



RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates held regional meetings in the morning to consider Convention implementation and resolutions before the COP. In the afternoon the Technical Sessions began, with presentations and discussions on challenges and opportunities for wetlands, water and sustainability. Committees on Finance, Credentials, and the Strategic Plan and Work Plan convened, and contact groups met to discuss agriculture, culture and wetlands, high Andean wetlands, mangroves, and water and the World Commission on Dams.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

AFRICA: Delegates considered reports on Convention implementation and the Strategic Plan for 1997-2002 and on key issues emerging from tentative national targets for 2003-2005 (COP8 Doc.25). They stressed the need for, *inter alia*: awareness raising about the ecological, socio-economic and cultural value of wetlands; capacity building at all levels; financial resources; strengthening of institutional frameworks; cooperation within and between countries involving all stakeholders; synergies between biodiversity-related conventions; integration of wetland strategies into urban and coastal planning and development policies; joint management of transboundary resources; addressing invasive species; knowledge and experience sharing; and inventories and monitoring.

THE AMERICAS: Participants considered changing the timetable and format for submitting national reports. They agreed that a document on target identification should be used in a continuous dynamic process. Noting lack of information in the current budget proposal and concerns over a proposed budget increase, they deferred financial deliberations until after the next Finance Committee meeting. Regarding the draft resolution on content and duration of future COPs, some delegates supported the initiative, while others voiced concern that it does not give Parties an adequate opportunity to voice their positions on technical resolutions.

ASIA: The group considered a report on Convention implementation and the Strategic Plan for 1997-2002 in Asia (COP8 DOC.26), as well as priorities for the next triennium, the Conference Committee's recommendations on future COPs, and the designation of experts for the STRP. On priorities for future actions, delegates stressed, *inter alia*, the importance of: promoting and providing financial and technical support to regional cooperation; facilitating training and education; dealing with water management issues and natural disasters; and evaluating and promoting socio-economic values of wetlands. JORDAN and IRAQ agreed to cooperate on transboundary wetlands. Several delegates and NGOs drew attention to underrepresented wetlands. The Group also considered enlarging the Region's representation in the STRP and the Standing Committee as a result of four new accessions.

EUROPE: Delegates considered implementation and achievements in Europe since 1997 and priorities for 2003-2005 (COP8 DOC.27) based on an analysis of national reports. Denmark, speaking for the EU, supported an increased emphasis on links and synergies between the Convention and relevant EU Directives. WWF highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder involvement in Parties' policy development.

On draft COP8 resolutions, the EU briefed participants on the dispute over the draft on invasive species (COP8 DR18), noting that it stemmed from the CBD COP6 decision on guiding principles on this issue. While the EU wanted to reference this decision in the COP8 resolution, he said Australia and others did not, as they believed the decision had not been properly adopted. Parties unanimously endorsed the EU position. Delegates were also briefed on Standing Committee and STRP membership (COP8 DR 28 and 28bis).

OCEANIA: Delegates discussed a variety of issues, including key challenges raised during a regional preparatory meeting held in Samoa in May 2002, implementation of the SPREP-Ramsar Joint Work Plan, and Bureau support for the region. On Bureau support, participants advocated establishing a coordinator for the Oceania region, which is the only region without one. Citing current funding difficulties, Deputy Executive Secretary Nick Davidson suggested providing an assistant coordinator on an interim basis by expanding the Ramsar internship programme. Delegates supported amending the draft resolution on SIDS in the Oceania region (COP8 DR 42) to reflect the need for a regional coordinator. WWF proposed appointing a SIDS coordinator in Oceania, and said it would contribute \$20,000 over the next two years to help finance this post, conditional on Parties also providing additional funding.

TECHNICAL SESSION ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Technical Session on major challenges and emerging opportunities for wetlands, water and sustainability began with panel presentations by invited experts, followed by discussions on related draft COP8 resolutions in four regionally-based groups. The Session was chaired by Ruhakana Rugunda, Uganda's Minister of Water, Lands and Environment.

PRESENTATIONS: Water allocation and management: Heather MacKay, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa, presented the draft resolution on guidelines for allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological functions of wetlands (COP8 DR1) and an information paper on processes, strategies and tools for allocation and management of water for maintaining wetland ecosystem functions (COP8 DOC.9).

World Commission on Dams: Jamie Skinner, IUCN, presented the information paper and draft resolution on the report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention (COP8 DOC.10 and COP8 DR 2), stressing that the WCD report offers non-binding responses to often conflicting environmental, social and economic objectives.

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Climate change: Habiba Gitay, Australian National University, gave a presentation on climate change and wetlands (COP8 DR 3), highlighting climate change impacts on wetlands and biodiversity, including increased risk of extinction for wetland-dependent species, coral bleaching, and possible transformation of peatlands.

Integrated coastal zone management (ICZM): STRP Chair Jorge Arturo Jimenes Ramón (Costa Rica) introduced the draft resolution on wetland issues in ICZM (COP8 DR 4), highlighting pressures on coastal areas, including unsustainable aquaculture, population growth, uncontrolled development, and climate change.

Partnerships and synergies: Ramsar Secretary General Blasco introduced the draft resolution on partnerships and synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other institutions (COP8 DR 5). He outlined key issues covered by the resolution, including a paragraph urging Parties to Ramsar and the CBD to develop projects suitable for GEF consideration relating to inland water ecosystems.

Special presentations: Nelson Andrade, Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean (Cartagena Convention), welcomed ongoing cooperation with the Ramsar Convention, and proposed a joint workshop.

Arthur Nogueira, on behalf of CBD Executive Secretary Hamdallah Zedan, stressed the importance of COP8, which follows the WSSD and precedes the 2003 International Year of Freshwater. He highlighted successful cooperation between Ramsar and the CBD.

Peter Bridgewater, UNESCO, announced the launch of a new publication, *Coral Reef Protected Areas in International Instruments*, produced by the World Heritage Convention, World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and Ramsar.

REGIONAL GROUPS: Africa: On the draft resolution on partnerships and synergies, delegates appointed a small group to discuss adding a specific paragraph on cooperation between Ramsar and the Convention to Combat Desertification. They also agreed to delete bracketed text on endorsement by the Convention on Migratory Species COP7 of the joint Ramsar-CMS work plan.

On the draft resolution on ICZM, delegates added a preambular paragraph welcoming the WSSD *Plan of Implementation's* emphasis on Ramsar Convention implementation as a tool to protect marine and coastal areas.

The Americas: On water allocation, delegates agreed to: delete preambular reference to the World Water Commission and Global Water Partnership; reinforce socio-economic values in the guidelines; and replace "precautionary principle" with "precautionary approach". Regarding the WCD resolution, changes were introduced to provide consistency on the value of dams and reduce the emphasis on WCD guidance. Regarding the draft resolution on climate change, participants added underrepresented wetlands to the list of wetlands of international importance. Delegates also endorsed draft resolutions on ICZM and on synergies with MEAs.

Asia and Oceania: Delegates endorsed without amendment draft resolutions on water management and synergies with MEAs. Regarding the resolution on the WCD, delegates agreed to language encouraging Parties "to take the necessary steps within their frameworks to provide access to migratory species wherever possible and appropriate" and proposed other amendments, including text stressing the need to adapt WCD guidance to local conditions. THAILAND stressed the need to deal with trans-boundary watercourses. Parties agreed to discuss the resolution on climate change in Plenary, when the relevant Contact Group submits its report.

Europe: Regarding the resolution on water, the UK, NORWAY, SWEDEN and WWF, opposed by TURKEY and SPAIN, supported reference to the Report of the WCD. Reference to "possible independent arbitration" in relation to conflict resolution mechanisms was deleted from the annex. TURKEY opposed the draft resolution on the WCD Report. On wetlands in ICZM, text was proposed urging Parties to take steps to halt commercial exploitation of wetland resources.

COMMITTEES

FINANCE: Delegates sought clarification on, *inter alia*: staff expenses, including IUCN services and performance of the fund-raising officer; travel on official business; STRP support service; and unpaid contributions. One delegate objected to the proposed 5% budget increase and, opposed by many delegates, suggested excluding from the core budget items on STRP support service, regional initiatives, and COP-related costs incurred by the Bureau. Most delegates supported a streamlined lower budget increase. A revised draft budget will be prepared.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN: Delegates continued discussing the Strategic Plan, adding a number of actions to the text. The Group discussed references to trade, with informal consultations continuing late into Wednesday night to resolve the issue. The Committee will reconvene on Thursday to conclude its work on the Strategic Plan and begin discussing the Work Plan.

CONTACT GROUPS

AGRICULTURE: Delegates discussed the preamble and the operational paragraphs of the draft resolution and suggested amendments. Contentious issues included references to landscapes, the CBD and the Joint Work Plan, perverse incentives and subsidies, and unsustainable aquaculture.

CULTURE AND WETLANDS: AUSTRALIA opposed the resolution and the guiding principles in their current form (COP8 DR19), advocated consultations with indigenous peoples, and suggested that the STRP clarify "culture," "cultural aspects," and "cultural values." Some delegates strongly supported the resolution, with TUNISIA noting that other conventions take into account cultural values. Indigenous Peoples' Groups urged a resolution on this matter and stakeholder consultation. The Group will reconvene on Thursday evening to consider a revised text.

HIGH ANDEAN WETLANDS: Following extensive discussions of the draft resolution on high Andean wetlands (COP8 DR 39), delegates agreed to insert reference to sustainable tourism, the threat to wetlands from invasive species, and cultural values of wetlands and indigenous management practices.

MANGROVES: The Group could not agree on ways to deal with activities impacting mangroves, including aquaculture, urban development and industry, with NGOs calling for restrictions on these activities. Delegates also discussed criteria for designating mangroves as Ramsar sites.

WATER AND WCD: Delegates considered the draft resolution on guidelines for the allocation and management of water. They agreed, *inter alia*, to refer to the resolution on agriculture. In an introductory paragraph of the guidelines, delegates discussed the inclusion of language on wetlands as an "integral component of the global water cycle." In the section on implementation, they agreed to language supporting groundwater extraction to supplement stream flows to wetlands when it does not significantly impact on other dependent values.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Budget issues came to the fore on Wednesday, with even a modest 5% increase being questioned by some donor countries. However, some observers suggested that the increase is merited, especially given Ramsar's small budget when compared with other MEAs. One observer suggested that "5% of almost nothing isn't really very much."

Meanwhile, a number of participants were discussing the organization of Wednesday's meetings, with some welcoming the regional group setting and full agenda, while others suggested various alternatives to use delegates' time more effectively.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 8:00 am to address the status of draft resolutions.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS: The Technical Session on base-lines begins in Plenary at 9:30 am. The Technical Session on global biodiversity and human life will start in Plenary at 3:00 pm.

COMMITTEES AND CONTACT GROUPS: Committees on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, Credentials and Finance will convene in the afternoon. Contact Groups on Agriculture and on Culture are scheduled. Check the noticeboard for details.