

Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
7th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on
Administrative Reform
Geneva, Switzerland, 14 January 2011

Report of the 7th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform

Contracting Parties present: Argentina, Algeria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Korea, Japan, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Republic of Korea, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Uruguay, United States of America, Venezuela.

Resources: UNEP

Observers: IUCN

Report Writer: Kofi Addo

Introductory remarks by the Co-Chairs

1. **The Co-Chair (Chile)** welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the last meeting during which UNEP presented the report requested by the Working Group (WG), and clarified the points raised for participants to send to their respective capitals. He said that the purpose of the meeting was a question and answer session. He introduced Mr. Jacob Duer and Ms. Barbara Ruis, both from UNEP, and asked that Mr. Duer, on behalf of the UNEP Secretariat to briefly go through the main issues that the report highlights. He noted that the Co-Chairs intended to adjourn the meeting by 13.00, since there were other meetings in the afternoon. He also introduced Mr. Kofi Addo (consultant) as the one taking notes and to write a draft report that would be made available on the Ramsar website after approval by the Co-Chairs. Members of the Working Group would then have the opportunity to provide comments on the draft report.
2. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** also welcomed all participants and wished them a happy new year.
3. **UNEP** thanked the Co-Chairs, and proposed to briefly present the report entitled: “United Nations Environment Programme – response to the letter from the Co-Chairs of the Ramsar Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform dated 22 July 2010 – Review of possible change in institutional host for the Ramsar Secretariat”, dated 7 October 2010. He said that the report was reissued for technical reasons and that this latest version of the report is available on the Ramsar webpage. He further stated that this revised report should be read in conjunction with the earlier UNEP report issued in December 2009 entitled “UNEP submission to the co-chairs of the Ramsar Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform: Operational implications of a possible change in institutional host”. He underlined that when the WG members look at these two reports, the parts on budget and staffing should be only referenced to in the version dated 7 October 2010.
4. **UNEP** continued by noting that the latest report is a further elaboration on a number of issues which were brought to the attention of the UNEP Executive Director contained in a letter dated 22 July 2010 from the Co-Chairs. He said that UNEP would not make a power point presentation at this meeting, since that was done at the previous briefing to the

AHWG on 5 October 2010. As a concise introduction, he reiterated that the report consisted of five parts, A to E. Part A is on the further options for reducing the costs of a UNEP administered Ramsar Secretariat in response to the letter from the Co-Chairs requesting UNEP to provide two options: (a) a cost-neutral scenario, and (b) a reduced budget scenario, should the COP decide for a transition of the Ramsar Secretariat to UNEP. He noted that Part A of the report contains three scenarios: Scenario 1 – staffing level based on UNEP’s initial submission; Scenario 2 – a cost-neutral scenario; and Scenario 3 – a reduced budget scenario.

5. **UNEP** further highlighted the other sections of the report, stating that Part B on “transition arrangements” indicated the potential costs of a move from the current location in Gland to the International Environment House in Geneva. Part C on the “timing and timeline for implementation” highlighted in a table form the steps that should be taken should a decision be taken for a UNEP administered Ramsar Secretariat. Part D on “the best possible staff arrangements” indicated the different options available at the discretion of the Parties. Finally, part E on “the added benefits to the Convention” stated the additional benefits to the Parties and also at the national level towards implementation of the Convention. Reference was also made to the three annexes attached to the report.
6. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** invited the participants to ask questions.

Responses to questions raised by the Government of Argentina¹

7. **Argentina** said his country had already submitted in writing a series of questions for which it had requested a response in writing.
8. **Co-Chair (Chile)** pointed out that at the last meeting it was agreed that this meeting would be a question and answer session, and that UNEP would provide oral responses and not written responses. The questions from participants and the responses of UNEP would then be reflected in the report of the meeting.
9. **Argentina** inquired if it was necessary for him to go through all the questions. **Co-Chair (Chile)** said that it would not be necessary since UNEP already has a copy of the questions.² **UNEP** thanked Argentina for the questions seeking clarification on a number of issues, and proposed to answer them in line with the five headings of the UNEP report, under A to E, which was accepted.
10. Regarding Argentina’s questions pertaining to Part A: “Further options for reducing the costs of a UNEP administered Ramsar Secretariat”, with respect to question 1 on feasible/realistic cost scenarios, **UNEP** stated that there would be no reduction in capacity under scenario 2. He explained that under scenario 2, the capacity in terms of the skills required for the running and implementation of the Convention would be maintained and would remain similar to the current level today. He explained that the reason why there, for some participants, might appear to be a capacity reduction is because of the comparison between scenarios 1 and 2. He stated that scenario 1 was part of the initial submission by UNEP to the WG, and at this point in time only served as a point of reference. Scenario 1 was based on the job descriptions available within the Ramsar Secretariat, which led to a

¹ For ease of reference the questions posed by the Government of Argentina are attached as Annex A.

² The responses of UNEP to the questions submitted by Argentina are provided below under the headings in the order in which Argentina presented them.

tentative assessment of the positions of the Secretary General, a Deputy, and a number of P5, P4, P3, P2 and G positions. He added that the initial proposal had, at that time, not been subject to further review by UNEP, but rather that UNEP accepted what was presented by the Ramsar Secretariat.

11. **UNEP** continued that in the second scenario, UNEP had actually, as requested, reviewed in more detail the job descriptions, and had also consulted with the Ramsar Secretariat. Further, as also specifically requested, UNEP had looked at the structure and staffing tables of other MEAs that are comparable in terms of size to the Ramsar Secretariat. Based on that review, UNEP has assessed that the Ramsar Secretariat could be composed of one D1 Secretary General and one P5 Deputy Secretary General. The four Senior Regional Advisors could be classified at the P4 level; there would also be a number of P3s, P2s and G staff. He added that under scenario 2 UNEP did not present a reduction in the capacity compared to today, and stressed again that no direct comparison is possible between the current scenario 2 classifications and the tentative classifications in the initial submission which are now represented in scenario 1 for reference purposes only.
12. In addition, **UNEP** emphasized that under scenarios 2 and 3, UNEP's proposed classification actually represents an increase in capacity of the Ramsar Secretariat because under these scenarios the interns or assistants are classified at the P2 level, which are full-fledged associate programme officer positions within the UN Secretariat, and are core positions. He observed that under the current administrative arrangement the interns/assistants usually have limited experience when they take up their assignment with the Secretariat, and that they are usually engaged for a limited period of time, between 12 and 24 months. This is in contrast with the P2 positions under scenarios 2 and 3, where these positions are established core positions, and the requirement for a P2 is, among others, a minimum of 2 years professional experience before joining the UN Secretariat. He added that if the person is recruited against a core position, there is a higher expectation that that person would stay beyond the current duration of the Ramsar internship programme and thus add significantly to the continuity of Secretariat capacity. Thus, in UNEP's view there will be the same capacity, if not an increase, by bringing in four core positions into the Ramsar Secretariat instead of the current internship arrangement.
13. **UNEP** further stated that in terms of the "vital HR, IT and other support services", there would be no change under the UNEP scenario. The situation now at the Ramsar Secretariat, i.e., the arrangement between Ramsar and IUCN, would be differently arranged under a UNEP scenario, but there would be no difference in the type of services that would be provided to the convention bodies and the parties compared to the current scenario. Under the current Ramsar scenario, the finance officer position is funded out of the core budget and IUCN provides a number of services, which relate to HR, IT and other support services based on the charges that IUCN collects from Ramsar. This is equivalent to the 13% programme support costs of UNEP. Under the UNEP scenarios, it would be slightly different because UNEP would pay for the finance officer (P3) and support staff working in administration (G5). In this respect, there will be no change in terms of the administrative support, nor in HR, IT and other support services, and there will be no reduction or decrease in the capacity of the Secretariat.
14. Going to Argentina's questions under its section B, "the added benefits to the Convention", **UNEP** noted that the questions under section B were closely connected to the questions Argentina posed under section C on synergies and section D on timeframe, and that UNEP therefore intended to link the responses under these three sections, while

at the same time addressing them individually to the extent possible. This proposal was accepted.

15. On the question of added benefits, **UNEP** stated that Argentina was requesting a response on the current situation with respect to the recognition of the Ramsar Convention in regard to other biodiversity conventions. He noted that there are many benefits already outlined, in particular in UNEP's December 2009 submission. In addition, UNEP wishes to stress that Parties have brought forward that there is a difference at the national level as to how conventions are perceived and the level of recognition that the conventions are receiving, depending on whether the conventions are related or attached to the United Nations. In this respect, if the Ramsar Convention is brought to the same footing at the national level as CITES or CMS, or other conventions, Ramsar is likely to receive a higher recognition and attract the attention of national policy-makers, which would thereby improve implementation of and compliance with the Ramsar Convention. During the AHWG process, countries have expressed their belief that they would benefit if the Ramsar Convention was put on equal footing with other UNEP administered biodiversity-related conventions so that national focal points could show at the ministerial and decision-making level the importance of the Convention, such as is the case with CITES and CMS today. This UNEP deemed as an important aspect that needed to be taken into consideration by Parties.
16. In terms of how that would change under UNEP administration and how difficulties would be solved by a change in host, **UNEP** highlighted its role in advocating for the Ramsar Convention through UNEP's networks in the regions, and also during UNEP and UN meetings. This he believed is also dependant on how countries themselves regarded the importance of the Convention and implemented it at the national level. In his view, it was a responsibility that should be divided between UNEP on one hand and the Contracting Parties on the other.
17. In response to Argentina's question under section C on Synergies, **UNEP** indicated that Argentina made reference to the Second Meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives (21-23 November 2010) on International Environmental Governance (IEG) held in Helsinki, and the information note from the Co-Chairs of the Consultative Group that was prepared for that meeting. UNEP pointed out that it is important to keep in mind that the report of the Consultative Group was a report of the Co-Chairs, as was the information note, and that they were not UNEP reports. He added that the report tried to outline some of the issues and gaps relating to the broader reforms of the IEG and the relationship of UNEP to the MEAs. He made reference to the quotation by Argentina from the IEG Co-Chairs Information Note which states that UNEP does not have the political, administrative and resourcing support required to exercise its mandate.³ UNEP responded that the report of the IEG actually provides recommendations and options on how to further strengthen or increase the coordination among the UNEP administered conventions.
18. **UNEP** also made reference to paragraph 7 of the Nairobi - Helsinki Outcome of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives, where it is recognised that the report of the Co-Chairs was a review of the gaps and options. The report of the meeting is essentially to take a step further on how to strengthen the whole governance structure around the MEAs and in the broader context of the Environmental Governance

³ See paragraph 3, page 16 of questions submitted by Argentina in Annex A to this report.

structure. He said that it is clear from paragraph 7(c) of the Nairobi – Helsinki Outcome that IEG encourages synergies between compatible MEAs with the aim of identifying guiding elements for realising such synergies whilst respecting the autonomy of the COPs. The report also looks at promoting the joint delivery of multilateral agreements with the aim of reducing the administrative costs of the Secretariats to free up resources for the implementation of the MEAs at the national level, including through capacity building. He added that there is actually a push to strengthen the cooperation and the coordination among the MEAs and therefore endorsing the synergies agenda. He further stated that there is no contradiction between the UNEP report of 7 October 2010 (response to the letter from the Co-Chairs of the Ramsar Ad Hoc Working Group) and the report of the IEG, but that they can be seen as mutually reinforcing.

19. In response to section D of Argentina's questions on the timeframe for the provision of the Ramsar Secretariat by UNEP, **UNEP** noted that this question also relates to the IEG process. He indicated that this process is on-going and there will be a number of discussions in relation to the IEG. The Nairobi-Helsinki Outcome in paragraph 11 lists five different options for broader institutional reforms namely:
- a) Enhancing UNEP;
 - b) Establishing a new umbrella organization for sustainable development;
 - c) Establishing a specialized agency such as a world environment organization;
 - d) Reforming the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development; and
 - e) Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures.

UNEP observed that based on what it presented in its report of 7 October 2010, there is the indication that UNEP is promoting these options and is moving towards the direction that the IEG is proposing without a final decision as to whether there will be a major reform, and possibly establishing an umbrella organisation. In this regard, the two reports go hand-in-hand concerning the approach to be taken.

20. In response to Argentina's question of the costs of having a special meeting, **UNEP** explained that it has not assessed these costs, but would be willing to do so. He added the decision to hold such a meeting is at the discretion of the Parties, and should the Parties decide to hold such a meeting UNEP would estimate the costs.
21. Regarding cooperation with the private sector, as in section E of Argentina's questions, **UNEP** noted that some companies see it as a strong incentive to engage with the UN and with UNEP in particular. He observed that there are a number of private sector organisations that are very keen on working with the UN for a number of reasons. This, he stated, was witnessed at the CBD COP where there was strong significant private sector support. He gave the example of how Airbus came up with a CBD logo on their planes.
22. **UNEP** added that there are a number of other examples that show that private companies are keen to working with both the UN and UNEP. He noted that these companies are engaging with UNEP at different levels and for different reasons. The private sector is providing financial support to UNEP's activities, and also in kind support, and there are many types of collaboration. He gave the example of how a company has expressed interest in working with UNEP on the new buildings in Nairobi, in making these buildings energy sufficient and energy efficient.

23. Regarding section F on general budget assumptions that refers to the issue of the exchange rate used in UNEP's report, **UNEP** explained that it used the exchange rate of USD 1.00 to CHF 1.00 for calculation purposes, as future exchange rates are difficult to estimate, and as there has been fluctuation in the CHF-USD exchange rates. He further explained that UNEP translated the Ramsar's current budget into the UN format, which is calculated in US dollars. He observed that 10 years ago the US dollars was exchanged for 1.60 Swiss francs, but the aim of the present calculation of the Ramsar budget was to bring it into conformity with UN practice. He further observed that if the exchange rate was more favourable for the Swiss franc then Parties would have more value for money, because the Parties would contribute less in US dollars.
24. **UNEP** added that the exchange rate also has an impact on salaries, since part of the salary, i.e., the post adjustment, takes into consideration the exchange rate, as well as the living costs in Geneva. For example, the post adjustment in 2001 was set at 22%, but today it is about 90% with an exchange rate of USD 1 to CHF 1. This has a great impact since about 80% of the Ramsar budget consists of salary cost. UNEP stated that it could explore other options and would be prepared to do so, but would need to look at the feasibility or relevance of conducting this exercise.
25. Going to Argentina's section G on the question of whether the hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat by UNEP would require an increase in the UNEP budget, **UNEP** responded that there would be no increase. He explained that the Ramsar budget will stand alone, but under the arrangement Ramsar will pay a 13% programme support cost to UNEP. This would be returned to Ramsar in the form of support to staff as well as services provided by UNEP.
26. **UNEP** summarised Argentina's question under section H in seeking clarification in terms of the transition arrangements, i.e., what needed to be put in place and the actual costs associated with such a move. He responded that in this respect different arrangements could be made, dependent on how quickly the Parties will decide for such a transfer to take place, and the arrangements between IUCN, Ramsar and UNEP. He added that should there be a physical move of offices, UNEP has tried to capture the costs in terms of furniture, offices, computers, and moving costs. He stated it had been brought to the attention of UNEP that the Ramsar Secretariat owns its 21 computers and does not have to procure these, in which case there would be savings compared to the estimated costs should the Ramsar Secretariat move. He explained that UNEP had calculated a cost of USD 40,000, which seems to be low, but the bulk of the costs will be in relation to the move of furniture and other unexpected costs in moving from Gland to the International Environment House in Geneva. He observed that the transition costs would be a one-off expenditure, which could be contributed to by one or more Parties.
27. **UNEP** stated that with respect to section I on transition arrangements of staff, including on staff indemnity costs and the fact that staff would have to apply for their positions, that there are other options available to the Parties, and highlighted these other options as detailed in the UNEP report of 7 October 2010 for Parties to consider. He added that an arrangement between Ramsar and IUCN could be envisaged, under which IUCN continues to provide contracts to a limited number of Ramsar staff members during a transitional period at an extra cost to Ramsar. UNEP made reference to the different options stated in the UNEP report (pages 18-22) for staff members who at the time of a transition would have reached the UN mandatory retirement age; staff members with up to five years of reaching the UN retirement age, and also staff members holding a contract of one year of

longer. Any arrangement would have to be agreed upon between UNEP, IUCN and Ramsar.

28. **Argentina** thanked UNEP for responding to the questions raised by his Government. He noted that the responses would be provided in the report of this meeting and inquired as to the timing of the release of the report.
29. **Co-Chair (Chile)** reiterated his earlier statement that the responses of UNEP would be captured in a report. First the report writer will send the report to the Co-Chairs for review and then it will be posted on the Ramsar website. The Co-Chairs will then allow for two weeks for revisions. Should a Party feel that a portion of the response was not captured, it would have to revert to the Co-Chairs for amendments.

Responses to questions raised by the Government of the Czech Republic

30. **Czech Republic** indicated that his Government has five questions for which it seeks a response. He extended his country's best wishes and good luck to the Government of Australia in light of the flooding in the state of Queensland. He noted that some of the questions overlapped with the questions posed by Argentina. His first question was in respect of converting the Ramsar Secretariat budget into US dollars. He mentioned that there was at least one exception to the rule of budgeting in US dollars by a UNEP administered MEA. He gave the example of UNCCD in Bonn which keeps its budget in Euros.
31. **UNEP** noted that this UNCCD example is a deviation from the current practice in the UN system. He said that in this particular case the contribution of the Parties is in Euros, but that they are converted to US dollars for reporting and accounting purposes. He added that if the Parties wish to follow the UNCCD example then UNEP would look into this possibility. However, it would be a deviation from UN financial rules and regulations.
32. Secondly, **Czech Republic** indicated that there are three scenarios, but it is not clear to the Czech Government if any of those three scenarios reflect the real state of matters in respect of the budgeting rules, taking into consideration the fact that the UN rules differ from the Ramsar budget format.
33. **UNEP** referred to page 9 of the UNEP report, showing the Ramsar budget the COP approved for 2011 in Swiss francs, but which UNEP had converted into US dollars. He added that UNEP understands that the Ramsar budget is based on actual costs and a certain percentage added to for subsequent years, as to take inflation into account. The UNEP scenario for calculation of staff costs is different because UNEP calculations are based on standard costs, and not actual costs. He further noted that the UNEP costs are provided by the UN Secretariat. Those standard costs are significantly higher than the actual costs; in practice UNEP often sees a significant saving on this budget line. The standard costs include other cost considerations, such as, post adjustment, assignment grant, shipment, separation, education grant, home leave, etc.
34. He also made reference to table A.1.g (on page 10/11) of the UNEP report, and stated that the calculation of the staff budget in that table is based on the actual number of staff in the Ramsar Secretariat, but assessed under UNEP's scenario, in particular scenario 2. UNEP based its calculation on the same number of staff as to their duties in the Ramsar Secretariat. Under scenario 3 of the same table, in response to the co-chairs request of a

- cost-reduction scenario, there is a reduction of 5% taking into consideration the fact that staff costs are about 80% of the budget. UNEP then assessed the budget as to how to decrease the staff costs. He noted that the difference between scenarios 2 and 3 is that in scenario 2 four interns are upgraded to the P2 level, but in scenario 3 there are only three interns budgeted as P2 programme officers. The reasoning behind this is that UNEP considered the likelihood that some governments may provide Junior Programme Officers (JPOs). In addition, UNEP also considered that three P2s might have more experience than four interns.
35. UNEP further assessed the Partnership Officer position, and classified the position as P4 under scenario 2. UNEP also considered that if one or more functions of the Partnership position could be moved to other officers, as is the case with other MEA secretariats, the Partnership position could be classified as a P3 position. He further explained that in scenario 3, there could perhaps be a decrease in capacity, whereas in scenario 2 there is an increase in capacity.
 36. **Czech Republic** said that the response of UNEP has covered the last two questions that the Czech Republic wanted to pose, but nevertheless inquired as to why scenario 1 has five P5 positions, which are high positions in the Secretariats of other MEAs, but then are downgraded in scenarios 2 and 3.
 37. **UNEP** responded that there is a cost decrease between scenarios 2 and 3 because UNEP was asked to provide a scenario representing such decrease in costs. But scenarios 1 and 2 are purely based on an assessment of the job descriptions as they stand today within the Ramsar Secretariat. UNEP's review of the Ramsar job descriptions was done in consultation with UNEP human resources with expertise in job classifications, and by looking at MEAs of similar size, with similar responsibilities. He underlined that the Senior Regional Advisor posts merit classification at the P4 level, and added this did not entail a 'downgrading', but rather that UNEP made a comprehensive assessment in scenario 2 of the different posts within the Ramsar Secretariat.
 38. In UNEP's view the correct classifications is what is contained in scenario 2, and UNEP insisted that the capacity of the Ramsar Secretariat is thereby maintained. He mentioned that the capacity of the Secretariat is not always necessarily linked to the classification of jobs. Rather the quality of staff is linked to the recruitment and selection process, making sure that the best people are hired, which could be irrespective of the level.
 39. **Czech Republic** inquired why the number of positions in the different scenarios differs. He observed that in the UNEP report the programme support cost (i.e., the 13% charged by UNEP to all MEAs) was included in scenarios 1 and 2, but not included in scenario 3.
 40. **UNEP** drew the attention of the Working Group to paragraph A.1.d.2 on page 8 (scenario 3 – reduced budget scenario (5%)), which states that the previously mentioned general assumptions are also applicable to scenario 3, including regarding the programme support costs. Scenario 3 is further based on the assumption that one position at the intern level is upgraded to a JPO position. This would, however, depend on voluntary donor funding for that purpose. Also, that the position of Partnership Officer is classified at the P3 level on the assumption that the representational functions of the Partnership Officer could be undertaken by the SG and/or Deputy SG.

41. **USA** said that to have a better understanding of the process, when UNEP compared the current Ramsar job descriptions and capacity whether UNEP carried out a desktop exercise or actually conducted interviews.
42. **UNEP** responded that the UNEP process is a combination of both a desktop review and interviews with the Ramsar SG. He said that UNEP looked at the positions in the Ramsar Secretariat in relation to comparable posts at the UN, and that UNEP considered many components in arriving at their conclusions.
43. **Japan** said that his Government would like to see possible costs. He added that from the report and presentation, the UNEP report may provide us some benefits, but not the costs for the future. In addition, with respect to the change of the Ramsar budget from Swiss francs to US dollars, he would like to see the actual costs ratio scenario at the actual rate as well as historical rates such as the exchange rates at 5 years ago or even 10 years ago. He indicated that the report has mentioned that benefits on synergies, but that could be achieved within the framework of IUCN. Furthermore, Japan would like to see more concrete benefits that UNEP could provide. He also felt that the transition costs have been underestimated, that there were open questions as to staff arrangements, the period during which staff has to stop working, as a result of a possible move from Gland to Geneva, and the additional costs associated with that. Finally, he inquired if there would be any changes to the UN administration in relation to other MEAs as well as any changes to the Ramsar Secretariat's relationship with NGOs.
44. **UNEP** stated that in terms of the exchange rate, UNEP would be happy to look into it. However, he conducted a limited calculation exercise to translate the Ramsar budget into the UN format, i.e., into US dollars, from a more historical perspective. He stated that if UNEP had used an exchange rate of one US dollar to 1.25 Swiss francs, as was the exchange rate five years ago, there would have been a saving of USD 230,000. Using the exchange rate from 10 years ago (of 1.69) the savings would have been USD 470,000. He stated that UNEP had used a more recent exchange rate since it is less adventurous, but would be willing to present different scenarios.
45. In terms of the transition costs, **UNEP** explained that there are a number of options. UNEP looked at the options and the opportunities of Ramsar moving either to UNEP or remaining with IUCN. As far as can be established now, UNEP believed that should Ramsar move to Geneva there are no further cost implications foreseen and also not many disruptions in terms of work flow. He recognized that it was difficult to say how much it would cost and to exactly determine the time involved in packing, moving and unpacking. He gave the example of the upcoming move of UNEP staff in Nairobi to new offices, and said that the Nairobi office is calculating about two to three days of disruptions to the work flow, but that in the Ramsar case perhaps a week would be a reasonable period to schedule.
46. With regard to Japan's queries on the added benefits to Ramsar under UNEP administration in comparison to IUCN, **UNEP** stated, that indeed this is at the core of the issue, and therefore UNEP has been elaborating on this topic in its two submissions. In UNEP's view it should be borne in mind that it is not mainly about administration but the added benefits in terms of implementation at the national level, which UNEP has tried to detail in its two reports to the Working Group. He said that there are practical advantages and gave the example of the Convention carrying the UN flag, the attention paid to the Convention at the national level and financing of the Secretariat's activities, Ramsar staff carrying UN laissez-passers, and the opening up of doors at the higher levels of

government. He added that UNEP has made an assessment of the added benefits as to assist the parties in their decision-making process, but that in the final analysis it is the Parties that would have to decide.

47. With respect to the Ramsar Secretariat's relationship with NGOs, **UNEP** does not envisage any change under the UN system. He said that UNEP has certain rules in dealing with NGOs, and the MEAs also have different rules in relation to working with NGOs.
48. **Czech Republic** observed that he has been inspired by the questions from Japan and that on a personal note, when you budget in different currencies, someone wins and others lose.
49. **Brazil** inquired whether the capacity of the Secretariat is related to the recruitment and selection process, and why UNEP thought the UN recruitment process was better than the present system under IUCN.
50. **UNEP** clarified that the main issue is about the quality of staff. He stated that, ultimately, it is not the capacity but the quality which determines the success of the Secretariat. UNEP reaffirmed that there would be no quality decrease when the position of Senior Regional Advisor would be classified at P4 level.
51. **UNEP** continued by giving an overview of the UN recruitment process. He mentioned the new online recruitment system called "Inspira" that has replaced the old system under "Galaxy". This system is used by the UN, UNEP and also the MEAs. Under the Inspira online recruitment system the posts advertised are based on a formal classification process, after which the positions are put into the online system. The positions are open for 60 days and, depending on the level, there are the minimum eligibility requirements. After the 60 days, the applications are released to the recruiting office, and the screening of applicants is based on a set of 10 questions related to the particular job advertised.
52. The number of applications released is those which have passed through the screening process based on their responses to the 10 questions. The recruiting office reviews the applications, and determines who should be invited to an interview. This is done considering, among others, geographical balance, gender balance, and good knowledge of the area of work. The next stage is the composition of the panel and the method to use. Interviews take place by telephone, face-to-face and/or video conference. Often, a written test or assessment is also part of the review and assessment process. The Panel then assesses the candidates and makes a recommendation. Usually more than one candidate is recommended. This is then entered into the Inspira system for a review by a central review body to assess the transparency of the process. Finally, the list of recommended candidates is given to the Executive Director, who makes a final selection based on the recommendations of the interview panel.
53. **Brazil** sought clarification as to who decides the composition of the Panel.
54. **UNEP** explained that in the case of UNEP the division director decides. However, the new rules stipulate the procedure and gives guidance as to the composition of the Panel. He clarified that the process described is used for positions up to the D1 level. In the case of D2 positions the process is similar, but there are different steps to go through and the final selection is made by the Secretary-General of the UN.

55. **Brazil** inquired whether the process is similar to the recruitment of the Secretary General of CITES.
56. **UNEP** responded that the CITES position is a D2 post, and as such the composition of the Panel is different. He stated that one has to be a D2 or above to sit in a D2 interview panel. In the particular case of CITES, the panel was composed of two UNEP staff members and two external members – the head of UNDP Nairobi and the Chairman of the CITES Standing Committee.
57. **USA** said that as a follow up, she was confused about the recruitment and quality issues. Given that this is an oranges to oranges exercise, the Secretariat would want to maintain the same quality of staff. She gave the example of the Senior Regional Advisors, who are representatives of the Convention in the regions, the Parties would want the same quality and the same job covered. She asked how to recruit the same quality for the same job when they going to be paid less, and how do you reap the benefits.
58. **UNEP** stated that whether the Senior Regional Advisors will be paid more, or less, when the Ramsar Secretariat will be with UNEP, is rather difficult to generalise. Looking at the Ramsar setup, there is a minimum and maximum pay level, putting the salary within a range. One could be a Senior Regional Advisor and getting, for the purposes of argument, say, USD 100,000 or even 140,000, but doing the same job. This is to some extent negotiable. Whether a Senior Regional Advisor gets more or less is thus difficult for UNEP to determine. Under the UN system the salary depends on the entry point level and step, and other factors, such as education grant, home leave, pension, health insurance, etc. He added that at present UNEP did not know the exact salary for each of the officers at Ramsar, as that has not been assessed. To do so would entail checking whether an officer is single or married, has school-going children, etc. He reiterated that the quality of the staff member is not only linked to the level the post is classified, but that it is far more important to have competent persons on the posts, able to perform the functions of the post.
59. **USA** stated that generally organisations get a different recruitment pull at a higher level when the post is at a higher salary, e.g., higher educational level etc. She expressed her concern as to the outcome when a P5 position is moved to the P4 level. She inquired whether the entry level and higher end salary level for a P4 position is what is quoted in the budget, and secondly, whether the other benefits that UNEP mentioned would be paid for by UNEP, or will eventually show up on the Ramsar budget.
60. **UNEP** responded that in terms of the salary as shown on the budget, the P4 level has one cost, so it does not matter as to the entry level or higher level entry point. In his opinion there are no additional costs to the Ramsar Secretariat. This is irrespective of whether the staff member has two or four children, as all that is captured in the amount in the budget. He gave the example that when a staff member is recruited at the P4 level the amount shown takes into consideration factors such as whether the person is married or single, repatriation grant, etc. The amount indicated is a conservative and rather high amount, which evens out depending on staff members' family situation and other costs. Based on this conservative estimation there is regularly a saving of about 5% to 10%.
61. **Switzerland** said that in its capacity as host country it should be clarified that if Ramsar remains in Gland should it be administered by UNEP there is the issue of security inside the IUCN building by bringing it into conformity with UN rules. What need to be considered are the costs and benefits of bringing in two security staff, and also the building

should have two doors. This would entail making modifications to the building. These are extra costs that the Secretariat would have to bear. She noted that there is already security in the Geneva Environment House. She added that Switzerland would be prepared to participate in funding costs related to the relocation.

62. **The Republic of Korea** felt that with regard to the transition costs, it is closely related to several dimensions. The first is the domestic dimension, and its impact on national compliance, implementation. He also felt that Parties should focus more on the national dimensions, and thought there are some benefits in terms of future goals through the institutional change from IUCN to UNEP.
63. **Co-Chair (Chile)** noted that members should bear in mind the added benefits to the Convention in this whole exercise, as to whether Ramsar should continue under the present arrangement with IUCN or be administered by UNEP. He felt that when the Group got to the point of drafting the recommendations the issue of added benefits should be the focus.
64. **Germany** said that it considers the UNEP report comprehensive and thought the report confirms the view that a move to UNEP would bring benefits. She thought that the difference between the scenarios presented by UNEP were interesting, especially scenario 2, where the interns are classified as P2s. In her view, a P2 will have more experience, and expressed the preparedness of Germany to support the Ramsar Secretariat for a JPO programme depending on the scenario Parties will decide on.
65. **Co-Chair (Chile)** said that since the session has been exhausted another meeting should be scheduled in February. He announced his departure in February and requested for another meeting for a drafting exercise. He indicated that the Group had one more year before the next COP meeting.
66. **Co-Chair (Australia)** noted that since there is no response to the scheduling of a meeting in February, it could be inferred that members are in agreement. She thought that the February meeting would be an opportunity to discuss the next steps. She suggested that the Working Group meet end of February.
67. **Japan** mentioned that there is the Ramsar STRP meeting taking place from 14-20 February, and as such end of February would be convenient to meet.
68. **The Secretary General (Ramsar)** said that at the Governing Council of UNEP will meet at the end of February. Furthermore, most of the staff of the Secretariat would be away because of the celebration of World Wetlands Day.
69. **Argentina** sought clarification on the substance of such a meeting in February.
70. **Co-Chair (Chile)** responded that the idea is to find key elements for drafting a resolution to be presented to the COP. He felt that meeting would provide guidance to the Co-Chairs as to what participants want to see in the resolution, and also feedback as to what should be achieved. He made reference to the fact that there are some new members in the Working Group, so there was the need to be reminded of the Group's mandate.
71. **USA** inquired whether the meeting will be a discussion to provide input and feedback to the Co-Chairs to draft a resolution, and how all this would work out with the Standing Committee. She also inquired whether between now and the next Standing Committee

meeting the Co-Chairs would draft resolution, receive feedback and send to the Standing Committee in the spirit of good faith and transparency, and have some discussion with the Standing Committee on the draft resolution.

72. **Co-Chair (Chile)** stated all this would have to be decided by the Working Group. The Co-Chairs could draft a resolution but are not required to do so. The whole point of the exercise is that the key elements have to be in relation to the mandate from Resolution X. He added that the exercise is not only about the legal process, but also the pragmatic process need to be considered. He added that normally in the Working Group, the Group would be asked to trust the Co-Chairs to draft a resolution, something that the Group would have to decide at the next meetings to be put forward to members to be sent to capitals for their input. During the next meeting members could come up with observations, amendments, additions and deletions to that draft, so that at the end of the meeting the Working Group would up with a resolution.
73. **Co-Chair (Australia)** noted that the Co-Chairs could not tell how long it would take to come up with a resolution. There could be one meeting on key elements. She suggested that members would have to be flexible, as there could be several meetings on the draft resolution.
74. **Japan** sought clarification as to which Standing Committee meeting the draft resolution would be presented. He thought it would be too short to send a resolution to the Standing Committee at the May meeting. Therefore, he argued that the Working Group should prepare a resolution for the Standing Committee in October.
75. **Co-Chair (Australia)** suggested that members should not pre-empt the outcome of the next meeting, but see where at the next meeting the Group gets to since it might take longer. Also members should not set what the Group are going to report, there could be a range of views and the process might not be easy. She added that normally the report of the Group goes to the Standing Committee.
76. **Brazil** mentioned that there was the need to clarify the mandate of the Working Group. He made reference to the terms of reference of the Working Group, in particular to No. 3 of the Annex that the Working Group “[r]ecommend through approval by the Standing Committee to Contracting Parties and the Conference of the Parties ...” In which case the Working Group has to go through the Standing Committee. He said it was his understanding that there were three upcoming Standing Committee meetings: in May, October and back to back with the COP.
77. **Co-Chair (Australia)** agreed with Brazil that the Working Group has several options and a degree of flexibility.
78. **Switzerland** thought it would be useful to provide some elements that could be included in the draft resolution. She felt there was the need to pre-cook something, and that the Group should not wait till October. She added that since members do not know how long it would take and also since it would take some time for capitals to digest the contents of the draft resolution, the quickest it goes the better it is. She felt the Group should aim for presenting a draft to the Standing Committee in May.
79. **Czech Republic** expressed his support for the proposal by Switzerland. He mentioned that as to what was quoted earlier by Brazil, the prerequisite had already been fulfilled by

the specific decision taken by the Standing Committee at the last meeting in Georgia in 2009, because the Working Group was given the green light to proceed.

80. **The Co-Chair (Australia)** suggested that the next meeting of Working Group should take place by the end of February, and promised to get back to members as to the date of the meeting. She thanked the participants. The meeting was closed.

Annex A

Questions by Argentina to UNEP's Review of the possible change in institutional host for the Ramsar Secretariat

A) Feasible/realistic cost scenarios

A.1.b. Scenario 1 – Based on UNEP's initial submission

A.1.c. Scenario 2 – Cost-neutral Scenario

A.1.d. Scenario 3 – Reduced budget Scenario (5%)

We appreciate that UNEP, as requested by the Ad hoc Working Group, is presenting three budget scenarios for consideration, as referred above.

1. Comment: The report lacks an explanation on how, in concrete terms, each of the three scenarios would affect the work of the Ramsar Secretariat and, in particular, how would it affect the services provided to parties.

This becomes more relevant under the light of the response of the Ramsar Secretariat to UNEP's review where it states that Scenario's 2 and 3 amount to "capacity reduction" of the Secretariat and its access to "vital HR, IT and other support services..." (see paras. A.1 and A.5 of the Ramsar Secretariat response).

This information is crucial for Parties in order to make an objective assessment of each of the three scenarios and therefore make an informed decision on the matter.

B) The added benefits to the convention

Para E.1.b) states that "Integration in UNEP would...strengthen the Convention's integration into global environmental governance structures and processes, and Ramsar will be increasingly recognized as a partner on equal footing to the other biodiversity-related conventions such as CITES and CMS."

The report should elaborate on what is the current situation with regard to recognition "as a partner on equal footing to the other biodiversity-related conventions".

Questions:

2. How does this disparity of recognition work in practice?

3. What would the difference under UNEP be in concrete terms? How would any difficulties in this regard be solved by a change in host?

C) Synergies

According to UNEP's report, synergies and linkages between various multilateral environmental agreements, including biodiversity related MEAs administered by UNEP, would facilitate greater coherence and collaboration among them with a view to achieving greater effectiveness in dealing with environmental issues (see paras. E.1.g.6 and E.1.g.12).

However, this seems to be in contradiction with what the Co-chairs of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance, with the advice of Executive Director of UNEP, have found concerning the absence of cooperation and coordination among UNEP administered MEAs.

In that process, it has been recognized that “lack of cooperation and coordination among MEAs, including those administered by UNEP, has significant, system-wide consequences for the efficiency and effectiveness of the IEG system.” (see document UNEP/CGIEG.2/2/2, p. 14).

Also, it has been admitted that UNEP does not have the political, administrative and resourcing support required to exercise its mandate and that it “...has lacked the collective governance platform, availed to other UN agencies and organizations who act as a global authoritative and responsive voice in other thematic areas, which includes a governing council with the authority and credibility based on universal membership.” (UNEP/CGIEG.2/2/2 p. 12).

4. Question: Could UNEP provide an explanation on the apparent contradiction among these assertions?

D) Timeframe for the provision of the Ramsar Secretariat by UNEP

Under para. C.1.b) it is stated that the timeframe is developed in the event that the Ramsar COP11 adopts a decision to change host organization in May 2012. However, it also refers to the possibility that Contracting Parties could consider convening a special meeting for this purpose, at another date either before or after COP11.

Given that the issue of international environmental governance and a possible global institutional change, including the role of UNEP and other international organizations in the matter, is going to be one of the main themes of the United Nations Conference On Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) that will take place in Rio de Janeiro in May 2012, it seems reasonable to wait until clear guidance is received from that process in order to decide the most efficient way forward.

Argentina would like to recall that the following options for international environmental governance are currently being discussed:

- (a) Enhancing UNEP;
- (b) Establishing a new umbrella organization for sustainable development;
- (c) Establishing a specialized agency such as a world environment organization;
- (d) Reforming the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development;
- (e) Enhancing institutional reforms and streamlining existing structures.

Questions:

- 5. How has this been taken into consideration by UNEP?
- 6. In any event, have the costs of a “special meeting” been assessed?

E) Cooperation with Private sector

Para. E.1.g.6) states that “some companies will see ... as a strong incentive to be able to be associated with the United Nations, and UNEP in particular.”

7. Question: Could UNEP provide concrete information to support this statement?

F) A.1.a.1. General budget assumptions. Para b)

This para. states that:

“As Ramsar’s budgets are in Swiss francs (CHF) and United Nations budgets are in United States Dollars (USD), UNEP has used one exchange rate for calculation purposes. As future exchange rates are difficult to estimate, and as there has been some fluctuation in the CHF-USD exchange rates in past weeks and months, UNEP has used as an exchange rate USD/CHF 1.000 that is close to the average USD/CHF exchange rate for the period 13 – 24 September 2010 as per rates published by the Swiss National Bank”.

Comment: the period 13 – 24 September 2010 seems excessively short to be representative of the “fluctuation in the CHF-USD exchange rates in past weeks and months”. Future exchange rates should not be based solely on this period.

8. Question: Could other more representative options be explored?

G) UNEP’s Budget

9. Question: Could UNEP clarify whether the hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat would require an increase of any type to UNEP’s budget?

H) Transition arrangements

On page 13 the following costs related to transition arrangements are detailed, in addition to possible staff indemnity payment:

new office furniture
IT equipment,
platforms,
applications and data transfer,
office equipment,
stationary,
public relations costs,
moving costs,
termination of lease or legal agreements, and of other contracts

On page 14, para. B.1.e), the “transitions costs without indemnity payments” include only:

Purchase of furniture and non-expendable equipment	USD 133,523
Moving costs	USD 25,000 (estimated)
Miscellaneous	USD 40,000 (estimated)

10. Question: Does the miscellaneous item in para. B.1.e) include all items detailed in page 13 other than Purchase of furniture and non-expendable equipment and moving costs? In that case, the amount of USD 40.000 seems to be rather low. Could this be clarified?

I) Transition arrangements: Staff

On page 13, para. B.1.a), it says that “the maximum costs for staff indemnity payment will be USD 634,481.036 – this will only be the case in the unlikely event that all current Ramsar staff eligible to such termination payment would require such payment.”

However, on page 18, para. D.1.c.1) it is recognized that “Under a UNEP/Ramsar scenario, the Ramsar staff members currently holding an IUCN contract would have to re-apply for their positions in line with UN staff rules and regulations...”. Also, under para. D.1.c.2) it is stated that “The Conference of the Parties may, however, request the UN Secretary General, through the UNEP Executive Director to seek an exceptional endorsement by the UN Secretary-General... The likelihood that such a request will be granted is very difficult to predict.”

11. Comment/request: These two assertions seem to contradict each other. Please clarify.