



RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates met in Plenary to discuss draft resolutions, and in Technical Sessions on baselines for sustainable use and on the Ramsar List. Committees on Finance, Credentials, and the Strategic Plan and Work Plan convened, and contact groups met to discuss agriculture and mangroves. In the evening, regional meetings took place to finalize recommendations to the COP on nominations for the Standing Committee.

PLENARY

Parties considered draft resolutions not taken up earlier in the week. On three resolutions dealing with Convention interpretation (COP8 DRs 20-22), BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, supported by the UK and others, suggested inserting text requesting COP9 to provide further guidance. Regarding the draft resolution on UNEP guidelines for enhancing compliance with MEAs (COP8 DR 24), the EU proposed adding reference to the WSSD's *Plan of Implementation*.

Parties then considered draft resolutions on various scientific and policy issues. SLOVENIA offered to co-sponsor resolutions on mountain wetlands (COP8 DR 12) and on guidance for temporary pools (COP8 DR 38). AUSTRALIA and EL SALVADOR proposed amendments concerning the role of temporary pools for local communities and indigenous peoples.

On the resolution on incentive measures for the wise use of wetlands (COP8 DR 23), AUSTRALIA suggested language on avoiding trade-distorting measures that contradict WTO rules in one paragraph, and proposed removing trade references from another paragraph. The EU said such changes should be carefully considered, and Parties agreed to consult informally.

On mangrove ecosystem resources (COP8 DR 32), MANGROVE ACTION PROJECT expressed concern at shrimp farming lobbyists' efforts to weaken the text. The UK noted that it was unusual for resolutions to instruct the Small Grants Fund on priorities, and AUSTRALIA indicated that this reference had been removed from the latest draft. Regarding agriculture, wetlands and water resource management (COP8 DR 34), UGANDA suggested encouraging preparation of management guidelines and strengthening the connection with poverty alleviation.

On the impact of natural disasters, particularly drought, on wetland ecosystems (COP8 DR 35), NIGER called for assistance in implementing the resolution. AUSTRALIA, with others, suggested reflecting the fact that in some areas droughts are a normal part of wetlands' ecological cycle. On participatory environmental management (PEM) (COP8 DR 36), GUATEMALA called for methodologies and funding for PEM. AUSTRALIA recommended that the STRP develop existing guidelines to include PEM, rather than prepare new guidelines.

Delegates supported resolutions on migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Asia-Pacific region (COP8 DR 37) and on high Andean wetlands (COP8 DR 39). On waterbird population and the

designation of Wetlands of International Importance (COP8 DR 38), BRAZIL suggested deleting language on priorities for the designation of the Ramsar sites.

On guidelines for rendering the use of groundwater compatible with wetland conservation (COP8 DR 40), AUSTRALIA proposed that the focus on arid and semi-arid areas be reflected in the title, while the NETHERLANDS said the text should also be relevant to other types of areas.

TECHNICAL SESSION ON BASELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE USE

The Technical Session on baselines for sustainable use: wetland inventory and assessment, began with panel presentations by invited experts, and continued with discussions on related draft COP8 resolutions in four regionally-based groups. The Session was chaired by Nadra Nathai-Gyan (Trinidad and Tobago).

PRESENTATIONS: Improving tools for identifying wetlands assets: Max Finlayson, President of Wetlands International, gave a presentation on improving tools for identifying wetland assets (COP8 DRs 6 and 7; DOC.16). He discussed, *inter alia*, available guidance, gaps, a framework for guidance, the integration of various analyses, and priorities for further action, including reconsidering data fields used on information sheets for Ramsar sites, incorporating tools used by other MEAs, and reviewing Ramsar's habitat classification system.

Assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands: David Pritchard, Birdlife International, discussed assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands, and the implementation of Article 3.2 (changes in ecological character) (COP8 DR 8). He outlined issues related to determining an ecological baseline, generating monitoring information, detecting and reporting change in ecological character, and responding to change. He stressed the importance of this issue for the basic operation of the Convention and the need for a coherent approach in determining the state of wetlands and addressing changes in ecological character.

Impact assessment: Andrea Athanas, Shell/IUCN, presented the draft resolution on the CBD Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment, and their relevance to Ramsar (COP8 DR 9). She highlighted issues of spatial scale, screening, wetland-specific impacts, and mitigation options, including restoration and compensation. KENYA urged further consideration of socio-economic impacts.

REGIONAL GROUPS: Africa: Regarding the draft resolution on a framework for wetland inventory, delegates were unable to agree on a number of issues, including whether to refer to "general guidelines" or "common standards." However, they supported retaining a paragraph on giving priority to wetland inventory projects in the Small Grants Fund. Delegates also began discussing a draft resolution on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and appointed a small group to finalize the draft resolution.



The Americas: The group endorsed the draft resolutions on harmonization of Ramsar guidance and on status and trends. On the wetland inventory, CADDO LAKE INSTITUTE proposed including NGO- and locally-generated reports in the reporting system. On CBD guidelines, participants agreed that references to "biodiversity" should apply equally to "conservation and wise use of wetlands."

Asia and Oceania: On harmonizing the Ramsar guidance on wetlands, delegates discussed text on the need for a methodology for identifying wetlands' ecological boundaries and on recognition of Parties' abilities to implement the task in the local context. On status and trends, delegates recommended, *inter alia*: reflecting the need for a threshold and the precautionary approach in reporting; incorporating the objectives of maintaining ecological character in management plans; and distinguishing the issue of wetlands' international importance from that of maintaining ecological character. On CBD guidelines, delegates suggested clarifying the definitions, and examining possible STRP assistance.

Europe: Delegates endorsed resolutions on a Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory, harmonization of Ramsar guidance, and assessing and reporting the status and trends of wetlands. Regarding CBD guidelines, the EU strongly supported this resolution for its reference to the CBD. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL requested inserting a reference to the recently adopted CMS resolution on impact assessment.

TECHNICAL SESSION ON THE RAMSAR LIST OF WETLANDS

The Technical Session on global biodiversity and sustenance of human life: the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, began with panel presentations by invited experts, and continued with regionally-based discussions. The Session was chaired by Louise Lakos (Hungary).

PRESENTATIONS: Developing new approaches to using the Ramsar List and guidelines for designating under-represented wetland types: David Stroud, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, UK, highlighted limited progress in implementing the Strategic Framework and Vision for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, and lack of coherent and comprehensive national Ramsar site networks. He introduced draft resolutions on improving implementation of the Strategic Framework (COP8 DR 10) and on additional guidance for identifying and designating under-represented wetland types (COP8 DR 11).

Standing Committee Vice-Chair Paul Mafabi Gumonye (Uganda) proposed further elaboration of the Ramsar criteria and guidelines for further developing the Ramsar List (COP8 Doc.31), stressing the need to recognize wetlands' cultural and socio-economic values, and to address poverty eradication.

Enhancing information on Ramsar sites: Douglas Taylor, Wetlands International, described the information collation process for Ramsar sites, and improvements to the database and information, particularly through revision of the Information Sheet format and explanatory notes and guidelines (COP8 DR 13 and DOC.33).

Ramsar Data Gateway: Alex de Sherbinin, Center for International Earth Science Information Network, presented the Ramsar Wetlands Data Gateway, explaining its functions and potential (COP8 DOC.34).

REGIONAL GROUPS: Africa: Delegates supported shortening and clarifying the preamble and deleting country names in the revised draft resolution on improving implementation of the Strategic Framework and Vision for the Ramsar List. They appointed a working group to finalize their position on the resolution. The group endorsed without amendments draft resolutions on under-represented wetland types and on enhancing information on wetlands of international importance.

The Americas: On improving implementation of the Strategic Framework, delegations agreed to delete text relating to socio-economic and cultural importance, on the grounds that it went beyond the current COP's mandate.

Regarding guidelines for designating under-represented wetland types, participants agreed to establish a working group to resolve differences on mangroves and coral reefs. Discussion on the enhancement of information on Ramsar sites focused on conditions for inclusion of information from non-Party sources.

Asia and Oceania: On guidelines for designating under-represented wetland types, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL suggested language requesting the STRP to investigate methods for defining targets for representation of wetland types in the Ramsar List. On enhancing the information on Ramsar Sites, delegates highlighted the need to specify the data to be collected. VIET NAM objected to a centralized database. Parties could not reach consensus on the process and criteria for selecting best available data, and agreed to bracket text on the quality and sources of data.

Europe: On improving implementation of the Strategic Framework, delegates agreed to move the list of Parties that have not provided updated Ramsar site descriptions to an annex, and to ask Parties to give priority to providing this information. Delegates suggested asking the STRP to analyze the consequences of introducing new criteria on socio-economic and cultural values and functions.

On under-represented wetland types, delegates agreed to delete a glossary of peatland and mire terms. On enhancing information of Ramsar sites, the EU suggested that the STRP review data and information needs in light of resource constraints, and that the Bureau and Wetlands International develop protocols for electronic submission of Ramsar data.

COMMITTEES

FINANCE: Delegates debated a revised draft budget for 2002-2005, including a lower proposed annual increase of 4.5%, and decreases in travel, equipment and office supplies, publications, and COP-related costs. A new revised draft will be prepared.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN: The Committee on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan finalized the debate on the draft resolution on the Strategic Plan (COP8 DR 25) and proceeded to consider the revised Strategic Plan (COP8 DR 25 Rev.1) and the Work Plan (COP8 DR 26). It resolved differences on references to trade, and agreed to insert only a brief reference to WSSD outcomes. Delegates decided to remove the designation of priorities from both the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, but to include general guidance on priorities for the work of the Convention's subsidiary bodies.

CONTACT GROUPS

AGRICULTURE: Delegates reviewed a revised draft of the resolution and agreed, *inter alia*, to include reference to the Dialogue on Water, Food and the Environment. Despite extensive discussions, differences remained on references to subsidies, the CBD and food security.

MANGROVES: The US suggested adding recognition of local communities' traditional use and access rights in text on reviewing and implementing mangrove conservation policies. Regarding a paragraph on incorporating environmental criteria in activities affecting mangrove ecosystems, delegates discussed adding references to sustainability and prohibiting the maintenance and expansion of harmful activities.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In spite of the 8:00 am Plenary and late evening regional meetings, few delegates were complaining about the long hours and extended schedule on Thursday. Varying degrees of progress were reported on a number of the more thorny issues, including culture and agriculture. There were also rumors of emerging compromises on the budget and on invasive species, and several observers seemed positive that Friday morning's meeting on climate change would yield positive results. However, one observer remarked that "there is a difference between being almost there and having the result in the bag."

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

TECHNICAL SESSIONS: The Technical Session on managing wetlands for sustainable use and human well-being begins in Plenary at 9:00 am, while the Session on culture and wetlands will start at 3:00 pm.

COMMITTEES AND CONTACT GROUPS: Committees on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, Credentials and Finance are expected to convene. Contact Groups on Agriculture, Climate Change and Mangroves are also scheduled.