



RAMSAR COP7 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 17 MAY 1999

Delegates at COP7 convened in Plenary to consider the reports of the technical sessions, appoint the members of the STRP, and consider and adopt COP7 resolutions. The Minister of the Environment of France made a special presentation.

REPORTS OF THE TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Bill Phillips, Deputy Secretary-General of the Ramsar Secretariat, provided an overview of the five technical sessions. He reported that drafting groups had revised the resolutions relevant to each technical session to reflect amendments proposed by the regionally-based discussion groups. He said the technical sessions were an innovative approach that had considered 13 of COP7's 32 draft resolutions. INDIA stated that not all countries' suggestions were reflected in the amended draft resolutions. Secretary-General Blasco replied that the drafting groups had attempted to incorporate all ideas emerging from the discussion groups, but when contradictory opinions emerged, compromise text was necessary. He noted that there would be a further opportunity to propose amendments in the final Plenary consideration of the resolutions.

Dominique Voynet, French Minister of the Environment, made a special presentation to the Plenary. She discussed Ramsar's significant role in the sustainable development and conservation of wetlands, and outlined France's Convention-related activities at the national and international levels. She underscored wetlands' essential role in renewing water resources and the potential for private enterprise to contribute to the achievement of Ramsar's objectives.

CONSIDERATION OF COP7 RESOLUTIONS

Secretary-General Blasco gave an overview of the list of COP7 draft resolutions and proposed amendments. On the Composition and *modus operandi* of the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) (COP7 DOC.15.2, Rev.1), he explained that the Standing Committee's (SC) proposed list of STRP members reflected CP submissions of candidates and corresponded to the new proportional regional composition of the SC. He emphasized that the STRP is a technical body and its members participate as scientific experts in their individual capacity, not as representatives of their country of origin.

On behalf of the Neotropical Region, URUGUAY tabled two additional amendments, recommending that the STRP's composition reflect the different bio-geographic characteristics represented in CPs and that STRP members, to the extent possible, come from countries not represented in the SC. The PHILIPPINES inquired whether there

would be political implications if STRP members were elected on the basis of their country not being represented in the SC. BOLIVIA and BRAZIL replied that the intention was to facilitate balanced regional representation in both the SC and STRP, with the latter's composition based above all on scientific expertise, while acknowledging nationalities to the extent possible. Delegates agreed that the STRP's composition should reflect the different bio-geographic characteristics "within each Ramsar region," rather than "in the CPs." They supported NORWAY and CANADA's proposal that the STRP also establish close cooperative arrangements with the International Mire Conservation Group and the International Peat Society. Since no preparations had been made for COP7 to elect the STRP Chair, the Plenary agreed that the STRP should elect its own Chair. Delegates adopted the resolution as amended, thereby electing the following members of the STRP: Aboubacar Awaiss (Niger), Geoff Cowan (South Africa), Harry Chabwela (Zambia), M. Shatanawi (Jordan), A. Alcalá (Philippines), Jan Pokorný (Czech Republic), K. Saat (Estonia), George Zalidis (Greece), Peter Maitland (UK), Yara Schaeffer (Brazil), Jorge Jiménez (Costa Rica), Arthur Hawkins (US), and two substitutes, Randy Milton (Canada) and Bronwen Golder (New Zealand).

On the Convention Work Plan 2000-2002 (COP7 DOC.15.33), the US suggested that the objective to maximize the achievement of the Convention's goals be amended to include text directing the SC to review the COP's structure and organization and adopt changes to facilitate its implementation and effectiveness. He added mangroves to the wetland types that may be considered as Ramsar sites. The document was adopted as amended.

Secretary-General Blasco introduced the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (COP7 DOC.15.34). He outlined the SC proposal (COP7 DOC.14), which calls for an increase in the Ramsar budget of 5%, 2% and 2% (5-2-2 proposal) over the next three years, and noted that a contact group had met last Thursday and had drafted a proposal to increase the Ramsar budget by 5% each year (5-5-5 proposal). He said the resolution proposes a minimum contribution of 1000 Swiss Francs and stated that any additional funds would go to recruiting a development assistance officer, who would be dedicated to active fundraising. There was consensus on the proposal for a minimum contribution of 1000 Swiss Francs.

IRELAND, Chair of the contact group, said the 5-5-5 proposal was necessary for Ramsar to achieve its objectives, implement its Work Plan, engage a development assistance officer, and send positive signals to CPs regarding implementation of the Convention in the next millennium. Several delegates, including the UK, SPAIN, KENYA, BELGIUM, GREECE, SWITZERLAND, EGYPT, SLOVENIA, DENMARK, AUSTRALIA, CANADA and the PHILIPPINES,



supported the 5-5-5 proposal. SWEDEN said that implementation of the Work Plan would be difficult with a limited budget, and added that a cut in the increase in 2001 and 2002 would send the wrong message to CPs. He urged donors to continue making contributions to the Small Grants Fund.

URUGUAY, GERMANY, SYRIA and the US preferred the 5-2-2 proposal. GERMANY said it is not in favor of increasing the budgets of international organizations. He noted that while a development officer would be advantageous, there are other ways to raise the necessary funds, such as through payment of dues owed by CPs. The NETHERLANDS supported the 5-2-2 proposal and offered to assist the Bureau in seeking an alternative solution to implementing the tasks intended for a development assistance officer. The US stressed that the Work Plan applied to the Convention as a whole, not only to the Bureau, and supported BRAZIL'S suggestion to incrementally allocate the 5-2-2 proposal over the three years, to 2%, 3% and 4%, respectively. He added that any CP is welcome to supplement the budget with voluntary contributions. AUSTRIA stated that an overall increase of 15% rather than 9% could have negative implications for the Small Grants Fund, noting that CPs would have problems contributing to both. Chair Koester said that delegates seemed to support an increase, at least of 5-2-2, but that there was no consensus.

The contact group reconvened to consider the two proposed options. IRELAND later reported on a compromise reached that applies the increases of 5%, 2% and 2% over the three years to CPs' contributions rather than the total size of the budget itself. This, he explained, would result in a slightly larger budget that would allow the Bureau to dedicate the additional funds together with unpaid dues to employ a development assistance officer. GERMANY said additional funds will be available through voluntary contributions and the payment of unpaid dues. Secretary-General Blasco said the resolution would be amended to incorporate the contact group's wording and the SC budget would be annexed, but stated that he could not guarantee that the Bureau could raise sufficient funds to create the development assistance officer's post. He said the revised resolution would be presented for consideration on the final day of COP7.

On Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies (COP7 DOC.15.6, Rev.1), delegates took note of and adopted several amendments, including an additional paragraph recognizing that development of policies and related initiatives may require efforts to build capacity where resources are limited.

Secretary-General Blasco introduced a draft resolution on the Status of Yugoslavia in the Ramsar Convention (COP7 DOC.15.36). CROATIA, one of the eight CPs sponsoring the resolution, explained that the text calls upon Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to submit to the Convention Depository a notification of succession to the Ramsar Convention as other successor States to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have done. He noted that the resolution was the result of intense consultations aimed at accommodating the views of interested parties. COP7 President Benito said the draft resolution would be considered by the Plenary on the final day of COP7.

On Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands (COP7 DOC.15.8, Rev.1), delegates adopted the text with numerous amendments that had been submitted by the regionally-based discussion groups, including a statement that the term "indigenous people" may vary from country to country and should not be interpreted to imply precedence of access to and use of wetlands and their resources. On the Outreach Programme 1999-2002 (COP7 DOC.15.9, Rev.1), the US amended a paragraph directing the Bureau to establish as part of the Convention's Web site a clearinghouse for information relating to wetland communication, education and public awareness "as funds and human resources allow." The resolution was adopted as amended.

The Secretariat announced that the Guidelines for identifying and designating karst and other hydrological systems as Wetlands of International Importance (COP7 DOC.15.13) would be incorporated into the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the Ramsar List (COP7 DOC.15.11, Rev.1), and both were adopted. On Sites in the Ramsar List: official descriptions, conservation status and management plans (COP7 DOC.15.12, Rev.1), GREECE noted the inclusion of an annex on Greek Ramsar sites, highlighting its efforts to remove specific sites from Montreux Record. ITALY also announced its removal of three sites from the Montreux Record, and several countries announced the designation of new Ramsar sites, including: ALBANIA, ALGERIA, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, CANADA, COSTA RICA, GUATEMALA, GUINEA BISSAU, MALAWI, ECUADOR, HONDURAS, INDIA, NIGER, POLAND, SLOVENIA and ZAMBIA.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL stressed the need to remain focused on what is transpiring on the Ramsar sites themselves and invited CPs to discuss how COP8 can adequately consider this issue. CHILE reiterated its view that a target of 75% of Ramsar sites in each CP having management plans by COP8 is too ambitious, and expressed preference for the previous target of 50%. Bill Phillips, Deputy Secretary-General of the Ramsar Secretariat, noted that since 44% of sites already have management plans underway or in place, setting 50% as a target did not seem sufficiently ambitious. He reminded delegates that they had earlier adopted the Work Plan, which contains the target of 75%. CHILE asked the COP to take note of its reservation. Delegates adopted the resolution as amended.

AUSTRALIA reported on revisions to the draft resolution on invasive species and wetlands (COP7 DOC.15.14, Rev.1). IUCN introduced an amendment that the STRP provide "guidance on legislation" rather than "model legislation" on risk assessment, as each CP has its own particular national legal context. He also inserted text that urges CPs to "review existing legal and institutional measures" pursuant to the resolution on CP legislative and policy reviews on wetlands, prior to adopting legislation and programmes to prevent the introduction of alien species. The Plenary adopted the resolution as amended.

Delegates adopted resolutions on Partnerships and cooperation with other Conventions, including harmonized information management infrastructures (COP7 DOC.15.4, Rev.1), Critical Evaluation of the Small Grants Fund and its future operations (COP7 DOC.15.5), and Guidelines for reviewing laws and institutions to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands (COP7 DOC.15.7, Rev.1) with minor amendments, and resolutions on Partnerships with international organizations (COP7 DOC.15.3) and the Wetland Risk Assessment Framework (COP7 DOC.15.10) with no amendment.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Some delegates reacted that Monday's rapid adoption of resolutions and the flood of new Ramsar sites was "fantastic." However, with the revised "consensus budget" effectively making it impossible for the Bureau to engage a full-time development officer to fundraise for Convention implementation in all CPs, additional burdens will be placed on the Secretariat, whose staff is already over-extended. Notwithstanding, a few delegates have been questioning the Bureau's budgetary transparency and prefer voluntary contributions for specific activities, while others felt this was a pretext to avoid having to dig deeper into their pockets.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates will meet in Plenary at 9:30 am in the Salones La Paz to adopt the remaining COP7 resolutions, elect the CPs to serve on the SC, take a decision on the date and venue of COP8, and adopt the report of COP7.