



RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS TUESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates met in a morning Plenary session to consider the Secretary General's report on implementation. In the afternoon, Parties took up finance and budget issues as well as proposals for COP resolutions and recommendations. In addition, Committees on Future COPs, the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, and Credentials, and contact groups on invasive species, mangroves, climate change, management planning and the San José Record, the STRP's *modus operandi*, the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List, and culture and wetlands, began their work.

PLENARY

CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE: Delegates approved COP8 President Martorell's proposal that, due to the absence of representatives from the Gambia, Algeria would replace the Gambia on the Credentials Committee.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL: Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco reported on the implementation of the Convention at the global level (COP8 DOC.5), highlighting key challenges for implementation. Reporting on the WSSD (COP8 DOC.7), Blasco said the challenge is to identify how the Convention can contribute to sustainable development and the WSSD's outcomes. He highlighted new designations, changes in areas and ecological character, and restrictions on sites in the List of Wetlands of International Importance pursuant to Article 8.2 (COP8 DOC.6).

Some participants, including GUYANA and BARBADOS, announced their intention to accede to the Convention. GUINEA, BENIN, GHANA, MALAWI, LATVIA, COSTA RICA, PARAGUAY and others described their national and regional activities.

WWF urged Parties to designate new Ramsar sites, and recommended that the COP consider a resolution on conservation of fish biodiversity. HUNGARY underscored the relevance of the WSSD's outcomes. INDONESIA called for implementation guidelines and assistance to improve national reporting. KENYA stressed the need for adequate scientific information and alternative livelihood sources for wetland-dependent communities. EL SALVADOR, ETHIOPIA and MALI emphasized synergies with relevant Conventions. RWANDA recommended that Parties establish long-term implementation plans.

COTE D'IVOIRE, MAURITIUS and PAPUA NEW GUINEA urged greater financial assistance. IRAN, NIGER, and CUBA called for GEF support to the Convention. MALI urged support for capacity building.

JAPAN highlighted its 100,000 Swiss Francs contribution to the Small Grants Fund, supported strengthening the STRP and prioritizing work of the COP and the Standing Committee, and opposed overloading the STRP.

IRAQ and SYRIA emphasized negative impacts of irrigation projects in the upstream Euphrates basin. AZERBAIJAN requested that, having acceded to Ramsar, it participate in the European Region.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN: Parties considered drafts of the Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 (COP8 DR 25 and Rev.1) and Work Plan for 2003-2005 (COP8 DR 26). Nick Davidson, Ramsar Deputy Secretary General, drew attention to the latest revision of the Strategic Plan, which addresses WSSD outcomes.

FINANCIAL REPORT AND PROPOSED BUDGET:

Karen Jenderedjian (Armenia), Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, introduced the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (COP8 DR 27). ARGENTINA requested adjustments in its assessed contributions for the next triennium. JAPAN supported the proposed scale of contributions and the budget line for regional initiatives, while RUSSIA and BRAZIL objected to the scale, with BRAZIL requesting its objection be recorded in the meeting's report. CUBA supported the proposed scale of assessment but objected to the procedure adopted by the UN to define it. GERMANY and RUSSIA opposed a 5% budget increase for the next triennium and called for a nominal zero growth, while GERMANY urged discontinuing low priority tasks. AUSTRALIA requested resources or staffing for implementing the Convention in the Oceania region. UGANDA supported the new budget line for COP-related costs. Stressing Ramsar's relatively low budget and lack of regional coordinators, WWF, supported by ALGERIA, urged Parties to support the 5% increase. SPAIN, on behalf of the EU, called for prioritization of activities.

PROPOSALS FOR COP RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Regarding a draft resolution for establishing a Ramsar Endowment Fund (COP8 DR 29), DENMARK urged developed countries' assistance for implementation in developing countries. SWEDEN, supported by the NETHERLANDS, preferred other means than the proposed fund to support Convention implementation. Blasco stressed that the COP would have to either close down the "dying" Small Grants Fund, or secure resources for its continued operation, and that the Endowment Fund was a means to do the latter. WWF stressed the need for broader criteria and simplified procedures for small grant allocation.

On the establishment of a regional Ramsar center in Western and Central Asia (COP8 DR 41), BELGIUM proposed bilateral support for the Center. Regarding a resolution on regional initiatives (COP8 DR 30), JAPAN supported strengthening the COP's authority in using the core budget. SPAIN stressed the need for self-sustainability of initiatives in the long-term.

On the draft resolution on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (COP8 DR 42), PAPUA NEW GUINEA, on behalf of SIDS, commended the Memorandum of Cooperation between the

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Ramsar Convention and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. JAPAN and FRANCE expressed concern over favoring one region.

Regarding the resolution on a subregional strategy of the Ramsar Convention for South America (COP8 DR 43), CANADA and JAPAN asked about the resolution's financial implications. Blasco replied that the resolution's scope was within the context of regional services provided by the Convention.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: Angela Cropper, Co-President of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, presented a status report on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) (COP8 DOC.8). She highlighted the dynamic relationship of the MA with Ramsar and expressed hope for its continuation, primarily through the STRP. EGYPT underscored the need to combine traditional knowledge with scientific and technical work.

Overview of Spain's wetland conservation activities: Ines Gonzalez Doncel, Spain's Director General for Nature Conservation, presented a comprehensive overview of wetland conservation and sustainable use in Spain, goals for the future, and plans to designate 11 new wetlands sites, thus improving the geographic spread of wetlands listed.

WWF expressed serious reservations about the new Spanish National Hydrological Plan (SNHP) in its current form, arguing that it is inconsistent with the Ramsar Convention and EU Directives, and might lead to the "misuse" of up to eight billion Euros of EU funds. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL expressed concern at the lack of proper NGO involvement in dealing with wetland issues in Spain and the process for assessing the SNHP's impact on Ramsar sites. GREENPEACE SPAIN said the SNHP plan does not provide for an environmental impact assessment. PLATAFORMA EN DEFENSA DEL EBRO expressed its fears for the state of the Ebro river basin. SPAIN acknowledged that some policies were controversial, expressed its commitment to preserving water resources, and noted that conflicts between interested stakeholders are inevitable in all activities.

UNEP: Paul Chabeda, on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer, stressed the need for enhanced synergies between multilateral environmental agreements, and for partnerships with all stakeholders. He outlined UNEP's Ramsar-related work, and noted the importance of capacity building and equitable benefit sharing.

COMMITTEES

FUTURE COPS: Delegates agreed that the efficiency of future COPs must be improved. They recommended that the Conference Committee consider: a procedural distinction between technical issues that can be finalized by the Standing Committee and the STRP, and those that require substantial discussion by the COP; mechanisms for preliminary review of draft resolutions; and longer lead-time for submission of draft resolutions. If the Conference Committee determines that a revision of the Rules of Procedure is required, such revision should be undertaken during the current COP.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN: Delegates agreed to begin by considering the Strategic Plan (COP8 DR 25 Rev.1), and proceeded to discuss it section-by-section, reaching the section on implementation. Discussions are set to continue on Wednesday morning.

CONTACT GROUPS

INVASIVE SPECIES: Delegates considered the draft resolution on invasive species and wetlands (COP8 DR 19). AUSTRALIA, supported by the US and BRAZIL and opposed by the EU, requested deleting a reference to CBD Decision VI/23 on guidelines for dealing with invasive species, arguing that it had not been properly adopted. The Group was unable to resolve this issue, and forwarded the resolution to the Plenary.

CLIMATE CHANGE: The Climate Change Contact Group considered the draft resolution on climate change and wetlands (COP8 DR 3), with Parties and representatives of the Global Biodiversity Forum proposing a number of amendments. The Group

agreed to include reference to the vulnerability of SIDS, the managing of wetlands to increase their resilience to climate change, and the WSSD *Plan of Implementation*, including language urging Parties to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Delegates were unable to agree on several paragraphs, with JAPAN disputing the need for STRP to conduct follow-up work on wetlands and climate change, arguing that the STRP's workload is already heavy. Text on this remains bracketed. Revised text will be distributed on Wednesday.

MANAGEMENT PLANNING/SAN JOSE RECORD: The Contact Group on Management Planning and the San José Record discussed the draft resolution on Management Planning (COP8 DR 14). Delegates agreed to recognize different management planning approaches and the need for a practical experience-sharing mechanism.

On the San José Record (COP8 DR 15), Parties debated the options of a closed list or a "good experience" database, and the potential costs of maintaining the record. Parties agreed to convene again after regional consultations.

MANGROVES: The Contact Group on the draft resolution on wise use of mangrove ecosystems (COP8 DR 32) agreed to retain a reference to good practices on conservation and wise use of mangroves, with a change in wording to include "mangrove ecosystem" instead of "mangroves" and "sustainable" instead of "wise" use. Some delegates stressed the need to balance economic and social development with environmental protection.

STRP MODUS OPERANDI: Delegates discussed the need for the STRP Supporting Service and possible means of its financing, terms of reference and other amendments to the STRP's *modus operandi*. They also addressed the designation of STRP experts. STRP representatives stressed that a contractual arrangement for the Service is more cost efficient than expanding the STRP staff.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR RAMSAR LIST: Delegates agreed to endorse the draft resolution (COP8 DR10) subject to two changes: limiting the targeting of future designation to the number of sites and not designating areas; consultations will take place on the format and dates for progress reports regarding the strategic framework, with the results of these talks being forwarded directly to the Plenary.

CULTURE AND WETLANDS: Delegates provided general responses to the draft resolution (COP8 DR 19). AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, the US, UK and others opposed the proposed resolution, some expressing concern that language in the resolution went beyond Ramsar's mandate. WWF endorsed integrating cultural values in the Ramsar Convention, but supported reducing the size of the guidelines. Representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations from Mexico and Panama supported the proposed resolution.

IN THE CORRIDORS

COP8 stepped up a gear on Tuesday as various contact groups and committees began their work alongside the Plenary. Some of the discord from the closing Plenary of CBD COP6 on the invasive species issue spilled over into the Ramsar Contact Group considering the matter. However, several observers hinted that a deal was being brokered that might assist Parties to reach a compromise.

Some participants were also talking about the "grilling" given by NGOs to the host country for perceived flaws in its new hydrological plan, and whether a proposed NGO resolution on this would find a willing country sponsor. Meanwhile, others were speculating that budget issues were likely to move higher up the agenda over the coming days, as the nature and cost of Ramsar's work during the next few years comes more clearly into focus.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

REGIONAL MEETINGS: Regional meetings to review implementation, resolutions, and the upcoming Technical Sessions will take place from 9:30 am - 12:30 pm today.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS: COP8's Technical Sessions begin at 3:00 pm in the Plenary with the session on challenges and opportunities for wetlands, water and sustainability.

COMMITTEES AND CONTACT GROUPS: Committees and Contact Groups will continue their work.