

**Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)**

**27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee  
Valencia, Spain, 17 November 2002**

## **27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee**

### **Report of the Meeting**

(in agenda-item order)

#### **Agenda item 1: Welcoming remarks**

1. Stephen Hunter (Australia), Chair of the Standing Committee, welcomed the participants and recorded his appreciation for all those involved in the preparations for Ramsar COP8. The Chair and Japan proposed amendments to the agenda, which was adopted as amended.
2. Spain, as COP8 host country, warmly welcomed all delegates and noted that many people have long been working very hard on the preparations, which are just now being completed, in order to provide the optimum working conditions for the delegates. He hoped that the delegates would take away fond memories of the people's hospitality.

#### **Agenda item 2: Report on COP8 arrangements**

3. The Secretary General (SG) expressed satisfaction at the way in which the extraordinary task of converting a museum into a convention centre virtually overnight has gone off so well.

#### **Agenda item 3: Review of the COP8 annotated agenda and programme**

4. It was noted that the present version of the Provisional Agenda includes no substantive changes from the version adopted by Standing Committee, only some rewording to reflect the current situation.

#### **Agenda item 4: Election of Ramsar COP8 officers**

**Decision SC27-1: The Standing Committee determined to nominate to the COP Mrs María del Carmen Martorell Pallás of Spain as President of the COP, and Héctor Conde of Cuba and Javad Amin Mansour of the Islamic Republic of Iran as Vice-Presidents.**

#### **Agenda item 5: Appointment of the Credentials Committee**

5. It was noted that the suggested membership has one Party from each region; the Bureau has tried to identify individual delegates willing to devote the time necessary for the Committee's work. Japan supported the proposal but asked for later discussion of the Committee's schedule of meetings.

**Decision SC27-2: The Standing Committee agreed to recommend that the COP elect the following Parties to the Credentials Committee: for Africa, Algeria; for Asia, Nepal; for Europe, Latvia; for the Neotropics, Colombia; for North America, Mexico; for Oceania, Papua New Guinea. The Bureau's Annette Keller will serve as secretary to the Committee.**

#### **Agenda item 6: Establishment of COP Committees**

6. The SG recommended that the core of the COP8 Committee on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan be composed of the existing Standing Committee Subgroup on the Strategic Plan, and that additional Parties be invited to participate as well, in such a way as to assure geographical balance. Meetings should be open to observers.

**Decision SC27-3: The Standing Committee agreed to nominate the members of its existing Subgroup for the COP's election to the Committee on the Strategic Plan, and adopted the Bureau's suggested list of additional Parties for invitation to membership.**

7. The SG recommended that the core of the COP8 Committee on Finances and Budget be composed of the existing Standing Committee Subgroup on Finance, and that additional Parties be invited to participate as well, in such a way as to assure geographical balance. Meetings should be open to observers.

**Decision SC27-4: The Standing Committee agreed to nominate the members of its existing Subgroup for the COP's election to the Committee on Finances and Budget, and adopted the Bureau's suggested list of additional Parties for invitation to membership.**

8. Japan expressed his understanding that the mandate of the COP Committee on Finance would include consideration of DR27 on the budget as well as all other Draft Resolutions which might have budgetary implications. This was agreed.
9. The SG suggested that the proposed Committee on Content and Duration of Future COPs be chaired by the USA with an open-ended membership. The USA and Armenia indicated a need to rearrange some of the pre-scheduled meeting times to meet other commitments, and the SG reminded the meeting of the very crowded COP meeting schedule.

**Decision SC27-5: The Standing Committee agreed to recommend that the proposed Committee on Content and Duration of Future COPs be chaired by the United States of America, and be a committee with open-ended membership.**

#### **Agenda item 7: Establishment of Contact Groups**

10. The SG identified eight Draft Resolutions for which there have been indications that special efforts may have to be made before consensus can be reached, and the Bureau was urging that Contact Groups be set up in advance for these, in order to allow additional discussions without taking up valuable time in plenary. Identifying these Groups before the COP would not prejudice the creation of further Contact Groups wherever the need

might arise, and any Groups established now could easily be abandoned if it should turn out that they are unnecessary.

11. Japan questioned the desirability of establishing Contact Groups before plenary discussions have demonstrated the need for them, and noted that in some cases Groups would be discussing new texts even before the plenary would have had its first discussion of existing texts.
12. The SG reiterated that, for these DRs, the regional meetings and comments to the Bureau have indicated that there will very likely be issues requiring further negotiation, and valuable time can be gained by letting those discussions get under way early.
13. France offered to lead the Contact Group on the San José Record and Management Planning and noted that the purpose would not be to detract from the discussions in plenary or the technical sessions, only to contribute to eventual consensus.
14. Japan initiated a discussion of the scheduling of the Contact Groups and other meetings outside of plenary, observing that there are many overlaps which would make it difficult even for large delegations to participate fully in the many issues under discussion. He urged a review of the whole schedule and suggested that some DRs be moved into the Technical Sessions for consideration there.
15. The SG dissuaded from referring any additional issues to the Technical Sessions, since they have been two years in the planning and their programmes are already very crowded. He recalled that Technical Sessions are intended only for substantive issues in which the DRs are meant to carry annexed Guidelines for inclusion in the Ramsar Toolkit. Many other issues may be politically controversial but not substantive in that sense. Most DRs submitted by the Standing Committee are covered in Technical Sessions, whereas most other DRs have been sponsored by one or more Parties.
16. The Chair clarified that the Tuesday review of non-Technical Session DRs in plenary is intended to identify those that might also need more work before consensus, so flexibility in the Contact Group schedule might be needed. The Conference Committee can keep the situation under close review.
17. The SG observed that Contact Groups would need to start their work as early as possible, and that ad hoc rescheduling of Group meetings during the week would be difficult in light of the limited number of times and rooms available.
18. Japan urged acceptance of the principle that no two main Committees (Conference, Strategic Plan, Finance, and Future COPs) should meet simultaneously, and that only one (or at most two) Contact Groups should ever meet at the same time, providing a maximum of three meetings in any one slot. Japan has prepared a new schedule of meetings that follows those principles and urged the Bureau to verify its feasibility. Brief initial meetings would be held by all Groups in order to determine whether and how many future meetings each would require. The USA supported Japan's proposal.

**Decision SC27-6: The Standing Committee adopted the list of proposed Contact Groups to be set up in advance of the COP and determined that the Bureau would work to the extent possible with the new schedule for Contact Group meetings**

**suggested by Japan, publishing overnight for the COP participants a new schedule of Group meetings' times and places. This schedule should be revised and reissued by the Bureau as needed throughout the week.**

19. Japan observed that the many non-Technical Session Draft Resolutions to be considered by the plenary on Tuesday might be more clearly dealt with if organized into thematic categories, rather than considered in numerical order, and suggested that these categories be: administrative and institutional matters, interpretation of the Convention, and technical/scientific/policy matters.

**Decision SC27-7: The Standing Committee agreed to group the non-Technical Session Draft Resolutions into three thematic categories for the COP's consideration and instructed the Bureau to publish a list of the new order in which the DRs would come up for discussion according to this plan.**

#### **Agenda item 8: Opening ceremony and social functions**

20. The SG described changes in the opening day's schedule, occasioned primarily by the planned appearance of HRH Prince Felipe. Spain indicated that it will be an honor to have the Prince addressing the COP, since he has always been very active in conservation issues.

#### **Agenda item 9: Nomination of STRP members for the next triennium**

21. The DSG described the nomination process for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel thus far, with a disappointing number of suitable nominations, especially from certain regions, and a weak overall response so far from the Parties. He recalled the changes to the selection process being suggested to the COP in Draft Resolution DR28/28*bis* and recommended that the Standing Committee strongly urge the COP to adopt those changes, so that selection of the STRP members can be deferred until the February 2003 Standing Committee meeting and a renewed call for STRP nominations can be made. If the COP declines to change the selection procedure, the Conference Committee will have to produce a list for the COP composed of existing nominations.
22. The SG observed that a slot has been created in the COP agenda for Saturday to allow at least the part of DR28 concerning the selection process to be adopted.
23. Japan urged that the issue be raised earlier in the COP and that the names of current nominees be made available, so that both the issue and the nominees can be discussed in regional meetings during the week.
24. The USA observed that the STRP is small but the amount of expertise needed is vast. He views the regional members of the STRP, less as sufficient experts in themselves, than as facilitators who can tap the scientific networks within their regions on behalf of the STRP. Thus, the small number of nominees from the North America region resulted not from lack of interest in the STRP but rather from a regional agreement on the individuals best able to play that role.
25. Trinidad and Tobago seconded Japan's suggestion of regional discussions of the issue and urged that present nominations be maintained as valid when the call is made for new ones.

**Decision SC27-8: The Standing Committee accepted the proposal to urge the COP to adopt a selection procedure for the STRP that would task the Standing Committee to make the selections at its first substantial meeting after the COP, and to renew the call for nominations for 2003-2005. The Bureau was requested to prepare a region-by-region list in English, French, and Spanish of the STRP nominations so far, in time for distribution prior to the COP8 regional meetings.**

#### **Agenda item 10: Conference Committee**

26. There was discussion of whether the Conference Committee's daily early-morning meetings should be open to observers, as Standing Committee meetings are, or restricted to members only in the interests of completing the necessary business in the short time available. There was a reluctance to refuse the right to attend as an observer but a willingness to limit numbers by not actively inviting observers. It was noted that, if discussions should become unfocused, the Chair should restrict interventions from observers if necessary.

**Decision SC27-9: The Standing Committee determined that observers would be admitted to Conference Committee meetings but that the attendance of observers would not be invited.**

#### **Agenda item 11: Approval of Small Grants Fund projects**

27. The DSG explained the background to the SGF selection process and current financial situation and expressed gratitude to the donors to the Fund in the past year. Proposals in categories A1 and A2 in the Bureau's recommendations are all worthy of funding, but sufficient funds are presently available only for those in A1.

**Decision SC27-10: The Standing Committee adopted the recommended Category A1 list of Small Grants Fund proposals for 2002 for funding support.**

28. Japan indicated the possibility of its funding Category A2 projects in Mauritius and Sri Lanka and requested more information on those proposals. The DSG expressed the Bureau's gratitude.

**Decision SC27-11: The Standing Committee accepted the geographical priority for potential funding of Category A2 proposals as expressed in DOC. SC27-2, paragraph 12, i.e., Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Mexico, Armenia.**

#### **Agenda item 12: Audited accounts**

**Decision SC27-12: The Standing Committee noted the audited accounts for fiscal year 2001 and the status of the Reserve Fund, as indicated in document SC27-3.**

#### **Agenda item 13: Any other business**

29. It was noted that an invitation had been received from Uganda to host the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in 2005. The invitation has been signed by the Minister of the Environment, and efforts are being made to have a new invitation signed by the Head of Government or Minister of Foreign Affairs, as required by the Rules of

Procedure, sent from Uganda before the end of COP8. It was observed that other Parties may also wish to extend invitations for COP9 during the coming days, and if that should happen, discussions would ensue.