

Report of the 31st Meeting of the Standing Committee

First day, 8 June 2005

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. **Gordana Beltram (Slovenia), Chair of the Standing Committee (SC)**, welcomed the participants and drew attention to the full agenda for the meeting, adding that she hoped not to devote too much time to the details of the technical papers but rather to focus most discussion upon the policy and financial draft Resolutions (DRs). She thanked the Secretariat and Heather MacKay for making available the framework for water-related guidance to the 13th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD13) and expressed gratitude to each of the International Organization Partners (IOPs) for its help in the lead-up to the meeting. She described the wandering J-Dog, sent abroad by a school in Canada, which has been accompanying Ramsar family members to meetings of the past half year or more, and introduced her surrogate J-Dog, a panda given her by WWF.
2. **Achim Steiner, Director General of IUCN**, welcomed the participants to IUCN HQ and remarked that the COP will impact not only upon Ramsar's work but also upon the world's impression of the Convention. He said that a great challenge for Ramsar and the environmental community is that many of our issues are not at the forefront of the emerging development movement. There is unprecedented interest in committing the world's resources to development, and the agenda for future years is being set in the next months, but the presence of environmental issues in the debate is the weakest it has been in a decade. The Ramsar COP must face the challenge of getting onto the development agenda or risk losing relevance.
3. **The DG** urged the importance of stressing the focus on human well-being, ecosystem services, and poverty reduction, and to move beyond the defensive strategy of protecting resources toward the investing of those assets and helping to reduce poverty sustainably. Wetland issues must be thoroughly incorporated into Integrated Water Resources Management and river basin management, and the increasing attention to water issues presents a great opportunity. He promised that IUCN will continue to assist Parties in developing environmental flow policies and plans.
4. **The DG** noted that MEAs are seen as not bringing about change, and COP9 must face the challenge of implementation on the ground. The Convention must support the Parties in applying the Ramsar guidance and improving wetland management. He observed that the regional initiatives are very important, but he called for more clarity about their objectives, criteria and due process, means, and practical implementation. Speaking for the four IOPs, he emphasized that the Ramsar relationship with the IOPs needs to be strengthened. The IOPs and their networks are very important to the Convention, but this needs to be shown on the ground. He concluded that Ramsar is capable of articulating a

case in the water debates that it not bound by the north-south thinking of the development community.

5. **The Secretary General (SG)** expressed satisfaction at the high level of interest in the meeting and pointed to the full agenda, covering both the logistics and intellectual content of the COP. He drew attention to the changes in both the Convention and the environmental debate since 1971 and said that, whereas we have been two-dimensional in our thinking, we must become three- or four-dimensional. He noted that there is an institutional paralysis in the international environmental governance frameworks and that Ramsar has the opportunity to provide leadership in the multilateral environment. He urged that the Secretariat and Parties together should meet the challenge of bureaucratic indifference and forge new ideas and directions. He said that we have a choice at this meeting and at the COP, whether to debate on style and form or to set new directions, take our message to the wider public, and start to really make a difference.
6. **The Chair** conveyed apologies from Javed Amin Mansour of Islamic Republic of Iran, the SC Vice Chair, and Trevor Swerdfager, who has represented Canada as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, and she introduced Mohsen Esperri of the Iranian mission in Geneva and Robert Martel of Canada in their places.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

7. **Austria** requested that an introduction to the item on budgetary matters be moved forward to the beginning of Thursday's business. **The Republic of Korea** requested that a presentation on Korea's offer to host Ramsar COP10 be introduced in Agenda item 14: Any other business.
8. The agenda was adopted with those two amendments.
9. **Morocco** called for the presentation of documentation in the three working languages of the Convention. **The SG** expressed sympathy with that concern but noted that the Parties have consistently preferred not to budget for translation of SC documentation, though interpretation has been provided at recent SC meetings. **The Chair** noted that all documents emerging from the SC for consideration by the COP will be circulated in English, French, and Spanish.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

10. Permanent observers and Contracting Party observers do not need admission. Other observers listed in the Provisional List of Participants were admitted.

Agenda item 4: Report of the Secretary General

11. **The SG** drew attention to his report in DOC. 31-35 and made a PowerPoint presentation which complemented that document. He mentioned new Parties and noted that the expected notification of the accession of Antigua and Barbuda brings the Bahamas onto the SC as an additional member for the Neotropical region. He mentioned the many new Ramsar site designations but expressed concern that some still enjoyed inadequate management, and he noted the many site problems that have been reported to the Secretariat; he said that an issue for the future is how to maximize the value of Ramsar site

designation in the context of the wise use of all wetlands. He reviewed the Secretariat's participation in meetings of the global water agenda and thanked Switzerland for helping Ramsar present our message there. He noted that the first meeting of the Biodiversity Liaison Group was hosted by Ramsar, and he reported interest in harmonizing national reporting amongst the biodiversity cluster of conventions.

12. **The SG** reported on the pre-COP9 regional meetings held for Africa, the Americas, Europe and most recently Asia, all of which produced valuable outcomes, and thanked the donors and host countries that had made them possible. He reported on the Secretariat's preparations for COP9, noting that online registration is now operational. He drew attention to the STRP's work and thanked those chiefly responsible. Stressing that taking the message forward is important, he noted the IOPs' contributions, but said that the budget provided no resources for the Secretariat's work with communications, education, and public awareness (CEPA). He noted that the Group Danone has provided resources for 'getting the message out', especially with World Wetlands Day (WWD) and the Evian Encounters, and said that he is looking for new ways to reach the global community. A particularly satisfactory thing about this past WWD has been how many people have customized the Ramsar materials into local languages; he noted that the method of distributing the materials has been changed and he thanked the Administrative Authorities for their assistance in that. He described the EcoFilm Festival, in which Ramsar and MedWet sponsored a prize category last year and will again this month.
13. **WWF** requested that in future reporting for the Asia and Oceania regions be separate, asked for an update on the SPREP Ramsar officer for Oceania, and asked for an update on threats to Ramsar sites in the Neotropical region. **The SG** reported that he was pleased with the progress being made in some of the cases in the Neotropics, and agreed that it would be appropriate to focus on Oceania separately in reporting. He judged that the SPREP Ramsar position has been very successful and thanked SPREP and the donors (WWF, USA, and Australia) for making that possible, but noted that the funding will have to be renewed at the end of the year if the position is to continue.
14. **Japan** offered a brief report on the Asian regional meeting, the main recommendations of which were: to continue the Asian Wetland Symposium, which should be linked to other regional meetings; to welcome the Republic of Korea's bid to host COP10; to support the development of subregional and transregional initiatives and to welcome the development of an initiative for peatlands; to strengthen the Small Grants Fund (SGF) and add a mechanism for Asian Parties similar to the Swiss Grant for Africa and Wetlands for the Future for the Neotropics; to stress that regional meetings are effective platforms and should continue; and to support DR10 on natural disasters and DR15 on poverty reduction. **The Deputy Secretary General (DSG)** noted that the full report of the Asia meeting went onto the Ramsar Web site last night.
15. **Uganda** inquired about progress in establishing a focal person in Kenya to provide liaison between Ramsar and NEPAD. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** reported that considerable progress had been made with Kenya, but since the secretariat will not be located in Nairobi the Secretariat is working on other possibilities with Zambia, Senegal, and South Africa.
16. **Uganda** reported on the formation of an intersectoral group including government officials, NGOs, the private sector, etc., which will function in Uganda like a National Wetlands Committee.

17. **Botswana** reported that SADC and IUCN have been implementing a wetland regional initiative that has benefited many countries in the region, especially in capacity building. He provided an update on the development of a management plan for the Okavango Delta, which should be completed by the end of 2006, and noted that that would not have been possible without the help of the Ramsar Secretariat, IUCN, Denmark, Germany, and Sweden.
18. **Canada** provided a brief report on the regional meeting for the Americas, noting the list of key issues identified in the SG's report. He stressed the importance of regional initiatives, especially for capacity building, and noted the very strong support for CREHO, the Ramsar center located in Panama.
19. **Ghana** inquired whether the new Parties in Africa would warrant an additional African member on the SC; **the Chair** promised that that will be considered at the COP.
20. **Austria** thanked the SG for his report on the things that have gone well and asked for information on anything that had not gone well. **The SG** noted the problem of the balance between the designation of new Ramsar sites and management planning for those sites, especially seen in the volume of complaints about problems at many sites. He expressed a wish for more regular updating of site information and Ramsar Information Sheets from the Parties. He noted that synergies with the other MEAs need much more involvement from the Parties at national level, a key issue in better governance globally.
21. **Papua New Guinea** stressed the need for the continuation of the SPREP Ramsar post in Oceania and for a regional meeting to be held there. **The SG** reported that some funds have been provided by SIDA for the meeting and that Australia is still considering its support, with an answer expected in a few weeks; if successful, it could be held in mid-August, possibly in Fiji.
22. **France** drew attention to the SG report's comments in para. 21 about the "linking science and governance" meeting in France in Germany and said that the government's proposal for an IPCC-like assessment process would not be "unrealistic", as described, if there were sufficient support for it. **The SG** agreed and noted the Secretariat would participate to the extent possible in the further development of the process.
23. **The Senior Advisor for Africa** summarized the results of the African regional meeting held in Arusha: a reconfirmation of support for NEPAD's role in implementing the Convention; concern about the lack of resources and capacity; the need for working with subregional economic groups in overcoming poverty; and support for regional initiatives such as ChadWet, among others. The full report of the meeting is available on the Ramsar Web site.
24. **The Chair** expressed her gratitude to all who helped in the successful organization of the regional meetings.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance

25. **Canada** presented a document containing the decisions of the Subgroup's meeting on 7 June 2005, which will serve as DOC. SC31-4. The Subgroup 1) recommended that the

audited statements for 2004 be approved; requested that presentation of budgets and audited statements be harmonized in future; requested the SG to prepare advice for COP9 on Ramsar specificities in IUCN's recommended budget provisions for dissolution of the institution; requested the Secretariat to prepare options for COP9 for addressing non-payment of dues by Parties; recommended that Ramsar statements be audited by the same auditors that are used by IUCN, unless that would cost more than twice as much as the present fees; recommended that COP9 be presented with a core budget proposal for 2006-2008 with an annual budget increase of 4% and an emphasis on regional initiatives and CEPA activities; requested the Secretariat to examine options for savings in the costs of the Ramsar Sites Database; and recommended that draft Resolution 14 on the Endowment Fund be transmitted to COP9 with one amendment.

Agenda item 7.1: Preparations for Ramsar COP9

26. **Uganda, the Chair of the Subgroup on COP9**, made a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on the host country's preparations for the COP. He covered the state of progress for each of the subcommittees of the National Organizing Committee (NOC) and reported that the Speke Resort Munyono, 10 minutes from downtown Kampala on the lake, has been chosen as the venue, though negotiations about costs are ongoing. He described emerging arrangements regarding visas, side events, exhibitions, and excursions, and explained the state of host country fundraising, with a shortfall of about US\$ 450,000 or somewhat more still to be secured. He explained the ministerial session that Uganda will host in Entebbe on the day after the COP, with the objective of having the ministers adopt the Kampala Declaration which will have been debated and endorsed by the COP, in order to give political weight to the COP's declaration.
27. **The SG** reported that preparations on the Secretariat's side are well in hand, that additional Secretariat staff for translation/interpretation, etc., have been contracted, all needed funding is in place, and online registration is now active on the Ramsar Web site. Some additional funding may still be pledged, e.g., for publication of the COP proceedings, in which case it might be possible to divert some assistance for Uganda's in-country costs. Funding has been secured for somewhat more than one sponsored delegate per eligible Party and, as fundraising results are ahead of the pace of COP8, the SG is hopeful that two delegates can be supported from each eligible Party. He urged that Parties register their delegate choices as early as possible.
28. **Morocco** and **Argentina** congratulated Uganda for its progress and asked what criteria have been used to select the Parties whose environmental ministers would be invited to participate in the high-level session. **Argentina** urged that ministers of all SC Parties should be invited. **Uganda** noted that it is not possible to invite ministers from all Parties, only 30 to 40, and the Subgroup on COP9 agreed that some should be invited from each region, though there are no fixed criteria – he pointed out that this is distinct from any ministers who may be attending the COP as heads of their delegations. He sought guidance from the SC as to whether ministers from all SC Parties should be amongst those invited.
29. **Canada** and **Botswana** inquired whether, in terms of risk management, a date has been chosen for going to "Plan B" in the event of a failure of the present preparations, and asked what is the "Plan B". **Uganda** responded that the "Plan B" would be the possibility of discarding the use of the plenary tent and trying to manage with only the existing

facilities of the resort – he suggested that the end of August would be a suitable cut-off date for making that decision, especially as more would be known about numbers of participants and whether the plenary tent would really be needed.

30. **The UK** inquired when the draft Kampala Declaration will again be available for comment. **Uganda** reported that the latest draft comes out of the NOC's input and will be circulated at this meeting – it will be tabled for discussion at the COP and hopefully endorsed by the COP, and the intention is that the Ministerial Session will then give it support by adopting it. He suggested that a working group be established for advancing the Declaration.
31. **Japan** asked what themes will be included in the ministerial session's roundtable and whether the Kampala Declaration will be discussed by the ministers or worked out by a drafting group first. **Uganda** responded that the focus of the one-day session will be upon the Declaration, as a follow-on from the COP, but the programme provides for discussion of CSD13, water issues, and "From Kampala On", i.e., the way forward for the Convention.
32. **The Netherlands** and **Austria** inquired about the relationship between the COP and the ministerial session, whether it is part of the COP or something taking place after the COP.
33. **Botswana** expressed concern that inviting ministers from some Parties and not others might diminish the political support of those countries that were not invited. He suggested that, if all Parties could not be invited, it be left to the regions to select their own representatives. **Argentina** suggested holding informal consultations or reconvening the Subgroup on COP9 to discuss the issue further.
34. **Canada** wondered whether the end of August would be too late for fresh preparations and asked if Switzerland would be the fallback host country. **The SG** and **the Chair** said emphatically that the end of August is too late, that some decisions must be made by the end of this meeting, and that everything must be firmly in place by the time of the Secretariat's logistical visit at the end of the June. **The SG** said that the COP will definitely take place in Uganda and that other countries are not being considered as fallback options. He reiterated that the post-COP ministerial session will be hosted by Uganda, not by the Convention.
35. **The UK** inquired about what options were being considered in light of Uganda's present funding shortfall. **The SG** replied that the only option is for further funding to be secured by Uganda, that the Secretariat has no budget for assisting in host country costs. He said that if provided with further targeted funding, the Secretariat may be able to divert some amount to Uganda but is concerned primarily with fundraising for supported delegates and has no ability to contribute substantially. He urged all Parties that can help to speak with Uganda soon.
36. **Uganda** noted that one important issue still to be discussed has to do with the numbers of participants to be expected, since that influences the need for the additional plenary tent. **The Chair** feared that the numbers won't be reliably known even by the end of August. **Spain** indicated that at COP8 there were 1,300 participants, but only 900 of them were "real" delegates, and suggested that 800-900 would be a good expectation for COP9.

Agenda item 7.2: Preparation of draft Resolutions for COP9

37. **The SG** noted that the different form of presentation of draft Resolutions, in the spirit of Resolution VIII.45, marks a sea change in the approach to the Convention's business.
38. **The DSG** explained that the proposed methods are a response to Resolution VIII.45's concern about the amount and complexity of guidance documents. He noted that the Subgroup on COP9 has asked Parties wishing to submit DRs or requests concerning regional initiatives to do so in time for SC31 and perhaps STRP to consider them. He described the organization of the technical DRs, with most guidance included as annexes to DR1 and recommended priorities for future work presented in DR2, and he explained the proposed Ramsar Technical Report Series, a Web-based peer-reviewed publication system for making available the STRP's more complex scientific and methodological support materials that will be offered to the Parties to use as they wish, whenever they are completed, detached from the cycle of COP adoptions.
39. **The USA** applauded the STRP's efforts to streamline the resolution process and reported on the efforts of the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 to assess how effectively the Resolutions and guidelines are being used in the Parties. A questionnaire was circulated to the Administrative Authorities for distribution within their countries, but though there were 40 completed surveys from Japan, in general the poll did not work very well, with only 175 responses from about 30 Parties. Though that response is insufficient to draw conclusions about the Resolutions' effectiveness, he urged that the Subgroup's efforts be continued by other means into the next triennium. **Canada** supported the continuation of the Subgroup's work.
40. **BirdLife International** noted that the recommendations in DOC. SC31-5 for streamlining the resolution process are incorporated into DR2, but only for those devoted to scientific and technical matters. **The DSG** suggested that some of the recommendations could be incorporated into other DRs as well. **Indonesia** wondered whether the distinction could always easily be made between those DRs that are scientific and technical and those that are not.

Decision SC31-1: The Standing Committee decided that the Subgroup on Resolution VIII.45 should continue its work into the next triennium, with a new Chair to be determined, and it expressed its gratitude to the Subgroup for its work so far.

Agenda item 7.3: Outcomes of CSD13

41. **The SG** reported that CSD13 did not specifically mention Ramsar or any other conventions in its outputs but did mention the role of MEAs in general. He noted that Mexico is preparing a draft Resolution on this subject, including the forthcoming World Water Forum, but it has not been received in time for the meeting. **Canada** offered to circulate the latest draft agreed among Canada, Mexico, and the USA, in the event that Mexico's draft does not arrive by tomorrow.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

42. **Max Finlayson, Chair of the STRP**, presented his conclusions, as embodied in DOC. SC31-3, noting that the STRP's six high-priority areas were set by the SC but included a large number of tasks within them. Despite few resources and a cut in the budget for the STRP Support Service, good progress was made on many of the areas of work. He drew attention to the framework documents intended to coordinate the use of the existing and new guidance materials, the new Technical Report Series, and the STRP's involvement with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and he described the products that have been prepared. He pointed out that the work has been accomplished by a small group largely made up of volunteers with in-kind support, and that few STRP regional members were closely involved. He expressed frustration that because of budget cuts greater use could not be made of the STRP National Focal Points (NFPs), and he recommended that in future the STRP should be more proactive in developing its work plan for the SC's approval.
43. **Dr Finlayson** said that Ramsar is seen as a convention with a strong technical base, which largely results from the work of the STRP, and he urged that steps be taken to make sure that the material is available and being used on the ground. He noted that practitioners are impressed by the Ramsar guidance and want more of it, as well as training in using it. He thanked those who contributed most to the STRP's work, especially the Vice Chair, Heather MacKay of South Africa, Canada, the UK, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, WWF, and IWMI, as well as the Secretariat. He also thanked the Government of Australia for supporting his own work with the STRP since 1993.
44. **The Chair** expressed appreciation for the great work of the STRP members and contributors and to their organizations.
45. **The DSG** paid tribute to the high-quality work of the STRP Chair and Vice Chair and said that the framework documents, showing how and when to use Ramsar guidance, are a great step forward. He felt the same frustration at the under-use of the STRP NFPs, due to lack of resources, but noted that a greater involvement of the NFPs is built into the STRP's recommended tasks for the future.
46. **Switzerland**, congratulating the STRP on its work, most of which was voluntary, stressed the need for the COP to set realistic priorities for the Panel for the next triennium.
47. **Argentina** congratulated the STRP for its excellent results and urged greater support for the STRP NFPs in the next triennium.

Agenda item 8.1: Draft Resolutions on scientific and technical guidance

48. **The DSG** explained that Annex B has not yet been completed and that Annex C.ii on environmental water requirements is too long and complex to be included in brief guidance documents and will be issued as a Ramsar Technical Report instead.
49. **The USA** agreed with the approach taken but urged that para. 5 on under-resourcing of the STRP is unnecessary and should be deleted from DR1.
50. **Argentina** and **Spain** pointed out that the technical guidance documents are long and complex and arrived too late to be circulated for comment amongst experts and relevant institutions for wetland management. **The SG** responded that he understood the problem

of time but noted that total consensus is not required, since these are not prescriptive rules but only technical advice that the Parties can use or not as they choose – thus they do not need to be analyzed in detail. Following the streamlined process of Resolution VIII.45, the purpose of DR1 is to consolidate the technical advice so that discussion can be focused on the policy issues. He said that if total support and consensus were needed for the guidance documents, it would be a step backward. **The DSG** added that these annexes are meant to be of assistance, not prescriptive, to be used only if wished, and some are to be kept under review. He noted that the SC is being asked only to decide if these should be brought forward to the COP, where they can be discussed further if necessary.

51. **The USA** pointed out that DR1's operative word "adopts" implies an endorsement of the specific language of the guidance, which would require much more review and debate, and he suggested finding another word for making the concepts available whilst not endorsing the specific points.
52. **The SG** suggested that the Secretariat be requested to look very carefully at the language of the DR and asked the SC to give its view to the Secretariat simply about whether the guidance documents are the right sort of thing to take forward to the COP, or not.
53. **Indonesia** agreed that "adopts" is too strong and suggested "welcomes" instead. **BirdLife International** and **Australia** noted that Annex A, with its revised definitions, and Annex D on the Strategic Framework both require a real adoption. **France**, mindful of the EC Directive on Water, urged the inclusion of language such as "in the framework of other regional instruments". **The SG** indicated that the Secretariat would prepare a revised text of COP9 DR1, responding to the issues raised, for consideration by the Committee.

Agenda item 8.2: A conceptual framework for the wise use of wetlands

54. **The Chair of the STRP** made a presentation on the proposed changes to the Convention's definitions of "wise use" and "ecological character", including the history of the terms since 1971 and the need to bring them into consonance with modern terminology, especially the MA's conceptual framework organized around "ecosystem services".

Second day, 9 June 2005

Introduction to budget issues

55. **Canada, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, explained the budget table provided by the Secretariat which shows the 4% annual increase overall, based upon a 1.5% cost-of-living increase across the board and increased amounts for regional initiatives and CEPA activities.
56. **Argentina** suggested that under 'STRP support' a footnote should be added defining that support as for developing countries, and **the UK** suggested that participation by NGOs from eligible countries be included.
57. **Austria** suggested that, since it is the COP that will decide the budget, the SC should send several alternative budgets for consideration. He asked to see the real expenditures for

- 2005, rather than the COP8-budgeted amounts, and the expected income for 2005 and 2006. He also asked for more information on the present staffing and future staffing plans.
58. **The UK** noted increases for regional initiatives and questioned whether Ramsar is the most suitable body to provide ongoing support for these; he also highlighted the importance of improved funds to be devoted to the STRP in its important work. He asked for alternative budgets showing proposals for these two different weighted options.
 59. **The Netherlands** also asked for more information about the budget lines and invited an explanation of the Ramsar Sites Information Service charges. He called for more optional budgets, e.g., zero-growth (1.5% cost-of-living), 4%, and others, and was also concerned about the balance between regional initiatives vs. STRP, CEPA, and capacity building in the use of the STRP's guidance. He was concerned about the idea of Ramsar functioning as a donor agency from the core budget, noting that the SGF is funded from voluntary contributions. **France** appreciated the proposed budget version, especially the use of UN barems and the restoration of line 9(a), but before further discussion France would like to have more details on the lines concerning the Ramsar Sites Database, regional initiatives, and outreach.
 60. **WWF** noted the omission of COP-related costs and drew attention to the difficulty of raising sufficient funding for COP9. Thus he urged great care in choosing the host for COP10. WWF has been asked to contribute to the costs of the COP but believes that the Parties should support their COPs themselves, and that WWF resources should rather be devoted to supporting implementation of the Convention.
 61. **The USA** also called for more information about budgeted expenditures but argued that the SC should debate the options at this time and bring only one recommended budget to the COP, in order to avoid long debates there. He expressed concern about the growth of regional initiative costs, and he reminded the meeting of the clear language of Resolution VIII.30 to the effect that Ramsar funding is intended to be start-up seed money for up to three years only, by which time the initiatives should be self-sufficient and added value for the Convention, and the budget line can be used for new initiatives.
 62. **Finland** expressed reluctance to support any growth above cost-of-living, and noted that the Nordic-Baltic wetland initiative is experiencing difficulty in finding financial support.
 63. **Greece** urged following the practice of COP8 by discussing the options in advance and supported the idea of Ramsar funds being used as seed money to foster regional initiatives, after which assistance would be phased out. She noted that MedWet is a good example from which to learn the real costs of regional initiatives.
 64. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** stressed the importance of regional initiatives and regional centres for the implementation of the Convention, but noted that there is insufficient support for the centres from donor countries and that they therefore require direct Ramsar support. **Argentina**, too, affirmed the importance of supporting regional initiatives and centres, which need "seed money" to carry out their work; she noted that the Basel Convention included funds in its core budget for the start-up of regional centres.
 65. **The UK** supported establishing regional initiatives but wondered whether a 400% increase in that budget line is not excessive. He agreed with the need for seed money but urged that

other fundraising options be explored as well. He suggested the need for a strategic debate about the funding priority of the STRP's work vs. the regional initiatives.

66. **Canada** and **the SG** said that additional information on budget lines, staffing, and IUCN services will be supplied. **The SG** explained that it would be misleading to be guided by real 2005 expenditures rather than the COP8-approved budget, since the present situation has had to be downsized to compensate for the COP8's error in income projection.
67. **The SG** also pointed out that under the term "regional initiatives" we find both networks of various sorts on the one hand and capacity-building centres on the other.
68. **Austria** asked whether the figure for unpaid contributions is really SFR 700,000 and whether the recovery of that money would make hard budgetary decisions unnecessary. **Canada** and **the SG** explained that the 700,000 is the total accumulation over many years and will not be forthcoming. They indicated that the proposed budget allows for a write-off per year of SFr 50,000 in "bad debt" but the present rate of non-payment of contributions is as much as three times that.
69. **The USA** and **the UK** proposed that a contact group discuss the budget further today and bring a better understanding and a consensus view to the meeting tomorrow.
70. **The MedWet Coordinator** argued that the Convention is facing an important strategic decision on whether it wants to support delivery mechanisms. Regional initiatives, once on a sound footing, can mobilize new funds for the work of the Convention; MedWet, for example, has been instrumental in securing some six million euros in funding assistance for Ramsar-related wetland projects.
71. **The Chair** noted that everyone supports the idea of regional initiatives and need only to find agreement on the best budgetary proportions.

Agenda item 8.1: DR1 on additional scientific guidance

72. **The DSG** introduced the revised version of DR1 which takes account of the distinction between guidance that is meant to be adopted and that which will be welcomed by the COP. **Indonesia** and **BirdLife** suggested minor amendments.

Decision SC31-2: The Standing Committee approved the amended text of DR1 for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration.

Agenda item 8.2: DR1 Annex A on a conceptual framework for wise use

73. In discussion of Annex A, the following issues were considered. The **UK** and **Australia** queried the distinction between "the ecosystem approach" and "ecosystem approaches" and **the DSG** indicated that the STRP did not wish to restrict the matter to the CBD's specific set of principles: he and **BirdLife International** suggested adding a footnote to "approaches" to allude to the CBD's approach and other alternatives. **Japan** and the **USA** questioned the focus on "sustainable development" rather than "sustainable use", which might carry the suggestion that all wetlands should be developed; **the DSG** replied that "sustainable use" has become a narrower construct than it was in 1987, and that "sustainable development" has become the much-used modern equivalent of what was

intended then. **The USA** and **Japan** expressed concern that the definition might be used in isolation from that explanation, and it was agreed that a footnote would be added. The **USA** asked why “human-induced” change of ecological character was specified, and the **DSG** noted that that comes from Article 3.2 of the treaty and applies only to reporting change, which was strongly reaffirmed by COP8; in assessing status and trends, all changes are important.

Decision SC31-3: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to incorporate the agreed amendments to DR1 Annex A and its explanatory paper and have the document translated and circulated as soon as possible, and to bring it forward for COP9’s consideration.

Agenda item 8.9: DR1 Annex D on the revised *Strategic Framework for the List*

74. **The DSG** explained that keeping the Criteria and the Strategic Framework under review is an ongoing STRP task, and STRP WG co-lead **David Stroud** described the major additions and changes being proposed.
75. **Switzerland** suggested some amendments to the text and queried the rationale of the change in Criterion 1 from near-natural to most-natural. He found the proposed Criterion 9 on aquatic megafauna very valuable but, given budget constraints, he suggested deferring it to the future.
76. **Morocco** cautioned that the proposed text on cultural use of Criterion 1, while valuable, might cause conflict between wetland users and conservers of heritage. He suggested that Criterion 9 should include non-aquatic as well as aquatic fauna.
77. In further discussion, **Japan** urged that the Strategic Framework’s obsolete targets be updated or deleted, questioned the need for a distinction between near- and most-natural, and asked how the species included in Criterion 9 would be selected. **Botswana** urged deferring Criterion 9 since most countries are not yet at the stage where they can use the 1% threshold. He suggested that lake basins, etc., be added to the focus on river basins and coastal systems, and he questioned the vague and value-laden language of ‘considerable value’, ‘outstanding value’, etc., since in some countries the real values of a wetland are seldom known. **The USA** noted that there is no logical leap from Criterion 1’s wetland types to an application in terms of cultural services and lamented there had not been an opportunity to vet the document thoroughly. The USA continued: “The inclusion of cultural and socio-economic importance of wetlands within Criterion 1 misses the interpretation of, and adds confusion to, this Criterion. Cultural and socio-economic services should be dealt with separately and not as part of Criterion 1. Therefore, we find the proposed amendments to Criterion 1 as reflected in paragraph [A3], page 7 of Document SC31-14 unacceptable.” **France** acknowledged the importance of the quantitative Criterion 9 but stressed the need for further development of qualitative Criteria.
78. **The DSG** explained that IUCN’s Species Survival Commission (SSC) is prepared to assist in providing information for Criterion 9 species as it becomes available in its normal work, so the costs of developing species population lists progressively would be minimal, and the Criterion would only be used when sufficient data does exist. In response to **Australia’s** request for clarification, he explained the present focus on aquatic megafauna as applying

to “wetland-dependent species” that aggregate at certain times of the year and can be counted, and was not intended to be at the exclusion of other taxonomic groups (such as mammals, reptiles, amphibians, monotremes, and aquatic macro-invertebrates). He also noted that the focus on globally threatened species is not intended but is an artifact of where the best information now exists. He explained that “most-natural” is needed because in some countries there are NO natural or near-natural wetlands, and he observed that in applying the Ramsar Criteria a degree of value judgment will always be needed. **David Stroud** added that the value-laden language was deliberate, in order to “set the bar” higher to international rather than just national importance.

79. **The DSG** asked the SC’s agreement to bring forward to COP the modification of Criterion 1, the method of including cultural values into the Criterion 1 explanatory note, and the new Criterion 9, and he offered to give a priority in translation to Annexes A and D so that Parties can consider them in French and Spanish at the earliest opportunity.
80. **Spain** noted that the Spanish practice in applying Criterion 1 is to focus on the “rare and unique example” and not the “representative” part.
81. **Argentina** welcomed the announcement of the upcoming translation of the Annexes by the Secretariat, referred to its previous statement about the late circulation of the documents, and reserved its position in order to provide substantive comments at COP9.

Decision SC31-4: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to incorporate the proposed amendments to DR1 Annex D, add the requested further explanations, and have the document translated and circulated as soon as possible, and to bring it forward for COP9’s consideration.

Agenda item 8.3: DR1 Annex B, Integrated Framework for inventory, assessment, and monitoring

82. **The DSG** explained that the document is intended to provide a guide through the types of assessment available to Parties but it has not yet been completed. The **Chair of the STRP** indicated that it will contain nothing new but will illustrate the links among existing and proposed guidance, and he promised that it will be completed within two weeks.

Decision SC31-5: The Standing Committee encouraged the STRP to complete DR1 Annex B within two weeks and instructed the Secretariat to circulate the document to SC31 participants for comment and approval for bringing it forward for the consideration of COP9.

Agenda item 8.4: DR1 Annex B i), Guidelines on rapid assessment

83. **The DSG** provided background on the evolution of the rapid assessment guidelines and lauded this as an example of the benefits of close cooperation with the CBD.

Decision SC31-6: The Standing Committee approved DR1 Annex B i) for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration.

Agenda item 8.5: DR1 Annex C, Integrated Framework for water-related guidance

84. **The DSG** reported that the Framework had been presented to great interest at the CSD13 side event hosted by Switzerland, Ramsar, and UNECE. He drew attention to sub-annexes C i) on river basin management and C iii) on groundwater, and indicated that annex C ii) on environmental water requirements has been withdrawn from the present guidance, since the document is sufficiently technical and complex to warrant publication as a Ramsar Technical Report instead.
85. **Turkey** expressed a number of objections to the documents' inclusion of mention of the Report of the World Commission on Dams and stated Turkey's view that issues of transboundary water management and allocation are outside the Convention's mandate. The full text of Turkey's intervention is annexed verbatim to this report.
86. **Switzerland** particularly thanked Heather MacKay for her help with the CSD13 side event and made suggestions for amendments for the text.

Decision SC31-7: The Standing Committee approved DR1 Annexes C, C i) and new C ii) (formerly C iii) for transmittal to the COP for its consideration.

Agenda item 8.10: DR1 Annex E, Ecological effectiveness indicators

87. **The DSG** provided background on the history and difficulty of this task, which is still incomplete, and suggested that the SC endorse the approach that is under way and ask the STRP to finalize the document for COP9's consideration.

Decision SC31-8: The Standing Committee endorsed the approach being taken on DR1 Annex E and requested the Secretariat to bring the STRP's final version forward for the consideration of COP9.

Presentation on the Ramsar Sites Information Service

88. **Doug Taylor of Wetlands International** made a PowerPoint presentation on the purposes and present state of the Web-based Ramsar Sites Information Service and its added value for the Convention's needs.

Agenda item 8.11: DR2, Future scientific and technical priorities for STRP and the Convention

89. **The DSG** introduced the DR and Annex 1, which comprises a schedule of scientific and technical actions requested by the Parties over many years for both the STRP and the other bodies of the Convention, showing the STRP's recommendations for priorities in the next triennium. Annex 2 is a rough-cut cost estimate of those recommended priorities. He encouraged the SC to review the STRP's 25 suggested priorities and prioritize them further.
90. **Switzerland** observed that many of the tasks are broad and vague and need to be refined. He suggested that they be ordered first by content and urgency and then again by feasibility.
91. **The USA** asked whether the 6-year time period will synchronize with the "Strategic Framework" and **the DSG** responded that this is meant to link to the STRP's

recommendation of a rolling programme of work for the future, since even within the 6-year periods of the Strategic Plans, there is a need to revise and update in the light of the decisions of each successful COP, including on implementation priorities.

92. Specific suggestions and textual emendations were provided by **France, Switzerland, Spain**, and others.
93. **Japan** asked how the STRP's priorities were selected, and **the DSG** explained that COP8 mandated the STRP to look forward at emerging issues and advise the SC on future priorities. These 25 STRP recommended priorities are put to the SC to refine into a new mandate for the STRP's work.
94. A number of participants questioned the utility of listing all of the tasks which would not be selected as priorities, and **the DSG** explained that the purpose of the DR is precisely to retain the COP-mandated tasks which have so far not been delivered, to choose from among them the highest feasible priorities for the near future, and to keep the list of COP-mandated tasks up to date. The COP has the power to cancel any tasks that it no longer wishes to have completed when resources permit, but until the COP does so they must be brought forward until they have been delivered or canceled by the COP. **The UK** noted that if these are all COP-mandated tasks, we should not be adding to or amending the list at this meeting.
95. There was discussion of the difficulty of setting the STRP's priorities from among its 25 recommendations, in light of rough costing of the individual tasks and the unresolved budgetary situation for the STRP's work. **The USA** noted that the Secretariat has not analyzed the STRP's recommendations and offered guidance on relative importance and feasibility. **The DSG** observed that the COP has historically been reluctant to prioritize; the opportunity on the National Report Format for Parties to set their own priorities went largely unanswered.
96. **The SG** offered to produce a prioritize, ranked list of STRP priorities with estimated costs for the consideration of the COP, and **Canada** insisted upon having some agreed basis for the prioritization. He wished to hear from SC members which issues they felt are most important and in what direction the STRP should go. **The SG** suggested that participants should reflect upon that and send their ideas to the Secretariat for incorporation. **The DSG** said that the selection criteria will be feedback from SC participants and those recently COP-mandated tasks not yet delivered.
97. **The USA** judged that there was a great deal of re-invention in the STRP recommended tasks. Many of them have been done successfully elsewhere, and he argued for a focus upon making those relevant materials available to Ramsar Parties, *mutatis mutandis*, rather than upon devising new documents with a narrow Ramsar focus.
98. To questions about the need for including unprioritized tasks in the DR, **the DSG** explained that the unfulfilled mandates cannot be ignored unless the COP withdraws them, so they are "still on the table". From among them, the COP can select the feasible priorities at any given time.
99. **Botswana** requested that the Secretariat include with the recommended priorities some explanatory notes explaining the choices.

100. **Canada** noted that the Americas regional meeting's Merida Declaration laid out the region's priorities very clearly and these should be taken into account. He urged that the DR should note the long list of undelivered mandates and focus on the short list of recommended priorities.

Decision SC31-9: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to consult with the STRP and prepare a short list of recommendations for the STRP's future priority tasks for the COP's consideration. All participants are encouraged to inform the Secretariat within the next two weeks of tasks they feel should be included.

Agenda item 8.12: DR4, Sustainable use of fish resources

101. **The DSG** explained that in response to the STRP's need for informed analysis, WWF, IUCN, and the WorldFish Centre prepared the report which underlies this DR, and the IWMI Comprehensive Assessment will be provide further Ramsar-related material on this subject.
102. **Japan** applauded the effort but protested that the broad statement that Ramsar sites are overfished is not true of Japan and requested clarification on what data it was derived from. **The DSG** promised to consult with the report's authors and make amendments as appropriate.
103. **Mali** highlighted the importance of this issue especially for Africa and described the losses in the Niger Inner Delta as an example.
104. **Switzerland, WWF, Wetlands International, and Australia** offered to provide refinements to the text.

Decision SC31-10: The Standing Committee approved DR4 on fish resources, with the inclusion of the amendments, for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration.

Agenda item 9.1: DR5 on Synergies with other conventions and harmonization of reporting

105. **Argentina** supported the draft Resolution and highlighted the need and convenience to harmonize national reports.
106. **BirdLife International, the UK, and Switzerland** offered amendments to the text.
107. **Japan and Indonesia** queried what was expected in the DR of the Parties in harmonizing their national reporting to the conventions, in the present wording of the text. **The SG** said that it was a parallel exercise.
108. **Botswana** supported the movement towards harmonized reporting, since the MEAs are very expensive to implement and much of the work is redundant among different conventions.

Decision SC31-11: The Standing Committee agreed to transmit DR5, subject to the amendments made, to COP9 for its consideration.

Agenda item 9.2: DR6, Transboundary Ramsar sites

109. **The SG** reported the increasing interest in transboundary Ramsar sites in the regions and indicated that the proposed draft Resolution is not meant to be overly prescriptive, just ideas to move the issue forward. It is a first step for the COP, to develop some kind of policy.
110. **The USA** recognized that more wetlands are being designated as transboundary Ramsar sites but pointed out a number of problems with the DR, especially concerning the phrase “all parts designated as Ramsar sites”, “connected under one management entity” (which is probably impossible given sovereignty issues), and other prescriptive criteria, noting that many transboundary Ramsar sites that already exist in practice, provided with many flexible arrangements, might be excluded.
111. A number of Parties noted that the usual term is “transboundary” sites, not “transnational” sites. **Argentina** noted that “transboundary” is the term used in international legal instruments.
112. **Islamic Republic of Iran** recounted its problems with transboundary sites shared with Afghanistan and Iraq, which are not Parties to the Convention, and urged an additional paragraph on the importance of encouraging non-Parties to join the Convention and enter into such cooperative arrangements.
113. **The Senior Advisor for the Americas** read out a message from **Nicaragua** (an SC member unable to be present), on behalf of the Central American Parties, to the effect that Nicaragua supported the DR, with the preservation of national sovereignty in all parts of the transboundary site, but urged the inclusion within the transboundary definition of Ramsar sites that might not be contiguous but have biological linkages through migratory species. [In traditional Ramsar terminology, these are called “twinned sites” if they have formalized their relationship.]
114. **Canada** urged that the tasking of STRP to develop procedures should be made to SC instead, as the SC should instruct the STRP.
115. **BirdLife** preferred not to revert to the term “transboundary”, since some Ramsar sites cross subnational boundaries. Since Ramsar is an intergovernmental treaty, subnational boundaries would not seem to be relevant. **The SG** suggested that transboundary and transnational be bracketed for discussion at the COP. He promised to take all of the comments on board in developing the DR.
116. **The USA** said that the document should be made more clear that the sites need not be adjacent, and pointed out that language needs to be added to provide a mechanism for declaring existing Ramsar sites to be transboundary sites.
117. **Austria** noted that it has already designated one transboundary Ramsar site with the Czech and Slovak Republics and wished to add some obvious and essential points to the process that are unaccountably missing from the draft Resolution: 1) to qualify as a transboundary

Ramsar site, there must be a transboundary agreement to establish one; 2) there should be a contact group or task force to consult on management of the site; 3) there should be work towards harmonized management of the site, with common principles or guidelines; and 4) when nominating existing Ramsar sites for transboundary status, the RISs should be harmonized.

Decision SC31-12: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to circulate by e-mail an improved version of the DR on transboundary Ramsar sites, as amended, and following a suitable period for comment, to bring the DR forward for the consideration of the COP.

Agenda item 9.3: DR7, Ramsar sites that no longer meet the Criteria

118. **The DSG** provided background on the COP's request for possible scenarios when Parties may wish to delist or restrict the boundaries of Ramsar sites without invoking Article 2.5 on urgent national interest, and he stressed that the main principle of the proposed guidance is that sites should not be delisted or restricted except as a last resort.
119. **Ghana** noted the priority given to reversing the adverse factors before delisting a site and called upon the Convention to assist Parties that are developing countries in their efforts to do that.
120. **BirdLife International** suggested a number of amendments to the text.
121. **The UK** welcomed the guidance but noted that Parties would not be "proposing" delisting, they would be "informing" or "reporting" a delisting of a Ramsar site, under the Convention's terms and given national sovereignty.
122. **The USA** observed that the DR seems to be creating a great lot of bureaucracy for potentially very small changes in site boundaries -- changes are meant to be referred to SC and STRP and then discussed at COP under Article 8.2(d). He asked why the STRP would need to review boundary restrictions, what result would be expected? **The DSG** noted that Article 8.2(d) reads that the Bureau must forward notice of changes to the COP and 'arrange for them to be discussed', and he said that the STRP has expressed the wish to be involved in such cases. **The USA** noted that there is a great difference between a Party requesting advice from the STRP and the STRP having to review every change in boundaries.
123. **BirdLife International** suggested that there is a balance to strike. The COP requested some kind of principles and procedures for situations that were not foreseen in the treaty text, and it might not be sufficient to safeguard the other Parties' interests simply to let Parties delist or restrict boundaries without review.
124. **The USA** said that the DR's analysis and scenarios are fine, but that the procedures extend beyond what is warranted by the Convention text. The USA has provided a number of textual amendments to the Secretariat.

Decision SC31-13: The Standing Committee approved DR7 as amended for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration. A draft of the revised version will be circulated as soon as possible.

Agenda item 9.4: DR8, Regional initiatives

125. **The DSG** explained the superfluity of documents on this issue, as after the original DOC. SC31-21 on regional initiatives and its addendum with the “pro formas” submitted by the Standing Committee’s 30 April deadline, additional proposals continued to arrive. The Secretariat has provided these late arrivals as well, though some have not yet been evaluated.
126. **Argentina** supported the regional initiatives, in particular the High Andean Strategy (Resolution VIII.39) and CREHO. She also emphasized that there should be an equitable distribution of “seed money” and said that, therefore, the draft Resolution and the annex should be amended.
127. **Botswana** announced that SADC would be submitting an additional proposal soon, probably with one month. **The Chair** noted that the deadline is long past. **The SG** recalled that there was clear notification that 30 April was the deadline for proposals, and that several of those included in the documentation have arrived after that time. He pointed out that the Secretariat will be preparing the COP documentation immediately at the end of this meeting, and the translators’ time has been engaged, with no time to spare before the obligatory mailing on 7 August. There will be real logistical problems if the SC accepts further late submissions, as well as a question of fairness for those who prepared their proposals on time.
128. **The USA** expressed pleasant surprise at the interest shown in these proposals, but agreed with the SG on the necessity of following the established procedures. The COP provided some clear rules on regional initiatives but left some issues undefined: how many initiatives can a region have? He suggested that one initiative per region was foreseen, until those are got under way. And he assumed that equity among the regions would be wished. The USA urged that the funds allocated to MedWet in Resolution VIII.30 should be set as the standard for start-up assistance. He noted that CREHO’s request has been supported by all of the Latin and North American Parties at the regional meeting.
129. **The UK** noted that a number of issues needed to be resolved: there were no selection criteria, and no agreement on the overall budget that would be made available. Without resolution of these, he did not think it right or possible to choose amongst the proposals.
130. **The USA** noted that some proposals seem to be incomplete and to be lacking budgets. **The SG** recalled that some proposals are not asking for funding, only for endorsement as Ramsar initiatives, which (if they meet the criteria) will help them in fundraising. The SG urged that those requesting funding but not supplying budgets should be discarded at once.

Third day, 10 June 2005

Announcement of Ramsar Awards for 2005

131. **The Chair** announced that the Standing Committee closed session has reached a unanimous consensus concerning the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for 2005, to be presented at COP9. The announcement was greeted by prolonged applause.

Decision SC31-14: The Standing Committee unanimously agreed to confer the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards for 2005 upon the following laureates: in the science category, Prof. Shuming Cai of the Chinese Academy of Science; in the management category, Dr. SH. A. Nezami Baloochi of the Department of Environment in the Province of Gilan, Islamic Republic of Iran; and in the education category, a shared award between the Wetlands Centre Australia in Shortland, NSW, Australia and Ms Reiko Nakamura of the Ramsar Centre Japan.

Agenda item 9.4: DR8, Regional initiatives, continued

132. **The DSG** introduced a new comparative table of the proposals received and recalled the criteria for determinations, including whether the proposal was received by the deadline; whether it met the stipulations made in Resolution VIII.30; and, if funding were requested, whether adequate budget information had been supplied.
133. **The USA** recalled that according to Resolution VIII.30 funding support is meant to be phased out after in principle not more than three years, and recommended that the total support should not exceed that provided to MedWet. The USA urged that, for funding, consideration should be given to one proposal per region, with some flexibility for exceptions.
134. **Argentina** noted that the Neotropical region has two proposals of high priority, one regional and the other subregional, viz: the CREHO centre located in Panama and the High Andean strategy.
135. In further discussion, **Australia** suggested the possibility of a staggered start to funding the initiatives, with the funding profile planned across the whole three-year period. The **MedWet Coordinator** offered to discuss a diminishing window of support through the triennium and urged at least a minimal level of support for MedWet throughout the period in order to show political support and provide a cash flow buffer. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** questioned why no financial figures were quoted for the Centre in Ramsar. **The UK** wondered whether it was an impossible task for the Subgroup to make allocation recommendations before the final budget had been agreed. **Switzerland** clarified that the allocations to be approved by COP9 would be for the coming triennium only.
136. **The Chair** invited the Subgroup on Finance to hold further discussions and bring recommendations forward later.

Agenda item 9.8: DR 12, Revised *modus operandi* of the STRP

137. **The Chair of the STRP, Max Finlayson**, provided background on the STRP's discussions of the need for improvement in its *modus operandi*, especially concerning appointments, timing of meetings, and prioritization of tasks, as well as the matter of funding support.
138. **Japan** suggested that the STRP's recommendations need more elaboration and noted that Japan has provided comments to the Secretariat. **The DSG** thanked Japan for the helpful clarifications and for its flow chart of the STRP's meetings and processes.

139. **The USA** urged a substantial rethinking of the structure of the STRP, recalling that the present structure was established in Resolution VII.2 as a mirror of the political structure of the SC. He suggested that instead of trying to nominate experts in the major areas of work, the priority should be upon nominating experts in networking with other scientific networks, and he urged that they should no longer be selected as representatives of the regions but rather drawn from the most suitable candidates anywhere. The USA suggested that a subgroup be formed to work out a new structure for the Panel and noted that if the resulting STRP were smaller some money would be freed up.
140. **Canada** supported the US proposal, especially in terms of the financial considerations. **The UK** also supported the proposal, but urged that the primary goal of the restructuring should be to strengthen the STRP and not just to save money. **BirdLife International** noted that the USA's suggestion implied that any money freed would be used to make the STRP more effective and not diverted to some other purpose. **Argentina** strongly supported an equitable regional balance for the STRP and made reference as example to the current structure of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
141. **The DSG** welcomed the suggestions as potentially a major step forward and summarized that the new subgroup would produce a revised proposal taking on board the new ideas proposed and then circulate that to all SC participants for comment with a very short deadline. In order to leave time for finalization, translation, and formatting before the 7 August COP9 mailing, the revised proposal would need to be completed by the close of business 15 July.

Decision SC31-15: The Standing Committee established an ad hoc Subgroup on the STRP to agree a revised proposal for the STRP *modus operandi*, which will be circulated to all SC31 participants for comment and brought forward for the consideration of Ramsar COP9. The Subgroup will be composed of the Chair and Vice Chair of the SC, the Chairs of the Subgroups on COP9, Finance, and Resolution VIII.45, the Chair of the STRP, and the Deputy Secretary General.

Agenda item 9.5: DR9, Strategic Framework for the implementation of the Convention

142. **The SG** introduced the latest version of the framework, which is intended to be a simpler and more targeted form of the unwieldy Strategic Plan 2003-2008, and added that it would have to be updated after the COP to embody decisions made there.
143. **WWF International** noted that a considerable number of detailed comments had earlier been submitted by WWF but drew attention to more fundamental problems. WWF appreciated the simpler format but considered the effort to be premature and urged deferring it until COP10, since it seems unclear what the relationship is between the framework and the already-adopted Strategic Plan 2003-2008. He observed that many of the performance indicators are quite vague and not measurable, and he noted that there are parallel processes under way for measuring Ramsar effectiveness which are not reflected here. WWF noted that the present Strategic Plan is linked to the National Reports Format but this framework seems not to be, and that the STRP's work on ecological indicators has not been built into this document. He supported the focus on harmonization of national reporting and would like to see that incorporated into a future Strategic Plan.

144. **Switzerland** urged that Goal 1 on “the wise use of all wetlands” should follow more closely the language of Article 3.1 of the Convention, since some wetlands might be worth conserving without any use, and that the reference in Strategy 2.2 to funding for Ramsar Sites Database management “if relevant” should be amended, since it is relevant. Switzerland noted that for many strategies the budget impact is listed as “staff time” and wondered whether that had been added up for all of those tasks. Switzerland also provided in writing textual amendments to Goals 1 and 2 and Strategy 2.5.
145. **Botswana** drew attention to financial implications for the Parties and noted that the Arusha regional meeting had identified lack of funds as an important impediment to the operationalization of the Convention in Africa. He expressed gratitude to Switzerland for funding the Ramsar Swiss Grant for Africa but noted that with so many Parties in the region it works out to only SFr 3,000 per Party per year. He urged that for Africa to operationalize the Convention more effectively something like the Wetlands for the Future initiative in the Neotropics should be established for Africa. **Morocco** shared the concern about the financial implications of implementing the framework and agreed that African Parties would not be able to do so without the establishment of an additional financial mechanism.
146. **Argentina** expressed concern that the framework does not seem connected to elements of the Strategic Plan and needs better coordination. There is also a need for better organization among the several plans and Resolutions that call for actions from the Parties and a clearer picture of priorities.
147. **The UK** welcomed the SG’s work on the framework but asked for clarification as to whether it is a simplification of the Strategic Plan or contains new elements not already adopted for 2003-2008. The UK shared WWF’s doubt about the impact on the National Reporting process.
148. **Japan** also appreciated the SG’s work and queried the relationship between the framework and the Strategic Plan; it was noted that it is not an extract from the Strategic Plan but has been modified and that the new elements require clearer explanations. Japan noted that global targets were set in the Strategic Plan, and targets for 2006-2008 will be needed along with a report on the achievements in the first triennium of the Plan. Japan queried the relationship between Strategy 2.6 and the SC’s work on regional initiatives.
149. **BirdLife International** agreed that the clarifications asked for would be helpful and urged that the DR text in para. 6 be changed from approving the framework as “the basis” for monitoring and measuring to “a basis”, as there are others. Similarly, **Australia** asked about the relationship between this framework and the work on ecological indicators as a basis for measuring implementation of the Convention.
150. **Wetlands International** voiced the need to crosscheck the draft framework with the MOUs recently agreed with the IOPs, since there seems to be some difference with what they have signed up to.
151. **Austria** suggested that, concerning restoration and rehabilitation, there should be added a mechanism for informing the Parties of existing funding possibilities in the regions.

152. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** urged that the two best ways to implement the framework would be to decentralize decision-making in the Convention to the regional centres and to support the regional centres financially.
153. **Canada** appreciated the document's attempt to lay out the budget implications of the various strategies but felt that needed information was missing and the core budget, staff costs, etc., are still unclear. Canada was looking for consistency of language with the Strategic Plan and Resolution VIII.26 on its implementation and not a whole new approach. He said that information about the progress to date is needed, whilst acknowledging that that is difficult to ascertain until the analysis of the National Reports has been completed.
154. **The Chair (Slovenia)** expressed reservations about the title "Strategic Framework for the implementation of the Convention 2006-2008", noting that the COP's wishes in the Strategic Plan are valid until 2008 and must be carried out before anything new can be added. She indicated a need to crossreference the document with the Strategic Plan and the MOCs with the IOPs. **Spain** expressed agreement with that view.
155. **The SG** noted that it seemed that the discussion of the document in the Subgroup on COP9 in March 2005 had been more positive. He said that the document's purpose was to provide a simplified version of the Strategic Plan, which many people have found difficult to use, and he described it as an alternative version of the Plan, drawn from it, though a few things have been worded differently to reflect changes in circumstances. He indicated that this was meant to be a trial of a new format in order to see whether it would be useful for the future, since a large and cumbersome Strategic Plan containing many unfunded ideas is not useful.
156. **The SG** offered to crossreference the framework to the Strategic Plan and to try to provide more realistic cost estimates, and understood the view that no new items should be included. He agreed with a need to look at the DR to be clear that it is not supplanting the Plan but would be complementary and a trial of the form. He explained that it is meant to be a measurement of Convention processes to complement the STRP's work on ecological measurements. He expressed the view that, if the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is correct that wetlands have been degrading and the Convention has been in existence for more than 30 years, then that is a bad report card. The SG noted that the National Report Format has not been found helpful and that the SC will have the opportunity to link a new NR format to this framework for the next triennium. He welcomed written comments on the framework and noted that it will continue to benefit from input.
157. **The DSG** agreed that the framework's approach could provide a starting point for a much improved NR format for the next triennium and recalled that the Convention has always prided itself on being responsive to a changing world. It could permit a clearer mechanism for prioritizing that would still be consistent with the Resolution VIII.26 targets – this framework and DR2 on scientific priorities would effectively become the Convention's work plan for 2006-2008.
158. **Argentina** inquired how this improved NR format would be harmonized with the reporting for the other MEAs, and **the SG** responded that the first full SC meeting of the

next triennium will consider the future format and the extent to which it could be harmonized with the CMS and perhaps the CBD.

159. **The Chair** indicated that in light of the amendments called for, the framework should be further revised and circulated to the participants by e-mail before finalization.

Decision SC31-16: The Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to revise the Strategic Framework further in light of the amendments proposed and circulate a new draft to all participants as soon as possible for comment, before sending it for translation and bringing it forward to consideration by COP9.

Agenda item 9.6: DR10, the role of the Convention in disaster prevention, mitigation and adaptation

160. **The SG** recalled the full discussion of the document at the Subgroup on COP9 meeting and noted that the comments there have been taken into account in the new draft. **The Vice Chair, the Islamic Republic of Iran**, invited comments.
161. **Argentina** requested that in para. 10, to “establish an international fund” the word “voluntary” should be added.
162. **Japan** recognized important linkages between the Convention’s work and the issues surrounding natural disasters but noted that Ramsar must not go beyond the mandate of the Convention text. Japan observed that the UNEP Post-Conflict Assessment Unit has no mandate on natural disasters (para. 2); that there are no criteria for listing the agencies in para.6 and not others; and that existing agencies should be utilized rather than establishing an international fund (para. 10).
163. **Switzerland** observed that the words “prevention, mitigation, and adaption” in the title are not mentioned in the DR and an explanatory paragraph should be added. She called for the inclusion of references to the Joint UNEP/UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Environment Unit in several places, and she observed that establishing a new fund would be expensive and impractical, urged that existing agencies be mentioned for that purpose, and suggested that Ramsar should seek to act as an advisor on wetlands to those bodies.
164. **Indonesia** reported that the Asian regional meeting in Beijing agreed to support this DR and urged additional text for it, and that the meeting called upon the Parties to work together urgently to help in the recovery from the tsunami of December 2004.
165. **Botswana** welcomed the DR and noted that, as the Convention has long been biased towards human-induced problems, it is good to see this attention to important natural issues as well.
166. Referring to the list of relevant agencies in para. 6, **Japan** explained that the relevance of each agency depends upon which stage of a disaster is meant: prevention, quick response, or reconstruction. If that can be clarified, Japan can supply additional relevant agencies.
167. **Wetlands International** provided an update on the Ramsar Tsunami Reference Group, led by WI, and recognized the support of the Government of Japan in establishing it. She

announced the start of a 4.5 million euro project funded by Oxfam-Netherlands (Novib), led by WI together with WWF, IUCN, and BothENDS in five countries in the tsunami-affected region; the project will facilitate community-led restoration of coastal ecosystems, linked with livelihood recovery. WI further recognized the need to develop a regional platform in south and southeast Asia for the provision and exchange of technical expertise and the development of ICZM guidance and capacity building, relevant to the issue of natural disaster responses, and reported that proposals to address this need are being developed. **Indonesia** expressed gratitude to WI for organizing support for the victims in the coastal areas.

168. **Australia** welcomed the DR and noted that it could provide a potential long-term mechanism for tsunamis as well as other natural disasters, such as fires, etc. **The Bahamas** welcomed the emphasis on ICZM and urged that IWRM concerns be included as well.
169. **The SG** welcomed the proposed amendments, but expressed reluctance to include an exhaustive list of all possible relevant organizations in the DR; he preferred a short list of key bodies, especially those with which the Ramsar Parties have not been familiar. He promised that a formulation would be found for para.10 on the international fund that everyone would be comfortable with. He acknowledged the fast and creative response of Wetlands International to his request to set up the Tsunami Reference Group.

Decision SC31-17: The Standing Committee approved DR10 on natural disasters, with the inclusion of the amendments, for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration.

Agenda item 9.7: DR11, Use of the term “Ramsar Secretariat”

170. **The USA** and **Japan** supported the DR’s attempt to bring terminology into line with the other conventions, and the **USA** urged that a separate, general Resolution should be adopted to the effect that the latest Ramsar Resolutions always prevail in the case of conflicts with earlier ones.
171. **Argentina, Mali, and Indonesia** proposed that in the absence of a legal personality for the Secretariat, except as an administrative unit performing the Convention's administrative functions within IUCN, the Secretariat should prepare a paper for COP9 on the options available for remedying that situation, in line with Action 13.1.10 of the Strategic Plan. **Mali** expressed concern that the Convention is operating in a legal void, but **Switzerland** explained that the Secretariat’s relationship with IUCN is legally solid.
172. **The SG** responded that an additional DR on the precedence of Resolutions will be prepared, but an options paper on legal personality will require further discussion with some of the delegations; he doubted whether Action 13.1.10’s focus on the UN General Assembly would be the best solution to this important issue at this time.

Decision SC31-18: The Standing Committee approved DR11 on Bureau terminology for presentation to the COP for its consideration and called upon the Secretariat to propose a brief DR to the COP concerning the precedence of Resolutions.

Agenda item 9.9: DR15, Ramsar and poverty reduction

173. **Ghana** provided background to the DR's provenance as an outcome in the Arusha African regional meeting and proposed that "existence values" in para.6 should be amended to "survival" or "livelihood" values.
174. **WWF International** reported that WWF, Ghana, and the USA jointly proposed a list of amendments and provided the suggested texts, which concern improved links to internationally agreed development goals, a reference to CSD13, increased priority for wetland wise use in national poverty reduction strategy papers, the need for incorporating national wetland strategies into national IWRM plans, and STRP engagement with the Global Water Partnership.
175. **Switzerland** supported WWF's amendments and provided text for a few more, including a reference in para. 5.4 to "payment for ecosystem services". **The USA** noted that para. 4.5's mention of regulating prices and labor costs and Switzerland's proposal on payment for ecosystem services might run athwart of trade issues and should not be included, and **Australia** echoed that concern. **The Chair** invited Switzerland, the USA, and Australia to confer together and submit a consensus text for those passages.
176. **Japan** recognized that poverty remains a serious global problem and wetland linkage with economic and social aspects is important, but observed that poverty reduction may be mainly outside the mandate of the Ramsar Convention.
177. **BirdLife International** noted that the Asian regional meeting proposed amendments to the DR which have not been included. **Japan** summarized the Asian regional meeting participants' conclusions that the originally-African DR would benefit from being made more global in its focus; that there should be an additional mention of the vulnerability of risk to wetland dependent people of falling into poverty; and that there needs to be a focus on improving the livelihoods of the significant numbers of the world's currently most economically and socially excluded people who live in or near wetlands.
178. **The UK** said that this DR could be one of the most important Resolutions to come out of the COP and strongly supported WWF's amendments. He urged referring to the GEF in para. 5.4 on financial mechanisms and noted that the document could be improved by examples showing successful case studies, which, he suggested, WWF might be able to supply.

Decision SC31-19: The Standing Committee approved DR15 on poverty reduction, as amended, for presentation to the COP for its consideration, with the inclusion of consensus text on trade concerns to be agreed by Switzerland, Australia, and the USA.

Agenda item 9.10a: The Convention's CEPA Programme

179. **The SG** clarified the distinction within the communications, education, and public awareness (CEPA) issues between the Convention's CEPA Programme adopted by Resolution VIII.31 for 2003-2008 and the Secretariat's own CEPA activities, which are included within that Programme. He explained that DOC. SC31-33a is an attempt to show where we are in achieving the CEPA Programme and that no DR is required since the Programme's mandate continues until 2008. He pointed out that COP8 provided no funding for the Programme and alluded to discussions about whether the COP9 budget

would do so, and he thanked Sandra Hails, the CEPA Programme Officer, for her leadership from the Secretariat's side. He enumerated a number of points, including RIZA's efforts in capacity building, upon which it would be good to have the SC's input.

180. **The Netherlands** provided a thorough briefing on the RIZA Wetlands Advisory and Training Centre's (WATC) Ramsar-based courses on wetland management and restoration over the past 10 years, with the Ramsar SG serving as chair of its Advisory Board. He noted that thinking on capacity building under Ramsar has moved on, with an increased emphasis on regional courses, and he described new approaches to the programme, including a training-of-trainers course in Wageningen, a Wetlands Professionals Platform virtual community, and a reconstituted "Ramsar Capacity Building Advisory Board". He referred to a letter from the Netherlands minister to the Chair of the SC asking for a commitment of support for the Advisory Board.
181. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** described the progress of the Ramsar Regional Centre in Ramsar, Iran, which was endorsed by COP8, and reported on the February workshop there, which included the SG and which approved Terms of Reference for the Centre. He noted progress in moving the TOR and a request for tax exemption through the government and reported the launch of the Centre's Web site. He suggested that if funding is not secured for this regional initiative, it will go against the intent of Resolution VIII.41.
182. **Argentina** referred to the rules of procedure of the Netherlands' Advisory Board and sought clarification about representation, selection, etc.
183. **Uganda** echoed the immensity of the problem of training needs but drew attention to the need for back-up and follow-up on training as well. He asked about the status of the Ramsar Training Service and noted that the training course in Kenya is no longer just for East Africa. **Wetlands International** reported that the Ramsar Training Service had been a proposal some time ago which had not attracted much support at the time and has been overtaken by events; WI foresaw that the Netherlands capacity building advisory board would fulfill that important role.
184. **Canada** welcomed the summary of many aspects of the CEPA activities, noting their budget implications, and called for a new SC subgroup to study the issues and report to the SC, to include the SC and Subgroup Chairs and the Secretariat's CEPA Programme and Communications Officers. **The UK** supported that and suggested that the newly-formed Subgroup on the STRP *modus operandi*, plus the Secretariat staff, could take up that task, and he acknowledged the generosity of the Netherlands in these initiatives. **Australia** and **the USA** supported the suggestion but urged a broader representation for a panel to supervise and advise the Secretariat on CEPA issues, and both offered to be part of that.
185. **The Netherlands** explained that the Advisory Board, while currently part of the Dutch government, could develop in coming years with support and advice from the SC. The Netherlands also offered to participate in the proposed CEPA oversight group, and noted that the Advisory Board has been working closely with Wetlands International and picking up on the goals of the Training Service.
186. **The Secretariat's CEPA Programme Officer, Sandra Hails**, recalled that in addition to the proposed CEPA oversight group there is already a CEPA expert group within the

Wetlands International's Specialist Groups network, including experts from the Parties, which, although unfunded, delivers for both the Ramsar STRP and Wetlands International.

187. **WWF International** appreciated the excellent CEPA activities of the Ramsar staff, but drew attention to the diminution of news about the Ramsar community on the Ramsar Web site in recent months and urged that maintaining the scope, quantity and timeliness of news items should remain a priority.
188. **The SG** noted that CEPA is much broader than STRP-related activities and viewed the USA's proposal of an oversight group to be a subset of the SC's "guiding hand" in responding to the Secretariat's ideas. He suggested that the Secretariat should look at the full range of DRs for COP9 and see where CEPA concerns could be included. **Argentina** expressed reluctance to support a new bureaucracy and urged that CEPA can be considered in the STRP's revised *modus operandi*. **Australia** asked to see from the advisory group how CEPA can be moved forward, whether part of the STRP or not.
189. **The UK** suggested that this task be passed to the next SC, after COP9, but **the USA** preferred to begin the process now, as guidance of various components of Ramsar CEPA would be helpful straightaway. **The Chair** suggested using for this purpose the newly-formed Subgroup on the STRP *modus operandi* plus the two Secretariat experts and the Netherlands, in the run-up to COP9. **The SG** pointed out that there is not the capacity to undertake these new tasks now and still prepare the documents in time for the COP; he suggested that ways be found to enhance the existing DRs and that a full consideration of CEPA issues be left for the next Standing Committee.
190. **Canada** appreciated the amount of work that the SC was committing to the Secretariat in this difficult time but urged that a brief new DR be submitted to the COP, to be drafted by the proposed CEPA oversight group, establishing its terms of reference.

Decision SC31-20: The Standing Committee directed that a brief draft Resolution should be presented for the COP's consideration which establishes a Standing Committee CEPA oversight group or panel and its terms of reference.

Agenda item 9.10b: The Convention's corporate image

191. **The SG** reported that some Parties and especially site managers have argued that not enough material has been presented on why a new Ramsar logo would be desirable, and he suggested that the Secretariat continue to work quietly on the issue and, after COP9, provide more explanation and rationale for the SC's consideration.
192. **The USA** noted that the Parties do not have a good picture of the Convention's overall CEPA efforts, just snapshots of it, and requested a fuller view of the whole thing. **Austria** expressed concern about changing the logo and reported that its recent poll, based on more than 20 replies from European country representatives and Austrian Ramsar site managers as well, showed that 90-95% of respondents of the European region did not wish to change the logo, since a change of the only-6-year-old Ramsar logo would cause confusion and additional cost.

193. **The Chair**, acting at the request of several Parties, asked the Secretariat's CEPA Programme Officer to prepare an information paper for COP9 on the implementation of the Resolution VIII.31 Ramsar CEPA Programme.

Decision SC31-21: The Standing Committee requested the CEPA Programme Officer to prepare an information paper for COP9 on the implementation of the Convention's CEPA Programme in the first half of its 2003-2008 period.

Agenda item 9.11: DR16, The status of Ramsar sites

194. **The DSG** provided a background on the Convention's Articles 2.5, 3.2, and 8.2 obligations and explained the COP's traditional method of providing advice in an omnibus Resolution or Recommendation on the implementation of the Convention at individual Ramsar sites. **BirdLife International** welcomed the framework DR but urged that the contents should not be confined to the SG's report and National Reports, but should include the phrase "or otherwise brought to the attention of the COP".
195. **Romania** reported that a draft Resolution had been submitted to the Secretariat concerning the situation in the Danube Delta, and **the DSG** confirmed that Romania has agreed to work with the Secretariat to incorporate that proposed DR's concerns into the omnibus DR on the status of sites.
196. **Romania** and **Ukraine** provided detailed updates on the status of the Bistroye Canal in the Danube Delta and the provision of information about it. **The Secretariat's Senior Advisor for Europe** expressed confidence that the problem of shared information can be resolved bilaterally with the Secretariat's assistance.

Decision SC31-22: The Standing Committee approved the framework DR on the status of Ramsar sites for the consideration of COP9, to be filled out with the results of the Secretariat's analysis of the National Reports and discussions emerging during the COP.

Agenda item 11: DRs submitted by Parties: DOC. SC31-38 on DR17, ongoing processes dealing with water

197. **Canada** introduced DR17, submitted by Mexico, concerning the World Water Forum to be held in Mexico and recognizing the importance of wetlands in assuring the global water supply. He noted that the intention was to draw the Parties' attention to the links between water and wetlands and that no cost implications were intended.
198. **WWF** welcomed the DR and proposed that operative para. 2 should read "maintenance of the ecological character of?" instead of "delivery of ecosystem services of?" and that it be made clear that "wetlands are a source as well as a user of water". WWF noted that in para. 7 the conservation and wise use of wetlands are not clearly reflected in the five themes and five crosscutting perspectives of the 4th World Water Forum and invited the Government of Mexico and Forum organizers to take steps to more clearly embrace wetlands in the agenda.
199. In further discussion, **Switzerland** welcomed the DR and would be happy to work with Mexico on it, and provided text for a number of additional amendments. **Indonesia**,

BirdLife International, Wetlands International, and the Netherlands made additional textual suggestions, and **the USA** supported the DR going forward but expressed the wish to review it again before finalization.

200. **Mexico** thanked the participants for their comments, and **the SG** proposed to work with Mexico and the other interested Parties to revise the DR in light of the suggestions.

Decision SC31-23: The Standing Committee instructed that a revision of the DR with the proposed amendments will be circulated to the participants for final comment before translation and transmittal to the COP for its consideration.

Agenda item 9.4: DR8, Regional initiatives, continued

201. **Canada** reported on the Subgroup on Finance's successful meeting on regional initiatives and summarized the principles based upon Resolution VIII.30. He noted the need to develop more guidance for balancing regional allocation vs. needs-based allocation and he recommended that the Subgroup, functioning as a Regional Initiatives Review Committee, keep up with applications and their budgetary implications on a continuous basis, as the issue could become more complex in future. He noted that the budget line for regional initiatives has been divided between ecosystem initiatives and capacity building initiatives.
202. **Canada** reported the Subgroup's recommendation for financial support to regional initiatives for 2006: MedWet 26,000 SFR, WacoWet 60,000, High Andean 20,000, Ramsar Centre Iran 20,000 subject to presentation of detailed budget information, and CREHO 80,000, which in total is an overcommitment of 20,000 for the first year of the triennium. **The DSG** noted that the Subgroup also identified initiatives that would be recommended for the COP's endorsement and thus potential eligibility for funding at a later date.
203. **The MedWet Coordinator and Greece** expressed disappointment at the low figure allocated to MedWet and asked for further discussion. **Canada** recognized those concerns but recalled that Resolution VIII.30 clearly states the intent to phase out support after a three-year period. Canada suggested that the recommended figure is a good compromise among important but competing concerns. **Switzerland** agreed that the 3-year support is meant to provide seed money. **Greece** recalled that seed money provided to MedWet has been used to bring in very large sums for Ramsar-related work in the region.
204. **France** noted the importance of maintaining at least minimal financing for all regional initiatives in order to continue their links with the Convention and Secretariat.
205. **The DSG** reported that the Subgroup recommended full endorsement for WacoWet, ChadWet, NigerWet, WSSD type 2 Partnership, the High Andean Strategy, CREHO, and the Oceania/SPREP initiative, noting that the Secretariat would offer to work with other proposed initiatives not yet ready for endorsement to improve their proposals for the future. He reported that the Subgroup recommended that the COP endorse for further development the proposals from RAMCEA, the Himalayan Initiative, the Carpathian Initiative, and the Nordic-Baltic proposal.
206. **The DSG** called attention to the need for a mechanism to bring a recommendation to the COP concerning allocations for 2007 and 2008, and **Canada** suggested that the COP be

asked to authorize the SC, with the advice of the Subgroup on Finance, to make allocations for those years from among the initiatives that have been endorsed.

207. **WWF International** noted that the Himalayan Initiative will have one further meeting before the COP, which will clarify its future needs, and sought an opportunity to reconsider its possible endorsement before the COP. **The DSG** recalled that the Subgroup discussed how to deal with applications on a rolling basis and noted Canada's recommendation for authorizing the SC. **Australia** clarified its understanding that those proposals that will have been endorsed by the COP will be eligible for funding by the SC if money should be available throughout the triennium.
208. **The Slovak Republic** inquired as to why the Carpathian initiative was not recommended for funding support, and **the DSG** observed that the Carpathian proposal did not conform to some of the stipulations in Resolution VIII.30; he noted that the DR requests the Secretariat to work with proposers to help identify problems and amend their proposals if they wish to.
209. **The Chair** expressed appreciation for the work of the MedWet Initiative, which has provided in many different ways a very successful example for future regional initiatives.
210. **Canada** clarified that all proposals on the fully endorsed list would be eligible for funding support if appropriate and urged that the authority to decide be worded as "by SC and/or the COP".

Decision SC31-24: The Standing Committee instructed that DR8 on regional initiatives be finalized in light of the Subgroup on Finance's recommendations for funding and endorsement, and circulated to the SC participants for comment before transmittal to the COP for its consideration.

Agenda item 10.1: DR13, Financial and budgetary matters

211. **Canada, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, explained that the budget for 2006-2008 that the Subgroup is recommending is based upon a 4% annual increase, which is basically a 1.5% cost of living increase across the board and additional budget lines for regional initiatives and CEPA Programme activities. He reported on the need to consider sensitive salary information concerning individuals, in the interests of transparency, and suggested that this be shared only with the SC regional representatives unless any problems should be found. He explained that the amount budgeted for Wetlands International's services would be dropped for 2006 but brought back up for the succeeding two years as a way of reinvesting the savings from cessation of the Directory back into the Database Information Service's functionality.
212. **Canada** noted that the line for regional initiatives has been split between 3a) for ecosystem initiatives and 3b) for capacity building initiatives and urged that the SC should have authority to be flexible between those in 2007 and 2008. He suggested that new line 7 on support for the CEPA Programme should include support for an ongoing oversight group or panel to supervise the Programme. He noted that the 2006 budget total is 20,000 francs higher than in the earlier draft but that the triennial total is the same.

213. **The Chair** expressed appreciation to Canada and Paulette Kennedy, the Projects Administrator, for their work in preparing the recommended budget.
214. **The USA** supported the recommended new budget lines but sought assurances that line 7 would be used to support CEPA Programme (Resolution VIII.31) activities that are not tied to regions as in 3b's capacity-building and CEPA regional initiatives.

Decision SC31-25: The Standing Committee accepted the Subgroup on Finance's recommendations to approve the Audited Financial Statements for 2004 and to request the Secretariat to report to COP9 on the impacts of IUCN-linked budget provisions for dissolution of the organization and on options for addressing the non-payment of Parties' contributions, and it approved the budget recommended by the Subgroup to be taken forward and proposed for the COP's consideration.

215. **Canada** reported that through an administrative oversight the Secretariat undercharged the Parties in their contributions for 2005 in a total amount of 90,000 francs, and suggested three options: 1) write it off, 2) send an amended invoice, or 3) include the undercharged amount with 2006 invoices.
216. **The SG** noted that the error was the Secretariat's and recommended that the missing amount be written off, that the Secretariat will have to take management steps to manage the shortfall.
217. There was discussion of the inconvenience of having to send indicative invoices to Parties before the UN scale of contributions is known, to be followed by actual invoices after the publication of that scale.

Decision SC31-26: The Standing Committee accepted the Secretary General's recommendation that the Secretariat will manage with the loss caused by the 90,000 franc error and provide information on how that was done.

Agenda item 10.2: DR14, Ramsar Endowment Fund

218. **Canada** provided background on the Endowment Fund that was established by Resolution VIII.29 as a potential means of resourcing the Small Grants Fund and reported that attempts to establish and finance that Fund have been unsuccessful. SC30 recommended that other means be found to resource the SGF instead, but a Resolution of the COP will be needed to annul the mandate of Resolution VIII.29. **Argentina** asked that "aggressively pursue" be amended to "actively pursue" in para. 11 of the DR.
219. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** observed that Asia is the largest region by all measures but the least advanced in implementation of the Convention, and yet Asia and Oceania received only two successful SGF projects and has no Swiss Grant or Wetlands for the Future to complement those; **Indonesia** echoed that concern. **Botswana** urged that additional mechanisms be established, including one for Africa as well. **The SG** said that the need for such mechanisms for Asia and Africa are well understood and offered that the Secretariat will prepare a strategy paper with new ideas for the consideration of SC34 following the COP. **Japan** supported that proposition.

Decision SC31-27: The Standing Committee approved DR14, rescinding the establishment of an Endowment Fund, as amended, for transmittal to COP9 for its consideration.

Report of the Subgroup on COP9 on its discussions during the week

220. **Uganda, Chair of the Subgroup**, reported on the conclusions of the Subgroup's meetings concerning remaining difficulties in the COP planning process. The Subgroup advised Uganda to plan on the basis of 800 as the number of expected delegates, thus obviating the need for an expensive tent for larger plenaries; the tent should become a fallback option. Concerning the ministerial session planned to follow the COP, the Subgroup welcomed the intention but noted that there is little time left to invite ministers and that in light of the remaining budget shortfall the financial focus should be solely upon the COP itself. Thus the Subgroup advised Uganda to revisit the idea of a ministerial session and consider other options for getting the COP message out, e.g., 1) an informal ministerial dialogue within the COP, 2) a ministerial session for the future, with more time to plan for it, and 3) dissemination of the COP9 outcomes at the World Water Forum. Uganda reported that the Subgroup recommended that a Resolution be considered by COP9 which would introduce a high-level segment to future COPs of the Convention.
221. **Uganda** noted that the Subgroup's advice will be transmitted to the Ugandan authorities. **The SG** expressed satisfaction at the Subgroup's conclusions, which now provide a way forward towards the COP. He noted that a team from the Secretariat will be visiting Uganda at the end of June to make detailed planning arrangements with the authorities. He indicated that the question of a DR on future high-level segments will be investigated.
222. **The USA** observed that the proposed Kampala Declaration remains outside the agenda and suggested that it be dropped. **The SG** drew attention to the Declaration's role in celebrating wetlands in Africa as part of the first COP in that region and urged that its consideration be continued, with all input welcome, and that it be discussed during the COP to ensure a consensus. He noted that such declarations have been agreed by previous COPs, such as the Kushiuro Statement at COP5 and the 25th Anniversary and the Brisbane Initiative at COP6.
223. **Uganda** further reported that the Subgroup recommended that reasonable charges be made for exhibition space and excursions, and possibly for side events.

Agenda item 12: Rules of Procedure

224. **The SG** explained that certain needed changes in the Rules, as shown in DOC. SC31-29, have been discussed in previous meetings and should be recommended for adoption by COP9.
225. **Japan** and **Australia** welcomed the amendments but requested that in future the Secretariat try to schedule all of the regional meetings prior to the deadline for submission of DRs from the Parties, so that issues identified at those meetings can be brought forward to the COP.

Decision SC31-28: The Standing Committee approved the proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure found in DOC. SC31-29 and recommended that the Parties adopt those amendments under Agenda item 4 of the COP.

Agenda item 14: Any other business: Request by IWMI for IOP status

226. **The DSG** explained that Resolution VII.3 recognized the four traditional International Organization Partners and set out rules for the inclusion of new organizations that might wish to apply for that status. He noted that heretofore, only Ducks Unlimited had requested such status, but had not clarified their scope and operations in relation to the terms of Resolution VII.3. He indicated that the intent of Resolution VII.3 was to encourage a network of support for the Convention that would be open and noted that though prospective organizations need not be global, they should have a significant international presence in a region.
227. **The DSG** reported on the International Water Management Institute's (IWMI) work around the world and its active cooperation with the other IOPs in many areas of work, including in its significant assistance to the STRP. He noted that IWMI has significant expertise in agriculture and water issues, which are increasingly important to Ramsar, and observed that the Chair of the STRP has recently joined IWMI's staff. He said that the Secretariat heartily recommended that IWMI be admitted as one of the Convention's Partner Organizations.
228. **Argentina** said that the existing IOPs are prestigious organizations whose broad range of activities are recognized throughout the world. Argentina could not support the admission of IWMI to the IOPs.
229. **BirdLife International** strongly supported the addition of IWMI to the IOPs and saw it as part of the dynamic evolution of the IOP construct. **Switzerland** strongly welcomed the admission of IWMI as an IOP. **The USA** supported the admission of such a well-qualified organization and saw it as an unusual opportunity for the Convention, especially in light of IWMI's relationship with CGIAR and its work with desertification issues.
230. **The DSG** suggested that a brief DR will be needed to bring the recommendation to the COP and reaffirm the status of the four existing IOPs as well. **Austria** also supported IWMI's admission, especially in light of its strong linkages among agriculture, water, and nature conservation.
231. **The SG** urged that a DR be prepared for the COP recommending the admission of IWMI to the IOPs. **Argentina** remarked that it would not support a DR being brought forward to the COP. **The Chair** asked for clarification of Argentina's reasons for not supporting IWMI's admission, and **Argentina** repeated the earlier statement that the existing IOPs are prestigious organizations whose broad range of activities are recognized throughout the world, which was not the case of IWMI.
232. **Switzerland** observed that the criteria for admission are clearly stated in Resolution VII.3 and it is quite evident that IWMI meets them, and in addition it supplies a needed bridge with expertise on agricultural and wetland issues.

233. **Botswana** inquired about the rules of procedure in such a case, since a DR seems to be needed. **The SG** suggested that the Secretariat should consult with Argentina in the coming weeks on how to resolve the issue. He noted, however, that it is an issue to be decided by the COP, not by the SC, and thus a mechanism must be found to bring it to the COP's consideration. **Indonesia** suggested that the SC31 report could be transmitted to the COP, so that the COP could decide whether to take the matter up or not, and **Argentina** agreed with that suggestion. **The SG** explained that matters before the COP must ordinarily be brought to it suitably in advance by means of a DR.
234. **Indonesia** and **Argentina** suggested that the DR should be fully within brackets and accompanied by an information note reporting that Argentina did not support the admission of IWMI. **Australia** urged that Argentina could then provide more information in that note about what its reservations are concerning IWMI's admission. **Argentina** responded that there is nothing to add to the reason already given.

Decision SC31-29: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution, entirely within brackets, concerning the admission of IWMI to the International Organization Partners, with an explanatory note on the SC31 discussion.

Agenda item 14: Any other business: Presentation by the Republic of Korea concerning COP10

235. **The Republic of Korea** made a PowerPoint presentation on its intention to offer to host Ramsar COP10, noting a number of reasons why Korea would be an excellent place for the COP because of its internationally significant wetlands and its desire to call attention to them, its commitment to global environmental efforts, the strong support among the local people and NGOs, and its experience with large meetings. He described Korea's plans for the event and reported that Korea is planning to budget US\$ 2.5 million to cover both the host country's and the Secretariat's costs.
236. **Japan, Botswana, and the Islamic Republic of Iran** expressed support for Korea's proposal – **the Chair** observed that evidently all the participants supported and welcomed the proposal and looked forward to receiving a formal proposal and favorable decision by the COP.

Agenda item 11: DRs submitted by Parties

237. **Japan** indicated that it has drafted a DR concerning the value of the Asian Wetland Symposium, and felt that, contrary to the DSG's suggestion that it be incorporated into DR8, it would not fit well within that DR and, subject to further talks with the Secretariat, should preferably be taken up as a standalone DR. **Indonesia** noted that the Asian regional meeting had advanced this idea. **The SG** agreed that Japan's proposed DR is important enough to be transmitted as a standalone and offered to work with Japan on suitable language.

Decision SC31-30: The Standing Committee invited Japan and the Secretariat to finalize the language of a draft Resolution concerning the Asian Wetland Symposium for transmittal to the COP for its consideration.

238. **Australia** indicated that it is possible that the Oceania regional meeting, if it takes place, will wish to submit a DR following up on Resolution VIII.42 on *Small Island Developing States in the Oceania Region*.

Agenda item 13: Date of the next Standing Committee meeting

239. The next SC meeting will take place at 10 a.m. on 7 November 2005 at the COP9 venue.

Agenda item 15: Adoption of the meeting report

240. **The Chair** invited the participants to pass all minor corrections and additions directly to the rapporteur in writing and to bring up only substantial matters requiring discussion during the review of the first and second days' reports. It was clarified that, traditionally and for budgetary reasons, the SC31 decisions will be translated into French and Spanish but the full report will be available only in English.
241. A number of participants noted corrections and promised to provide appropriate text for the rapporteur. The DSG pointed out that some of the DRs will be renumbered in their amended versions.

Decision SC31-31: The Standing Committee adopted the first two days' reports, subject to the amendments notified to the rapporteur. The third day's report will be approved by the SC Chair and circulated to all participants.

242. **Indonesia** offered sincere thanks to the SC Chair and the Secretariat for a well-run meeting. **The Chair** expressed thanks to the rapporteur.

Agenda item 16: Closing remarks

243. **The SG** expressed his appreciation to the participants for their hard work and excellent outcomes. He expressed his gratitude to the whole staff of the Secretariat for their parts in the preparation and running of the meeting: Catherine Loetscher and Mireille Katz on logistics, Montserrat Riera and Valerie Higgins on documents, the Senior Regional Advisors for assisting the regional representatives, the Assistant Advisors for their help, the CEPA Programme Officer for her input, the Projects Administrator, and most of all the Deputy Secretary General. He said that it was good to have such a team to be able to rely upon. He again thanked all of the participants and especially the Subgroup chairs.
244. **The Chair** echoed the SG's appreciation to the staff members and thanked especially the SG and DSG. She felt that great progress had been made towards COP9, and she particularly thanked the Subgroup Chairs and the SC Vice Chair and their substitutes, and Max Finlayson and the STRP. She thanked the interpreters, too, and wished the participants a safe journey home.

Annex: Intervention of the Turkish delegation under Agenda item 8.5

Thank you Madame Chair,

At the outset, I would like to thank the STRP and the Ramsar Bureau for their efforts for the preparation of the documents, which are valuable inputs to achieve our common goals, on protection and conservation of wetlands.

Madame Chair,

The Government of Turkey has been attributing great importance to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention since its accession. We are aware of the vital role of the wetlands to sustain our life, and in this context, we support the international cooperation in environmental matters.

Regarding this issue, the Turkish Delegation would like to draw your kind attention to the document DOC.SC31-10 para 61, bullet 3, concerning the Resolution VIII.2 “Report of the World Commission on Dams”.

Turkey is of the opinion that the report of the WCD should not be a basic reference document for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The Report of the WCD has no worldwide acceptance. The recommendations of the Report are not globally acceptable and they have been subject to criticism of many countries. The Report has put forward 8 conclusive points which were based on the analysis of 125 water storage facilities. However, these water storage facilities constitute only 0.28% of the total completed ones in the world.

Destructions by uncontrolled power give damage not only to people but also the wildlife. If it is not properly controlled, such destructions create social and economic disasters. On the other hand, access to safe drinking water could not be achieved without storing water and there is an urgent need for building more water infrastructures to store water during the rainy seasons in order to avoid water shortages. It is obvious that developing countries have no choice but to store water. During the construction of the necessary infrastructures, environmental changes may occur, but if the necessary precautions are taken, changes will not lead to “destruction”. Briefly, our perspective should be based on an understanding of “balancing the need for the development of water resources with the conservation of the environment.”

Madame Chair,

I would like to also draw your attention to the same document, para 61,62, Resolution VIII.1 “Allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands” which is related to transboundary water management.

Madame Chair,

There is a great heterogeneity in the economic, social, cultural, environmental and political situations of river basins throughout the world. Different countries and regions have different needs and priorities and face different challenges. Accordingly, there cannot be a “one size fits all” solution. Moreover, we are of the opinion that transboundary water resources management is out of the mandate of the Ramsar Convention.

For the reasons which I stated earlier, on behalf of my Delegation, I wish to put on record my country’s reservations on the Resolution VIII.1 “Allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands” and Resolution VIII.2 “ Report of the World Commission on Dams” during the COP-8 of the Ramsar Convention.

Therefore, Madame Chair, I kindly request the Ramsar Bureau to duly reflect this statement in all of the relevant documents of the 31th Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention which refer to the Resolutions stated above.

I thank you, Madame Chair.