



RAMSAR COP7 HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 12 MAY 1999

Delegates at COP7 met in Plenary to hear special presentations and overviews of implementation in Oceania and Asia, review the official descriptions, conservation status and management plans for Ramsar sites, and consider proposals for COP7 resolutions and recommendations, the Work Plan and Bureau budget for 2000-2002, and the report of the Credentials Committee.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS AND REGIONAL OVERVIEWS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Deborah Moore, Commissioner of the World Commission on Dams (WCD), made a presentation on the WCD's objectives and activities. She highlighted the direct and indirect impacts of dams on wetlands. She explained that the WCD, which includes both dam opponents and proponents, is conducting a global review of dams' impacts, assessing options and best practices for delivering water and power services, and developing criteria, guidelines and policies for dam planning, operations, mitigation and de-commissioning. She noted common challenges for Ramsar and the WCD, and said the Commission could benefit from Ramsar's expertise on the impacts of dams on wetlands and Ramsar sites, the effectiveness of mitigation and restoration strategies, monitoring and enforcement, and experience with EIA, the ecosystem approach to planning, and economic valuation of wetland resources. She expressed hope that COP7 would endorse specific recommendations for collaboration between Ramsar and the WCD and the to find integrated solutions to managing dams, wetlands and river basins.

Bill Phillips, Deputy Secretary-General of the Ramsar Secretariat, provided an overview of implementation in the Oceania region. He highlighted achievements in implementing wise use guidelines, including development of wetland policy frameworks and use of EIA and economic valuation. Challenges in implementing wise use include the need to assist parties to implement the Convention, build capacity, and utilize wise use frameworks. On communication and cooperation, he reported progress in educational awareness campaigns and multi-lateral initiatives. He underscored the need to promote wetlands in educational curricula and systematic training. He noted the designation of four new Ramsar sites and active NGO involvement, but stressed the need to designate under-represented habitat sites and further promote twinning arrangements. In the ensuing discussion, delegates stressed the need to restore degraded wetlands and involve local stakeholders and governments.

Barbara Di Giovanni, on behalf of Hamdallah Zedan, Acting Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), spoke on the joint work programme between the CBD and Ramsar. She highlighted key features of the programme, including:

Ramsar's status as lead CBD partner for developing criteria and classifications of inland water ecosystems; close cooperation between the conventions' scientific bodies; and sharing of expert rosters and reports on inland waters and coastal and marine biodiversity.

Rebecca D'Cruz, Regional Coordinator for Asia, presented the regional overview of Convention implementation in Asia. She indicated that the Ramsar Bureau treats Israel as an Asian CP but that this issue remains unresolved. She said progress in implementation was mixed and identified significant challenges, including: increasing membership in Central and West Asia; enhancing NGO involvement; mainstreaming wetlands into water and coastal zone policies; designating additional sites, particularly under-represented wetland types; completing site management plans; enhancing training; and monitoring changes in ecological character. She recommended that Asia use the Latin American Wetlands for the Future initiative as a model.

In the ensuing discussion, NGOs and delegates highlighted implementation issues, announced new Ramsar sites, and drew attention to several factors, including: promoting the Convention in ASEAN environmental meetings; launching the East Asian Migratory Bird Strategy; halting landfills in tidal mudflats; and revenue-sharing between wetland conservation areas and local communities. PAKISTAN requested that Israel not be mentioned as an Asian group member until the issue of regional categorization is resolved. ISRAEL stated that it will continue to be an Asian group member until it is decided otherwise. SYRIA stated that the inclusion of Israel in the group ignores the outcome of the Pan-Asian regional meeting. He asked the Secretariat to verify figures received from CPs citing that Israel's submissions were not realistic.

Miguel Eduardo Araujo, Minister of Environment of El Salvador, made a presentation on wetlands and sustainable development in Central America. He said the region's wetlands are threatened by agricultural and urban expansion. He highlighted cultural and economic benefits of wetlands, including conservation of biodiversity and habitat protection, development of fisheries and tourism, and natural disaster mitigation. He noted the active role of NGOs and local partners in designing rational wetland policies, but said more remains to be done regarding legislation and management. He highlighted several issues requiring further attention, including: defining internationally important wetlands; improving public awareness and training; managing freshwater wetlands; making use of regional experts and the private sector; and taking advantage of the awareness-raising potential of environmental journalism.

Eva Velasquez presented the Declaration of Central American People on Wetlands. It states that wetlands are of vital importance for present and future generations, providing water and flora and fauna for food and natural medicines as well as a source of income. The Declaration calls on COP7 to: increase awareness and provide training and incentives for sustainable use; promote land-use planning and legal-



ization of land tenure; ensure the application of legal frameworks; promote economic options and identification of markets for new products; promote community self-help; and channel funds for community development directly to interested local populations.

REVIEW OF OFFICIAL DESCRIPTIONS, CONSERVATION STATUS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR RAMSAR SITES

On the Review of official descriptions, conservation status and management plans for Ramsar sites (COP7 DOC.13.3) and the related draft resolution (COP7 DOC.15.12), CHILE expressed concern with the proposal to increase from 50 to 75% the percentage of Ramsar sites in each CP required to have management plans in place or in preparation by COP8. Several delegates supported the Montreux Record as a useful tool for highlighting problem sites. In response to an intervention by WWF, BELGIUM agreed to place on the Montreux Record a Ramsar site it removed in 1994, noting that progress anticipated had not occurred.

RAMSAR CONVENTION WORK PLAN AND BUREAU BUDGET 2000-2002

The Secretariat introduced documents on the Convention Work Plan (COP7 DOC.14 and Annex 1, DOC.15.33), noting that they propose a work plan for the whole Convention, not only the Bureau, and set priorities and targets to be achieved by COP8. He reported that a focus group considering the work plan had expressed concerns about expectations that the work plan might create, given uncertainty regarding the resources available. It was noted that the Bureau would be requested to suggest regional rather than global targets to reflect regional priorities and that a new strategic plan will be prepared by COP8. The US encouraged the Bureau to seek collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative and announced that it has earmarked US\$100,000 for coral reef projects. Some delegates expressed concern that the work plan is too ambitious and may not match available finances, and suggested harmonizing it with the capacity of the Bureau. Secretary-General Blasco stated that if the work plan is adjusted to the budget, it will be difficult to raise additional resources for activities not mandated by the COP.

Secretary-General Blasco described SC proposals for the Work Plan and Budget 2000-2002 (COP7 DOC.14) and his proposal for draft resolutions on Financial and Budgetary Matters (COP7 DOC.15.34). He presented the SC recommendation for a 9% minimum Bureau core budget increase -- 5% for 2000 and 2% for the ensuing two years. He proposed a resolution for a minimum annual CP contribution of 1000 Swiss Francs. He urged delegates to rethink the Convention's unique tradition that host countries pay for COP costs in light of the challenges faced by Costa Rica and the Bureau to raise US\$1 million for COP7.

Herbert Raffaele, Chair of the SC Subgroup on Finance, recognized problems with the draft consensus budget, such as future COP funding, increased cost of living, and hopes for a new Bureau donor relations officer. With the UK and GERMANY, he expressed concern over gaps between ambitions for the work plan and guarantees for financial resources.

Delegates praised the Bureau for its effective work despite its limited budget. WWF, supported by several delegates, expressed disappointment that all three draft options for the Secretariat budget were not included in the SC report and urged CPs to support a greater budget increase. DENMARK, with CANADA, BRAZIL and GERMANY, objected to any increase beyond the SC-recommended 9%, given constraints in their national budgets, but agreed with NORWAY that an increase in the budget ought to be considered. BELGIUM expressed its willingness to increase its contribution by 22.4% as called for by NGOs.

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS FOR COP7 RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Secretary-General Blasco invited delegates to comment on those draft resolutions that will not be discussed during the Technical Sessions, noting that these would not be presented for adoption until Monday. On Partnership with international organizations (COP7 DOC.15.3), the WCD proposed adding cooperation and information

sharing between the WCD and Ramsar in areas of mutual interest and relevance. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL, on behalf of the Convention's existing international NGO partners, supported a formal structure for admitting partners to the Convention.

On Partnership and cooperation with other Conventions, including harmonized information management infrastructures (COP7 DOC.15.4), SWEDEN supported the resolution but noted that total harmonization of data is not possible given that different conventions require different data. The US suggested that the proposal that the STRP exchange information and coordinate activities with the expert bodies of relevant conventions be dependent on availability of funds. WWF suggested consideration of cooperation with relevant regional conventions. The WORLD HERITAGE CENTER noted that it would sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Ramsar later at COP7.

On Critical evaluation of the Small Grants Fund (SGF) and its future operations (COP7 DOC.15.5), the NETHERLANDS proposed that future SC reviews evaluate SGF functions and consider the possibility of project management by one of the Convention's international NGO partners. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL suggested that monitoring and evaluation be built into project proposals. AUSTRALIA introduced its proposed draft decision on invasive species and wetlands (COP7 DOC.15.14), emphasizing the need to strengthen action on invasive species. SWEDEN, on behalf of the Nordic countries, supported the resolution and noted a joint project on introduced species. A number of delegates proposed minor amendments, and the Chair suggested they consult informally with Australia to incorporate these in the final draft, to be adopted next week.

On a Global action plan for wise use and management of peatlands (COP7 DOC.15.18), GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT NETWORK called for plans to deal with emergency situations such as recent peatland fires in Southeast Asia. On Enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands (COP7 DOC.15.22), ECUADOR called for inclusion of shrimping in reference to unsustainable aquaculture. Regarding Small Island Developing States and Ramsar (COP7 DOC.15.24), delegates supported ARGENTINA's request to delete a proposal that specific countries with small island territories review Ramsar implementation, as some are the subject of sovereignty disputes.

REPORT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

Oscar Lara, Chair of the Credentials Committee, presented the Committee's report, noting that the COP had elected to the Committee: Oscar Lara (Guatemala), Daniel Tehan (Australia), Ed Wiken (Canada), Petr Roth (Czech Republic), Bandiin Ganbaatar (Mongolia), Beat Nobs (Switzerland) and Abdou-Kerim Mounouni (Togo). He noted that 104 CPs had submitted credentials to COP7. Delegates added Belgium and El Salvador, which submitted the necessary credentials after the deadline.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates spent much of Wednesday consulting informally on how to resolve the issue of regional categorization of Israel yet avoid breaking Ramsar's long-held tradition of agreement by consensus. Some delegates felt that adopting the SC Chair's proposal to use biogeographical regions (which would keep Israel in the Asian region) would obstruct cooperation in the Asian region and the Convention as a whole and discourage accession by potential CPs holding views similar to those favoring UN categorization (which would place Israel in the Western European and Others Group). However, some expressed optimism for consensus based on the EU proposal, which allows CPs located near regional boundaries, at their own request, to participate within an alternative region if the STRP does not object. Nevertheless, the potential for a deadlock that will force a vote looms large for this morning's debate.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 9:00 am to take a decision on the draft resolution on regional categorization.

TECHNICAL SESSION: Delegates will convene from 3:00-7:00 pm for a Technical Session on Ramsar and Water.