Fund project, and offered to share that knowledge with the STRP.

99. **Uganda** suggested that the STRP work to provide the Parties with further guidance on wise use, especially in relation to indicators; Mr Pritchard promised to convey that wish to the STRP.
100. **Argentina** noted that the best inventory methods vary from region to region, and said that in Latin America quick methodologies are in use which may lack the depth of other methods, but are still useful; he suggested that the STRP consult with Ecuador, where these methods have been used successfully.
101. **Norway** urged that the Working Group on Climate Change cooperate more fully with the UNFCCC and suggested that the Group focus on ecosystem services and new methods of carbon sequestration. The **USA** supported the importance of the climate change question in the STRP's work.
102. **China** reported that it has been working on wetland inventory for four years, with the field work now completed and a final report ready perhaps by next year. China noted the increased attention paid to wetlands in China since the floods of 1998, including the restoration of farmland to wetland along the Yangtze.
103. **The DSG** explained that the STRP Working Group recognizes the need for different inventory methods for different purposes and plans to provide a range of guidance. He noted the support for the STRP's work on climate change and drew attention to IUCN's study of the impacts of climate change upon wetlands and of wetlands in mitigating climate change effects. This is intended to supplement the IPCC's 3rd assessment, which may not address wetland issues adequately; the Bureau has financed the beginning of this work, but further resources will be needed in order to complete it.

Decision SC25-10: The Standing Committee approved the revised Work Plan proposed by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). It noted the report on the STRP's 9th meeting and its progress in achieving its programme of work, and it noted the progress in the Parties' designation of STRP National Focal Points.

104. **The DSG** noted that the STRP has asked the Bureau to prepare advice on its concerns about the Panel's *modus operandi* for consideration by SC26.
105. **The USA**, supported by **Argentina** and **France**, said that the Parties should be proud of the STRP and particularly of how well it has done without much guidance. The issues raised require discussion, and the USA urged the creation of a new Subgroup to discuss them with the past and present STRP Chairs and offer substantial help. **Japan** also supported the suggestion and offered to serve in the Subgroup.
106. **The SG** asked that consideration also be given to the implications for the work load of the Bureau. Since STRP members are volunteers, their work requires a great deal of coordination and administrative support from the Bureau; this presently falls to the DSG but consideration should be given to employing a full-time STRP coordinator in the Bureau. He noted that the COP's mandates to the Panel have shifted from "review" to generating many new products, which is probably necessary.
107. **Canada** lauded the aim of the STRP Working Group on Climate Change to review the work of the IPCC but wondered whether this is not too ambitious a goal on such a complex issue. He asked what STRP would suggest as a remedy to the problems it has identified: more human resources, clearer priorities and focus in the tasks given, restriction to a "review" function?

108. **The SG** explained the STRP's nomination and selection process and its present composition, including members selected from the Parties, members from the Partners, observers from scientific organizations, and invited experts when necessary. He noted that the timing of STRP selection is mismatched with its mandates from the COP, since members are chosen before the kinds of expertise that will be required are known. He stressed the importance of the STRP's work to the Convention's effectiveness and urged the COP to be mindful of the tasks that it requires from the STRP, particularly when the need for further invited experts raises resourcing implications.
109. **The Chair** expressed the Committee's gratitude to Mr Pritchard and the STRP members for their hard work so far.

Decision SC25-11: The Standing Committee noted the concerns of the STRP's Chair and members about its *modus operandi*, mandates from the COP, and high turnover. The Committee established a Subgroup on the STRP to study the method of STRP selection and kinds of expertise sought for it, as well as the resource implications for the STRP and the Bureau caused by its work load and by the need for coordinating interactions with the STRP National Focal Points. The Terms of Reference of the Subgroup are to:

- prepare Terms of Reference for the Chair and members of the STRP and guidelines on the role and functioning of the STRP in relation to these TORs, as well as the role of observer organizations and invited experts;
- review the role of the STRP National Focal Points and, as appropriate, recommend changes to the existing Terms of Reference of these focal points so as to ensure that they can contribute fully to the work of the STRP;
- make recommendations for a procedure designed to establish greater continuity of membership in the STRP;
- make recommendations for a process designed to make available to COP8 (and subsequent COPs) a clear understanding of the full list of tasks it has under consideration for the future work of STRP, so as to assist the COP in its determination of Resolutions and Recommendations relating to this work;
- make recommendations on the schedule of meetings of the STRP during the next triennium, and in particular the timing of its first meeting, so as to maximize the time available to STRP to develop and undertake its programme of work; and
- review the financial and other resource implications of the recommendations and proposals relating to the *modus operandi* of the STRP, and make recommendations concerning resourcing of the work relating to the STRP.

The Standing Committee requests the Bureau to prepare a paper addressing the above Terms of Reference for circulation to the Subgroup on the STRP by 15 January 2001 and to incorporate comments from the Subgroup in a second draft; this second draft will be considered by the 10th meeting of STRP (in line with Decision STRP 9-17) and then at a meeting of the Subgroup to take place immediately prior to the 26th meeting of the Standing Committee, in late 2001, for transmittal to COP8.

The Subgroup will consist of Armenia, France, Uganda, Japan, BirdLife International, the Chair of STRP, and the USA as Observer, and the Deputy Secretary General (*ex officio*) and the past Chair of STRP (to be invited).

Agenda item 17: The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

110. **The SG** reported on the progress of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) and Ramsar's role as Board members. He expressed high hopes for the value of the Assessment and noted that it offers great exposure for the Convention's values. The Assessment's purpose is to enhance

capacity to manage ecosystems sustainably for human well-being. The Administrative Authorities, and national focal points of the CBD and CCD, will be invited to nominate experts.

- 111. **The USA** reported that it is actively supporting the MEA and cited President Clinton's announcement that the US intends to contribute satellite images and other technical assistance. Still, the USA does have some concerns, chiefly that as yet there is no methodology for the assessment, no view of how useful information can be got from fragmentary studies and how it can be made to flow to decision-makers. Since information is scale-sensitive, it is not clear how global assessments can be helpful at local level. She also noted that there are many other assessments already available or in progress. The USA encouraged Ramsar's involvement in the MEA and urged that the Convention's representatives communicate to the Board what Ramsar Parties expect to gain from this process. The USA asked what Convention resources will be committed to the MEA.
- 112. **The MedWet Coordinator** noted that MedWet is proposing that the Mediterranean should be included as one of the ten pilot studies; **Spain** supported this suggestion.
- 113. **Norway** supported Ramsar's participation in the MEA and its role in highlighting wetland issues. She welcomed the MEA's fresh approach of concentrating on the ecosystem approach and on ecosystem services. Norway is planning its own national ecosystem assessment, in which wetland issues will play a large part.
- 114. **Ecosistemas Mayas** applauded the fact that the MEA plans to take into account the needs and views of indigenous people and is aimed at ensuring sustainable development for human well-being.
- 115. **The SG** explained that the MEA Board will decide upon national and local assessments that will require funding, but will welcome the results of all other assessments that follow the agreed methodology. He said that the Board is aware of the concerns expressed by the USA and expressly intends the MEA results to be useful and practical. The Bureau is involved as part of the Board, requiring minimal resources, but will devote no staff time to assisting the working groups.

Decision SC25-12: The Standing Committee endorsed the Bureau's participation in the development and implementation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and expressed the willingness of SC members to assist the MEA Board by nominating suitable experts and suggesting likely pilot sites for local assessment.

Agenda item 18.1: Dates and venue of the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

- 116. **Spain**, as Chair of the Subgroup on COP8, reported on progress in the preparations for COP8, including an agreement signed last month between the Spanish Ministry of Environment and the Bureau which spells out responsibilities and budget. Spain also distributed a dossier with information about the proposed slogan, logos, and the city and region of Valencia. He described the advantages of Valencia as the venue and explained the potential choices for the COP slogan, all of which stress the ancient interaction between humans and biodiversity, a particular way of life that is especially notable in the Mediterranean Basin, particularly in Valencia, where people have been associated with wetlands from ancient times. He explained the various reasons for Spain's choice of 18-26 November as the COP8 dates.
- 117. **Japan** offered to make a financial contribution for delegate support, and expressed its view that COP8 should be held at least two months before or after the next COP of CITES. Japan asked the Bureau to keep in touch with the CITES secretariat on this issue. Japan further asked the US

delegation to contact the Chair of the CITES Standing Committee (USA) to see what could be done to change the dates of CITES COP 12, to be expected 4-15 November 2002.

118. **The SG** indicated that Chile had given assurances that the CITES dates would not be set until after Ramsar's had been approved, but that 4-15 November was chosen anyway. He urged the Administrative Authorites to invite Chile or the CITES secretariat to change those dates in order to leave more time between the COPs. For the reasons described, Ramsar has no alternatives to the 18-26 November period. He noted that holding the COP in the second half of the year requires some rearrangement of the pattern for Standing Committee meetings.
119. The **USA** agreed to discuss the CITES COP dates with the Chair of the CITES Standing Committee.

Decision SC25-13: The Standing Committee adopted the recommendation of the Subgroup on COP8 that the COP be scheduled for Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002, and it endorsed the proposed slogan "Wetlands: water, life, and culture" (and its French and Spanish equivalents). The Committee welcomed the agreement between the Bureau and the Spanish Ministry of Environment outlining responsibilities and budget and expressed gratitude for Spain's generous offer of Sfr 721,000 for Bureau costs and Sfr 100,000 for sponsored delegates.

The Committee also approved the following calendar of pre-COP8 events: a) Standing Committee's 26th meeting, 3-7 December 2001; b) Subgroup on COP8 meeting, 6-8 May 2002; c) SC27 and SC28 meetings, 17 and 26 November at the COP8 venue; d) SC29 meeting, 6-9 January 2003; e) SC30 meeting, 10-15 November 2003. The Committee welcomed Japan's indication of its willingness to contribute to delegate sponsorship.

Agenda item 18.2: Proposed COP8 Draft Agenda and Programme

120. **Spain** reported that the Subgroup analyzed suggestions for shortening the length of the COP but could reach no consensus and thus recommends the traditional nine-day programme. Spain wishes to host as useful and important a COP as possible and finds that six days leaves insufficient time to cover the many issues proposed. The Subgroup recommended that the issue of duration and content of COPs and regional meetings be studied further and discussed at COP8. The Subgroup also considered the question of adding a ministerial session to COP8 but felt that the many practical and financial problems made that inadvisable.
121. **WWF** urged that Technical Session 1 be expanded to include discussion of the water crisis. Noting WWF's work with cultural aspects of wetlands, she also urged that more attention be devoted to cultural aspects in the Sessions, and offered WWF's assistance.
122. **Islamic Republic of Iran** observed that ministerial sessions attract further the attention of high-level officials and requested Spain to reconsider the question of holding such a session at COP8.
123. **The USA and Argentina** congratulated Spain on its efforts and for its flexibility on the question of dates.

Decision SC25-14: The Standing Committee adopted the Draft COP8 Agenda and Programme proposed in DOC. SC25-15, with the following amendments (in italics):

Agenda item VI: Appointment of the Credentials Committee and any other committees - Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure, the Conference will appoint a Credentials Committee on the basis of proposals made by the Conference Committee, and may establish any other committees necessary to enable the

Conference to carry out its functions. The COP may establish a Committee on the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 and the Work Plan 2003-2005; a Committee on Finances and Budget; and a Committee on content and duration of future Ordinary Meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Technical Session 1: Item 1.1 should incorporate the outputs of the STRP Working Group on Water allocation and management; Item 1.2 should incorporate the outputs of the (proposed) STRP Working Group on Climate change and the Ramsar Convention

Technical session 4: The titles of items 4.1 to 4.5 should read “*Case studies and guidelines on ...*”

The Committee requested the Subgroup on COP8 to prepare a study of the content and duration of future Conferences of the Parties, for consideration by SC26 and COP8. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the Government of Spain for its leadership on COP issues.

Agenda item 18.3: Ramsar regional meetings in advance of COP8

124. **Spain** corrected a few errors in the Subgroup's recommendations and described the need for subregional meetings in three regions. **The SG** noted that no dates or host countries have yet been decided upon for the proposed regional meetings, with the exception of Europe's meeting which will be held in Slovenia in October 2001 – following the SC's decision, the Bureau will seek offers to host the meetings and then negotiate the dates.
125. **Uganda** and **Togo** voiced the need to organize subregional meetings in Africa on a geographical rather than a language basis (as recommended by the Subgroup); they urged three meetings, for East and South Africa, West Africa, and Central and Northern Africa. **The SG** pointed out that language-based groupings had been recommended in order to avoid the high costs of translation and interpretation; he suggested that the Committee request the Bureau to explore this proposal, subject to availability of funds. All funds for the meetings remain still to be raised.
126. **Slovenia** described the work already done between the Bureau and her country to host the pan-European meeting on 13-18 October 2001.
127. **Argentina** reported that the Neotropical SC members would jointly urge that two meetings are necessary for each of the South and Central American subregions, one before the next SC meeting in order to forge a joint approach and another in 2002 to consider the COP agenda documentation. Argentina offered to organize the 2001 meeting and indicated that a budget has been drawn up that will fund a significant part of it.
128. **Trinidad and Tobago** supported Argentina's proposal. He indicated that the meeting planned for December 2000 in the Caribbean will be a training session and not a regional meeting as such.
129. **Libya** supported the proposal for geographical rather than language-based subregional meetings for Africa and offered to assist in exploring co-funding between host countries and the Bureau.
130. **France** suggested that the MedWet/Com meeting set for Portugal in 2001 be added to the list.
131. To a question from **BirdLife** about the Oceania region, **the Chair** indicated that the three Parties in Oceania can easily meet informally without calling upon the Bureau's resources. He promised to consult with New Zealand and Papua New Guinea whether it would be possible to organize a meeting for the region that would include non-Contracting Parties.

132. **Mexico** supported Argentina's proposal; regarding the North American region, he noted that Canada, Mexico, and the USA already meet annually on relevant issues.
133. **Iran** drew attention to the absence of Contracting Parties in the Central Asia region and asked for clarification, and **the SG** indicated that the decision should specify that that subregional meeting will be intended for non-Contracting Parties.
134. **Costa Rica** expressed concern about the possibilities for obtaining funding for the planned meetings. **The SG** indicated that the Bureau will do all that it can, but he urged potential hosts to approach the Bureau as soon as possible so that the Bureau can seek co-funding. Since donors may be reluctant to provide funds to the Bureau in Switzerland, it is usually preferable that donated funds be provided directly to the host country. The first task is to identify when and where the meetings will be held, and their agendas, and then to approach donors with concrete rather than hypothetical plans.

Decision SC25-15: The Standing Committee noted the suggestions that regional meetings in Africa be organized by geographical proximity rather than by language and that planned meetings in the Neotropical region be increased from two to four, and instructed the Bureau to explore these arrangements, subject to their financial feasibility. The Committee adopted the list of regional meetings proposed by the Subgroup on COP8¹, as amended by the wishes of Africa and the Neotropics, and with a notation that the Central Asia meeting is planned for non-Parties. The Committee also approved the list of objectives for the regional and subregional meetings, as amended by the Subgroup's recommendations. It welcomed Australia's offer to explore with New Zealand and Papua New Guinea the organization of a meeting for Oceania, possibly to include non-Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 18.4: Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award

135. **Spain** reported on the Subgroup on COP8's recommendations and noted the changes in the Guidelines required by the agreed dates for COP8.
136. **The Philippines** approved of the recommendations and called for representation from Asia and Oceania in the Subgroup on COP8. **The Chair** indicated that Australia is representing Oceania and that consultations on a representative from Asia will be needed among the Regional Representatives.
137. **The USA, Costa Rica, and Trinidad and Tobago** requested revised wording in the Guidelines to clarify that sums of less than US\$ 10,000 will not be awarded to winners, rather than that sums less than \$10,000 will not be accepted from donors.

Decision SC25-16: The Standing Committee approved the proposed text of the guidelines for the Ramsar Award, amended to indicate that sums of less than \$10,000 will not be awarded as cash prizes, not that they will not be accepted from donors. It endorsed the Subgroup's proposed calendar – call for nominations by 20 June 2001; deadline for nominations on 31 December 2001; Bureau's analysis of candidatures by 31 March 2002; Subgroup on COP8's recommendations on winners at its 6-8 May 2002 meeting and transmittal to Standing Committee for endorsement; presentation of the Awards at the opening of COP8 on 18 November 2002.

¹ The list of planned meetings, as amended by Decision SC25-15 and subject to feasibility, comprises: Africa, 1 subregional meeting each for West, North+Central, and East+South Africa; Asia, 1 meeting each for the Middle East, Central Asia (for non-Contracting Parties), West Asia, and East Asia; Europe, 1 pan-European meeting in Slovenia; Neotropics, 2 meetings each for South and Central America; and the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee meeting in Portugal in 2001.

138. **The Chair** conveyed the SC's gratitude to the Subgroup on COP8 for its efforts.

Agenda item 19: Report of the Subgroup on Strategic Plan 2003-2008

139. **Uganda** introduced the Subgroup's report and recommendations and commended the Bureau for its work in preparing the draft Plan for consideration. The Subgroup took account of all comments received, and considered that most of the draft Plan meets the Convention's aspirations. The Subgroup also discussed the effects of the first Strategic Plan, its successes and failures.
140. **The Chair** asked that the SC consider the Subgroup's comments in the following order: a) overall structure, Annex II; b) key and emerging issues, Annex I; c) more substantive points; and d) next steps in the process.
141. **Trinidad and Tobago** stressed the importance of allowing stakeholders to identify the key issues facing the Convention, a process that he felt was missing from the drafting of the first Strategic Plan. Drafting of the second Plan should have begun by identifying key issues with stakeholder involvement. He indicated that a section on "What are the key issues facing Ramsar?" should be added to the structure in Annex II.
142. **Japan** reported that the Asia region has agreed that India will participate in the Subgroup on COP8 and Japan in the Subgroup on the Strategic Plan.
143. **The SG**, referring to Annex I, noted that the wording of bullet point 1 concerning human poverty seems to 'blame the victim' and urged the addition of a reference to over-consumption patterns as well.
144. **The Philippines** called for consideration in the Plan of the relationship between globalization and wetlands.
145. **India** urged a rearrangement of the structure so that the second Plan would begin with an assessment of the success of the first Plan, followed by a section on Challenges, then the new Plan. He noted that the draft Plan deals with all issues but should stick to the basic objectives of the Ramsar Convention.
146. **The Chair** noted that the Challenges are meant to be contextual and the text will clearly distinguish between those that Ramsar can and those it cannot influence.
147. **The USA** said the Subgroup had discussed introducing the draft text early in the COP agenda and finalizing it late, in order to allow for discussion and for inclusion of COP8 results in the final Plan. The point was not reflected in the draft Strategic Plan report. She noted further that since the COP will be held later than usual, there should be ample opportunities for the regional meetings to convey their input; the process has seemed somewhat 'top down' so far.
148. **The SG** suggested a calendar of events to allow for circulation of the next draft to the Parties in January 2001, to allow time for them to reflect upon it and seek input from their National Ramsar/Wetland Committees.
149. **Argentina** suggested that the Subgroup should meet sufficiently early that the SC can consider a final draft at its next meeting. **The SG** urged that, instead, the SC should delegate the Subgroup to adopt the final draft at its meeting in May 2002.

Decision SC25-17: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to prepare a third draft of the Strategic Plan in line with the recommendations of the Subgroup on the Strategic

Plan; to incorporate in this third draft, as far as practicable, any additional comments on the second draft received from Standing Committee members by 30 October 2000; and to circulate the third draft to the Subgroup by 15 December 2000 for comment and approval by 8 January 2001, followed by its translation into French and Spanish and wider distribution for comment by the end of January 2001. The Standing Committee will consider again the draft at its 26th meeting and will delegate the Subgroup to meet in May 2002 to adopt the final draft for transmittal to COP8. It is intended that the draft Strategic Plan will be considered late in the COP8 agenda to allow time for incorporation within it of results of the COP, as appropriate. It is also intended that the pre-COP8 Ramsar regional meetings will be given the opportunity to comment upon the draft Strategic Plan.

Agenda item 20: The Bureau's Work Plan for 2001

- 150. Following the DSG's introduction to the agenda papers, the **Regional Coordinator (RC) for the Americas** reported that Monday's regional meeting has asked for amendments to the Bureau's Work Plan (WP) relating to the Americas; regional priorities have been established and these will be introduced into the Bureau's WP2001.
- 151. **The MedWet Coordinator** observed that the MedWet section of WP2001 is based upon the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy, which is an adaptation of the current Ramsar Strategic Plan; this document will be consolidated with the new Strategic Plan, with the inclusion of Mediterranean specificities.
- 152. **The USA** noted that some of the targets mentioned in the draft WP seem very ambitious and should be discussed by the Committee. **The SG** recalled that the targets were those set by the COP in the triennial Work Plan of the Convention and could not be amended, though the SC could comment upon them if it wished to do so.
- 153. **India** urged that the present WP should include a "balance sheet" of the achievements of the preceding annual Work Plan. **The SG** agreed and apologized that this useful function was overlooked during the Bureau's preparation of the agenda papers.
- 154. **Uganda** suggested that the Bureau's "balance sheet" should be linked directly to the targets; **the SG** recalled that most of the targets set by COP7 in the Convention's Work Plan actually require actions by the Parties and other bodies, not necessarily by the Bureau. Nearly all of the Bureau's actions are intended to help the Parties meet their targets, but for many targets, the Bureau cannot help at all.
- 155. **Trinidad and Tobago, India, and WWF** called for a somewhat simpler document in which it would be more clear which bodies have responsibility for which targets and exactly what role the Bureau should have in reaching them. The SC also needs to know afterward which actions have been achieved.
- 156. **The Regional Coordinator for Europe** recalled that Secretary General's Report to the SC does list most of the achievements, though not in tabular form.

Decision SC25-18: The Standing Committee approved the Bureau's Work Plan for 2001, with amendments to the Americas section following the recent regional meeting. It urged that in future the Bureau's proposed plan should be simpler in structure and that it be accompanied by a 'balance sheet' indicating where the actions of the preceding year's Work Plan have been achieved or not achieved.

Decision SC25-19: The Standing Committee requested the Bureau to prepare a report and proposals, for consideration at its next meeting and possible transmittal to COP8, on a) the

nature and extent of data holdings in the Ramsar Sites Database and the relationship between “official” and “unofficial” data on Ramsar sites; b) the possible need for a revised format for the Ramsar Information Sheet to bring it into closer conformity with evolving data needs; and c) specifications for the future preparation of Ramsar site maps, in both paper and digital formats.

157. **Wetlands International** explained its proposal for the establishment of a Ramsar Wetlands Training and Advisory Service, as described in the supplementary paper to DOC. SC25-19. He stressed that it would be a Ramsar, and not a Wetlands International, service, and that it would be directed to capacity building and training and not be intended to replace the Outreach Programme. It would be a needs-based programme and would draw upon experience and resources already existing. Internet access would be used for maximum benefit. Wetlands International hoped that the SC would endorse the proposal at this time, whereafter approaches would be made to assistance agencies, and progress would be reported to the next Standing Committee meeting.

Decision SC25-20: The Standing Committee endorsed the proposal by Wetlands International for establishment of a Ramsar Wetlands Training and Advisory Service, as described in the supplementary agenda paper to DOC. SC25-19 and presented by the representative of Wetlands International.

Agenda item 21: World Wetlands Day 2001

158. **The Secretary General** described the products that the Bureau will be offering to assist Parties and others to prepare for WWD 2001, including a brochure, a poster, and an information pack on wetland values and functions. The Ramsar Web site will again list WWD plans and activities reported to the Bureau. The SG drew special attention to the fact that WWD 2001 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention, and he indicated that the new 8-poster version of the Ramsar exhibit could be used by the Parties to improve the visibility of that occasion. The SG has invited the Parties to host a significant international event in honor of the 30th anniversary, but there has been no response. The Director General of WWF International is considering a similar suggestion. The SG urged the Parties to use the occasion of WWD and the 30th anniversary to raise public awareness of the Convention and its values.
159. Many of the participants made interventions indicating their plans for WWD 2001, which will appear in more detail on the Ramsar Web site when they have communicated these more formally to the Bureau. **Australia** plans a number of national-scale activities. **Uganda** values WWD highly and reported that this WWD a 10-year wetland strategic plan will be launched; the Government has elevated wetland activities to the level of a poverty-alleviation programme. **WWF** urged change of WWD to a Week for the 30th anniversary; WWF International is communicating with its network (e.g., the Living Waters Campaign is planning with Algeria to designate 10 new Ramsar sites on WWD) and will report further. **The Philippines** reported that a presidential proclamation is planned to commemorate wetlands on 2 February, and the Administrative Authority is planning a number of activities at national and regional level, hopefully including the designation of two Ramsar sites. **Costa Rica** noted that a workshop is planned for Nicaragua, and that Costa Rica will be focusing on mangrove areas for WWD, with a half-hour film on wetlands slated for television; the AA is working towards a decree that will increase protection for areas contiguous to Ramsar sites. **India** intends to launch seven new Ramsar sites on WWD. **Iran** stressed the importance of honoring the 30th anniversary of the Convention and expressed its desire to play a role in that exercise. **Benin** noted that the adoption of a National Wetland Policy is slated for 2 February, with the help of The Netherlands; articles, reports, a video, and a 2-day training seminar on wetland values are also planned, hopefully with participation from neighboring countries. **France** is organizing an exhibition for its 18 Ramsar sites (2 February to World Water Day on 22 March) to make them better known. **China** celebrates WWD every year and has many activities in prospect for 2001, including plans to launch 16 new Ramsar sites. **Libya** is publishing an article about

Ramsar and MedWet in its bulletin and is producing a new poster on the value of wetlands and waterfowl.

160. **The Chair** invited the participants to forward descriptive text on these activities to the Bureau for inclusion on the Ramsar Web site.

Decision SC25-21: The Standing Committee members noted the Bureau's planning for World Wetlands Day 2001 and indicated their willingness to forward descriptive text about planned activities in their own countries to the Ramsar Bureau, as soon as practicable, for inclusion in the growing list of planned activities on the Ramsar Web site.

Agenda item 22.1: Audited accounts for FY 1999

161. **Armenia** presented the Subgroup on Finance's recommendations on this and the following agenda sub-items.

Decision SC25-22: The Standing Committee accepted the Audited Accounts as truly reflecting the financial position of the Ramsar Bureau as of 31st December 1999, for transmittal to all Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 22.2: Income and expenditure for FY 2000

Decision SC25-23: The Standing Committee approved the report on FY 2000 core and projects income and expenditure.

Agenda item 22.3: Use of funds under budget line 3

Decision SC25-24: The Standing Committee noted the Bureau's report on the use of funds under budget line 3 (travel on official business), submitted in accordance with Decision SC24-23.

Agenda item 22.4: Small Grants Fund: *modus operandi* and approval of projects

162. **Brazil** indicated that it was withdrawing its project proposal and hoped that the project from Argentina could be approved in its place. **The SG** explained that, because the project ranking is done by assessment score rather than by region, the freed funds would have to go to the next proposal on the priorities list.
163. **The USA** asked why funds freed by unsigned contracts for 1999 projects should not be used for unfunded 1999 projects rather than for 2000 projects. **Several Bureau staff** pointed to difficulties with this suggestion. Unfunded projects and proponents from the past may no longer be available; most worthy unfunded 1999 projects have been resubmitted for 2000 in any case, and all proponents have had the opportunity to do so.
164. **Guatemala** queried the status of Guatemala's SGF proposal and was informed that the project was withdrawn from consideration by the Administrative Authority.
165. There was considerable discussion of India's reservations about two proposals from the Asia region and the principle of equitable regional distribution that is presumed to operate in project assessment. **Togo** noted that since Africa has many more Contracting Parties than other regions, more proposals from that region should be approved. **Argentina** expressed discomfort about the mingling of technical and political criteria for approval.
166. **India** withdrew its reservations about the projects from Mongolia and Thailand.

Decision SC25-25: The Standing Committee decided:

- a) to establish a deadline of 31 December 2000 for return to the Bureau of signed contracts on outstanding SGF1999 projects. If a contract has not been returned fully signed by that date, the project should be cancelled and the funds reallocated to the next ranked A2 category SGF2000 project;
- b) to establish a general rule for SGF2000 and future years that fully signed contracts must be returned to the Bureau within three months of the date that the Bureau has confirmed the project proponent's reception of the document. If a contract is not so returned, the project should be cancelled and the funds reallocated to the next ranked A2 project awaiting funding.
- c) to approve for funding the list of projects in Category A1 contained in Annex 2 of DOC. SC25-24 and the projects listed in paragraphs 7 and 9 of the Addenda to DOC. SC25-24, noting the withdrawal of the project proposal from Brazil.
- d) to amend the assessment procedure used in the review and ranking of small grant proposals by the following steps:
 - Adding four new categories to the five categories already existing in Stage II of the evaluation form.
 - These four new categories would address the 4 technical themes of Stage I:
 1. Objectives
 2. Activities and Methods
 3. Budget
 4. Capacity to Implement the Project
 - A maximum of five points and a minimum of zero would be awarded under each category.
 - A rating of zero should represent a minimally adequate level of compliance, not non-compliance.
 - The Ramsar Bureau staff will develop specific proposal rating language for each of these four new Stage II categories. This language will be reviewed subsequently by the Subgroup on Finance.
 - These proposed changes will be implemented in the 2001 small grants cycle.

Agenda item 22.4 (ii): Feasibility of transferring operation of the SGF to another body

167. The Senior Advisor for Environment and Development Cooperation sought the aid of the Administrative Authorities in facilitating access to the relevant agencies in their own governments.

Decision SC25-26: The Standing Committee

- a) decided that the administration of the SGF should be kept within the Ramsar Bureau and invited the IOPs to strengthen their support in relation to Ramsar SGF project design, evaluation, implementation and monitoring;
- b) welcomed the statement by the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation that he is confident that there are several mechanisms that could be explored with considerable prospects of success to raise funds for the SGF;
- c) requested the Secretary General to ensure that the Senior Advisor devotes attention to exploring these mechanisms as soon as possible; and

- d) urged the Ramsar Administrative Authorities to provide full support to the Senior Advisor in this endeavor.

Agenda item 22.5: Unpaid contributions from the Contracting Parties

- 168. **Japan** supported the Subgroup's recommendation but voiced concern that sanctions on unpaid contributions might discourage the Parties concerned from taking conservation actions or even from continuing as members of the Convention.
- 169. **Islamic Republic of Iran** observed that the United Nations offers provisions for exceptional treatment of States facing extraordinary difficulties and proposed the addition of a new point (as indicated in point e of the decision below) which would allow for that possibility.
- 170. **Costa Rica** recalled previous discussions of whether Parties unable to pay their sometimes very small contributions might be permitted to pay with in-kind services in-country. **The SG** noted that, since COP7 set the minimum contribution at SFR 1000, all unpaid contributions are worth pursuing, and that in-country services do not help with the cost of operating the Convention's services.

Decision SC25-27: The Standing Committee determined to submit to COP8 a draft resolution establishing that, in order to encourage timely and regular payment of annual contributions, as from 1 January 2003:

- a) Contracting Parties whose arrears equal the amount of their assessed contribution for the preceding two years on the date of the opening of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties shall not be eligible to be elected as Regional Representative in the Standing Committee of the Convention;
- b) Contracting Parties whose arrears equal the amount of their assessed contribution for the preceding three years on the date of the opening of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties shall have their right to vote suspended at that meeting;
- c) Contracting Parties whose arrears equal the amount of their assessed contribution for the preceding two years at the time of considering any request for funding under the Ramsar Small Grants Funds or other funding mechanism under the Convention shall not be eligible for such funding.
- d) Since these sanctions would commence only at COP9 in 2005, COP8 should authorize the Standing Committee to negotiate a fair arrangement, on a case by case basis, with those Parties that have accumulated considerable arrears, in order to allow them to attend COP9 with a clean slate.
- e) In case of severe economic conditions or natural disaster, at the request of the Contracting Party concerned, the Standing Committee would be authorized to make special arrangements with that Party regarding its unpaid contributions.

Agenda item 22.6: Use of the OECD/DAC list to determine eligibility for Ramsar assistance

- 171. **Armenia** explained the Subgroup on Finance's recommendation that the categories within the DAC's eligibility list be used to determine priorities for Ramsar assistance.
- 172. **Argentina** protested the inclusion of the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) in the DAC list and recalled its reservation on this issue at the time of its accession. Furthermore, Argentina recalled that paragraph 8b) of Resolution VI.6 applies only to countries included in the List of Aid

recipients established by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD. Argentina requested that the text of its reservation should be recorded with the minutes of this meeting

173. **The SG** pointed out that the list comes from the OECD/DAC, not from the Ramsar Bureau, and the names used on it cannot be changed by Ramsar.
174. **China** protested the listing of “Chinese Taipei” in the DAC list and indicated that, because China considers Taipei to be a province of China, this name should be removed from the list.
175. **The SG** recalled that the list in question has been prepared by the OECD and cannot be amended by Ramsar. He noted that Taipei is not a Contracting Party, so the issue is not relevant to Ramsar concerns. He suggested adding language to the SC decision to indicate that the use of the DAC list would apply only as it is relevant to Ramsar Contracting Parties and those countries eligible to become Contracting Parties. **Argentina** suggested wording to that effect and requested of the Bureau that, where the DAC List would be used in Ramsar documents, it should be accompanied by a note indicating that the DAC List would apply only to Ramsar Contracting Parties and other countries eligible for accession.
176. **China** again protested the presence of Chinese Taipei on the list. **The SG** recalled that the use of the DAC list was decided by Resolution VI.6 of COP6, and both the SC and the Bureau are bound by that decision.

Decision SC25-28: The Standing Committee decided that:

- a) the OECD/DAC List of Aid Recipients should continue to be used, *mutatis mutandis* as applying to Ramsar Contracting Parties and other countries eligible for accession, for eligibility for SGF as established by Resolution VI.6;
- b) the Bureau, when allocating assistance for participating at Ramsar meetings, should use the OECD/DAC list in the following order of priorities:
 - i) Contracting Parties in Part I of the List
 - ii) Contracting Parties in Part II of the List: Central and Eastern European Countries and New Independent States of the former Soviet Union; and
 - iii) Contracting Parties in Part II of the List: More advanced Developing Countries and Territories;
- c) the Bureau should prepare a report on the regulations and practice applied on this matter by other environment-related conventions for consideration at the next Standing Committee meeting and possible transmission with recommendations to COP8.

Agenda item 22.7: Ramsar Bureau budget 2001

Decision SC25-29: The Standing Committee approved the Bureau’s proposed budget as shown in Document SC25-28.

Agenda item 22.8: Work Plan of the SAEDC

Decision SC25-30: The Standing Committee noted the proposed Work Plan of the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development Cooperation (SAEDC) and looked forward to its effective and successful implementation.

Agenda item 22.9: Location and financing of the MedWet Coordination function

177. **Spain** indicated that its desire is to assist the functioning of MedWet in any way that it can, and to further that end, when an offer to host the MedWet Coordination function was made by Greece, Spain decided to withdraw its earlier offer in the interests of consensus. Spain plans to consider whether some of the funds intended to host that function in Málaga could be used to second a Spanish expert staff member to the MedWet Coordination in Athens.
178. **France** thanked both Greece and Spain for their efforts and urged that the MedWet countries be informed promptly of the Standing Committee's decision.

Decision SC25-31: The Standing Committee, having received the generous proposals submitted by Spain and most recently by Greece for hosting the Coordination of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, including a pledge for financial contributions towards the salary of the MedWet Coordinator and other expenses:

- a) accepted with pleasure the recommendation of the interested countries that the MedWet Coordination function should continue to be based in Athens, Greece, for the interim period until 31 December 2002, when the 8th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties will have taken a more permanent decision;
- b) accepted the generous offer by the Government of Greece contained in the letter addressed to the Secretary General by the Deputy Minister of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works dated 16 October 2000 and further elaborated in the letter also addressed to the Secretary General by the Director General of that Ministry, dated 24 October 2000;
- c) expressed its most sincere appreciation to the Government of Spain for having submitted a generous and early offer to provide a solution to the location and financing of the MedWet Coordination, and welcomed the indication by the Ministry of the Environment that it may consider using part of the resources involved in its offer for the secondment of a Spanish expert to work in the MedWet Coordination in Athens;
- d) authorized the Secretary General to enter into an appropriate agreement with the Government of Greece concerning the MedWet Coordination office and its financing; and
- e) urged the Bureau to communicate news of this decision to the participating MedWet countries without delay.

Agenda item 23: Next meeting of the Standing Committee

179. **Argentina** expressed the view of the Americas regions that time should be allotted in the agenda of the next SC meeting for regional gatherings.

Decision SC25-32: The Standing Committee fixed the dates of its 26th meeting for 3-7 December 2001, at the Ramsar Bureau offices, and determined that time will be set aside in the agenda for regional meetings.

Agenda item 25 (i): Procedure for selection of a new Secretary General

180. **The SG** urged that the selection process be got under way earlier than foreseen, since awaiting COP approval of the procedure, given the later dates for COP8, would leave insufficient time to have someone on board by 1 August 2003.

181. **The USA** suggested that, in view of the many issues to be considered (such as selection criteria, qualifications, confidentiality concerns, composition of review and interview panels), a Subgroup should be created to make a proposal to the next SC meeting.
182. **The Chair** suggested that he be tasked to circulate proposals on these issues to the SC members well in advance of the normal posting of agenda papers for SC26.

Decision SC25-33: The Standing Committee decided a) that the Chair will circulate proposals concerning search procedures, including search criteria and the composition of the search and interview committee(s), well in advance of the next Standing Committee meeting; b) that at that meeting the Committee will adopt the procedure and calendar for selecting the new Secretary General and instruct the Bureau to put it in motion; and c) that the Committee will communicate to COP8 the procedure adopted by the Standing Committee for selecting a new Secretary General and invite the COP to consider and adopt it as the formal procedure for future occasions.

Agenda item 24: Adoption of the report and decisions of the meeting

Decision SC25-34: The Standing Committee adopted all of the Decisions of the meeting, as well as the Minutes of the first day of plenary sessions, subject to final editorial preparation by the Bureau. It was agreed that the Minutes of the second and final day of plenary sessions will be circulated by electronic mail to voting members of the Standing Committee with one week allowed for comment.

Agenda item 26: Closing remarks

183. **The Chair** thanked the participants for their engagement in the substantial issues that have been covered in this meeting. He expressed gratitude to all who have contributed to the successful conclusion of the meeting, particularly the interpretation team, the Bureau staff, and the Standing Committee members, observers, and International Organization Partners.
184. **The Secretary General** expressed particular appreciation for the work of Annette Keller on the logistics and preparations for the meeting, assisted by Valerie Higgins, Mireille Katz, and Montserrat Riera. He thanked the interpreters for their skill and patience, and on behalf of the Bureau staff he thanked the participants in the meeting for all of their efforts.

Attachment: Document provided by Argentina (see paragraph 172 above).