

RAMSAR COP 11 HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY, 7 JULY 2012

On Saturday, 7 July, Ramsar COP 11 continued, meeting in plenary throughout the day. The plenary adopted the agenda and considered rules of procedure, elected the President and Vice-Presidents, appointed the Credentials Committee and established the Finance and Budget Committee, addressed admission of observers, and considered the reports of the Standing Committee (SC), the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), implementation of the Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) Programme, a statement from the World Wetlands NGO Conference, and the report of the Ramsar Secretary General. The day concluded with a special presentation on wetland conservation and sustainable use in Romania. The Credentials Committee also met in the afternoon. A number of side events took place during lunch and in the evening.

PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Ramsar SC Chair Yeon-Chul Yoo, Republic of Korea, opened the plenary on Saturday morning. Delegates adopted the agenda (COP11 Doc.1 Rev.1) and rules of procedure (COP11 Doc.2 Rev.1). Adoption of rule 5 (on notification of the COP agenda) and rule 26 (on the Conference Committee, other committees and working groups) was postponed after a discussion on, among others, the possibility for closed Conference Committee meetings.

The COP elected Rovana Plumb, Minister of Environment and Forests, Romania, as COP 11 President, and Mihail Făcă, State Secretary, National Environmental Protection Agency, Romania, as an alternate. With Făcă presiding, the plenary elected Mohammed Saif Al Afkham, United Arab Emirates, from the Asia region, and Nancy Céspedes, Chile, from the Neo-tropical region, as Vice-Presidents.

The COP appointed representatives to the Credentials Committee from each region: Sidi Mohamed Abdou Ould Lehlou, Mauritania, from Africa; Eiji Hatano, Japan, from Asia; Helle Liemann, Denmark, from Europe; Erick Fernando Cabrera Castellanos, Guatemala, from the Neo-tropics; a delegate to be determined, US, from North America; and Georgina Usher, Australia, from Oceania.

The COP also established a Finance and Budget Committee and appointed one member from each region to serve with members of the Standing Committee sub-group on Finance. The Secretariat clarified that the chair of the SC Sub-Group on Finance, from Finland, does not represent the Europe region, and therefore that region may appoint two members. The COP appointed representatives from Switzerland and Denmark for

Europe, Japan for Asia, South Africa for Africa, Antigua and Barbuda for the Neo-tropics, Canada for North America, and Fiji for Oceania. In the afternoon, the COP adopted the list of current observers.

REPORTS: Report of the Chairperson of the SC: SC Chair Yeon-Chul gave an overview of the SC's activities for the period 2008-2012 (COP11 Doc.5). The Committee held five meetings during which it: reviewed the Secretariat's work and budget; considered reports on work recommended by the STRP and the CEPA Oversight Panel; and discussed draft resolutions. Yeon-Chul underscored five issues requiring consideration at COP 11: resolving hosting arrangements of the Secretariat; resolving long-term financing; increasing cooperation with other instruments; raising awareness of wetlands' social and economic roles; and strengthening the capacity for Ramsar Convention implementation by parties.

Report of the World Wetlands NGO Conference: Petruta Moisi, Eco-Counselling Centre Galati, Romania, on behalf of the World Wetland Network, reported on the recommendations of the World Wetlands NGO Conference, which took place just prior to COP 11, expressing concern over the continued degradation of designated and undesignated wetlands and the failure of many parties to apply the wetland wise use concept in practice. She drew attention to the draft resolutions on: sustainable tourism, stressing the need to balance tourism and local demands on wetland resources; institutional arrangements for the Secretariat, which should bring clear benefits and more involvement of civil society; energy, calling for cumulative impact assessment of small hydropower systems; and agriculture and pesticide use, expressing concern for the potential increased use of genetically modified organisms to control pests.

Report of the Chairperson of the STRP: Heather MacKay, STRP Chair, briefed delegates on the Panel's work 2009-2012 (COP11 Doc.6). She highlighted new communication tools, collaboration with other organizations and conventions and revisions to the Ramsar Information Sheet and Strategic Framework. She emphasized the need to focus on implementation, and highlighted challenges related to the work and capacity of STRP national focal points (NFPs) and the limited capacity of STRP members to respond to intersessional requests.

In the ensuing discussion, DENMARK, ROMANIA, SOUTH AFRICA and SWITZERLAND thanked the STRP for its work. SOUTH AFRICA called for solutions to the challenges presented by the STRP Chair. IRAN emphasized improving the relationship with other scientific bodies.

Report on Implementation of the CEPA Programme 2009-2015: During the afternoon, Sandra Hails, Ramsar Secretariat, presented the "Overview of the Implementation of the

Convention's CEPA Programme" (COP11 Doc.14), describing the main challenges and achievements over the last triennium. She highlighted the need for: designation of separate general, CEPA, and STRP NFPs by parties; improved communication between the CEPA and STRP communities; and development of national CEPA action plans. She noted the role of the four Ramsar regional centres in capacity building and training.

Hails looked back on the successful activities surrounding the Fortieth Anniversary of the Ramsar Convention and the annual World Wetlands Day. She announced a new tool, "Enhancing Wise Use: A Framework for Capacity Development" (COP11 Doc.34), and the upcoming discussion at COP 12 on further implementation of Resolution VII.8 (Guidelines for Establishing and Strengthening Local Communities' and Indigenous People's Participation in the Management of Wetlands) and VIII.36 (Participatory Environmental Management as a Tool for Management and Wise Use of Wetlands).

In response to the CEPA Report, IRAN stressed the need to enhance the capacity of regional centres and NGOs for training. SOUTH AFRICA, supported by INDIA, NEPAL and UGANDA, underscored the importance of raising awareness on wetlands issues among politicians and high-level stakeholders, with SOUTH AFRICA linking this discussion to the agenda item on the institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat (COP11 DR.1). PERU highlighted the need for CEPA guidance aimed especially at older indigenous women, with INDIA sharing its experiences incorporating CEPA issues into action plans, the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES underscoring difficulties in participation, and KENYA showing appreciation for the support of the Small Grants Fund for its CEPA projects.

Report of the Secretary General: Ramsar Secretary General Anada Tiéga presented the "Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of the Convention at the Global Level" (COP11 Doc.7), including progress, achievements, challenges and ways forward for the next triennium, highlighting the tourism value of wetlands and a planned TEEB water and wetlands study that will demonstrate the economic importance of wetlands. He recommended that parties examine how wetland issues have been incorporated into other national strategies and planning processes, including those on poverty, water, coastal issues, forests, sustainable development, agriculture, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. He also highlighted the need to consider connectivity between inland waters and oceans.

On the wise use of wetlands, Tiéga recommended that parties develop national inventories of the ecosystem services provided by wetlands, in terms of their importance for water, biodiversity, energy production, jobs and mitigation of climate change. He noted that parties have reported a 7% increase in national wetland policies since COP 10, but said this is insufficient and some policies need to be updated to include climate change considerations.

On Ramsar Sites, Tiéga highlighted the need for all sites to have a management plan. He urged parties to involve key stakeholders, include CEPA in their work and make better use of the Montreux Record, noting it currently lists 48 sites.

On international cooperation, he mentioned the Secretariat's contribution to international processes including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Migratory Species and Rio+20, among others. He highlighted the role of the recently hired Partnership Coordination Officer in strengthening collaboration with UNEP, the Global Environment Facility and others, adding that regional initiatives are an important form of collaboration.

On institutional capacity, he noted the need to find a balance between growing expectations and limited Secretariat capacity, highlighting that unpaid contributions from 2011 and earlier currently total CHF 237,000.

On membership, Tiéga announced that Ramsar now has 162 parties, and welcomed new parties Grenada, Turkmenistan, Bhutan and Laos.

In response to the Secretary General's Report, several parties provided accounts of implementation at the national level and the designation of Ramsar Sites, highlighting issues of concern or interest in the Report. COSTA RICA and IRAN stressed the importance of Ramsar's technical assistance to contracting parties, particularly with regard to legal and communication matters. COSTA RICA, PERU and CUBA called for increasing and strengthening strategic alliances and synergies with other instruments and organizations, with PERU highlighting the historic Memorandum of Understanding between the CBD and Ramsar.

URUGUAY requested that two of its Ramsar Sites be withdrawn from the Montreux Record. SOUTH AFRICA underscored the importance of capacity building for NFPs and requested that the core budget include funding for meetings and delegate support. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL stressed the urgent need to update the Ramsar Sites Information Service, currently managed by Wetlands International, noting this redevelopment is part of the non-core budget. INDIA highlighted the lack of monitoring at many Ramsar Sites, noted the need for clear performance indicators and suggested that additional Ramsar Sites should not be declared until existing sites can be effectively monitored.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON WETLAND CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE IN

ROMANIA: Grigore Baboianu, Executive Director, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, Romania, presented on wetland conservation and sustainable use in Romania, highlighting the eight Ramsar Sites, covering 8250 km², of which the largest and oldest is the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, the four newest designated sites covering 943.6 km², and eight proposed sites covering approximately 2000 km². During the presentation, James Leape, Director General, WWF International, presented COP 11 President Făcă with a certificate recognizing the four new Ramsar Sites.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As participants adjusted to the cavernous opulence of their workspace in the Palace of the Parliament and began working through routine agenda items on Saturday morning, the Secretariat resorted to binoculars to identify delegates in the back rows of the plenary hall, while delegates squinted back through binoculars to see the distant dais. Fortunately the key issues on the COP 11 agenda were much clearer in contrast, with participants identifying as important the proposed revision to the Ramsar Information Sheet and Strategic Framework and the implications of the Rio+20 conference for Ramsar, as well as what one delegate characterized as the "thorny" issue of the institutional host of the Ramsar Secretariat.

One observer remarked that Rio+20 seemed to have sparked a greater sense of urgency about implementation, igniting discussions focused on the fact that Ramsar "isn't only about membership and the number of sites, but also about their ecological status." Although tackling the routine agenda items got off to a slow start, especially on the approval of the rules of procedure, by the afternoon, the Secretariat had enlisted assistants with walkie talkies to more easily relay requests from the floor in the large plenary chamber - a trend toward greater efficiency and urgency that one seasoned delegate hoped "COP 11 as a whole will reflect."