



RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS FRIDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates met in Technical Sessions on wetlands management and on cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for conservation and sustainable use. Committees on Finance and the Strategic Plan and Work Plan convened, and contact groups met to continue discussions on agriculture, climate change and the San José Record.

TECHNICAL SESSION ON WETLANDS MANAGEMENT

The Technical Session on managing wetlands for sustainable use and human well-being began with panel presentations by invited experts, and continued with discussions on related draft resolutions in four regionally-based groups. The Session was chaired by Natalya Kasymova (Uzbekistan).

PRESENTATIONS: New Guidelines on management planning: Chaman Lal Trisal, Wetlands International, presented new guidelines on management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands (COP8 DR 14), which he said: focus on site-based management planning; provide flexibility to allow variation in Ramsar site types and involvement of local communities in the management planning process; and address socio-economic and cultural features.

San José Record: Marie-Odile Guth, Director of Nature Conservation, France, presented the San José Record of well-managed Ramsar sites (COP8 DR 15), stressing that it can be a tool for the exchange and dissemination of information on methods used in such sites, and for the promotion of cost-effective management planning. She added that the criteria for inclusion on the record must be revised regularly.

Principles and guidelines for wetlands restoration: STRP Member George Zalidis (Greece) presented principles and guidelines for wetland restoration (COP8 DR 16), highlighting the need for, *inter alia*, national plans, a step-wise approach, performance standards, consideration of the existing natural conditions, multi-stakeholder involvement, and integration of the guidelines into wider policies. He noted the establishment of a "wetland restoration mini-website."

Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands: Jack Rieley, International Peat Society, introduced the guidelines for global action on peatlands (COP8 DR 17), which seek to achieve international recognition of peatlands' importance and facilitate partnerships and cooperation. Noting that peatlands are under-represented in the Ramsar List of Wetlands, he stressed their cultural and socio-economic values, and barriers to their sustainable and wise use, including drainage, agriculture, forestry, and nature conservation. BOLIVIA noted difficulties in gathering accurate data.

Invasive Species: Geoffrey Howard, IUCN, discussed invasive species and wetlands, highlighting the particular threats posed by invasive species, and introducing the draft resolution (COP8 DR 18).

REGIONAL GROUPS: Africa: Delegates endorsed guidelines for management planning and for global action on peatlands. They approved the San José Record resolution with various amendments, including: deletion of preambular text stating that "appropriate and exemplary management is not necessarily costly"; and agreement on listing sites for six years. The group endorsed principles and guidelines for wetland restoration, with added references to the WSSD's *Plan of Implementation*. Regarding the draft resolution on invasive species, delegates opposed reference to the CBD Biosafety Protocol, and endorsed the resolution without amendment. Some delegates requested clarification on the different positions taken in the contact group.

The Americas: The group reaffirmed its opposition to the San José Record, and welcomed a US proposal to investigate an alternative mechanism to link the resolution's concepts with the CEPA focal points. Regarding guidelines on peatlands, BRAZIL suggested that the coordinating committee be regionally-balanced and composed of government representatives. On the draft resolution on invasive species, the US supported an IUCN compromise proposal on reference to the CBD. BOLIVIA proposed recognition of the potential importance of invasive species for the livelihoods of local populations.

Asia and Oceania: The Group endorsed the draft resolution on wetland management planning. On the San José Record, delegates supported a three-year review process and opposed restricting the nomination procedure. On guidelines for wetland restoration, delegates discussed the need to pay particular attention to peatlands. Regarding guidelines on peatlands, delegates agreed to delete a reference to the Kyoto Protocol, and added language on the Joint Work Plan on Peatlands, wetland restoration, limits on actions relating to national capacities, and extrabudgetary funding for the proposed coordinating committee. On the draft resolution on invasive species, JAPAN opposed establishing a new STRP task to compile guidance on this issue.

Europe: On new guidelines for management planning, delegates proposed language in the annex on integrating Ramsar site management plans at all levels to ensure public participation and local ownership. COASTWATCH proposed language on compensatory measures for adverse effects.

On invasive species, ECOLOGISTAS EN ACCION proposed examining the consequences of water transfer. The EU proposed adding reference to CBD decision VI/23 on invasive species guidelines. WWF proposed language on regulating the importation of live species for aquaculture and aquarium trade.

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TECHNICAL SESSION ON CULTURE AND WETLANDS

The Technical Session on cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use began with panel presentations, and continued with regionally-based discussions. The Session was chaired by Clayton Rubec, Environment Canada.

PRESENTATIONS: Different perspectives on culture and wetlands: Maria José Viñals, SEHUMED-Universidad de Valencia, delivered an audio-visual presentation outlining different perspectives on cultural heritage of wetlands.

Guiding principles on the cultural aspects of wetlands: Thymio Papayannis, Special Advisor to the Ramsar Secretary General, presented an information paper and the draft resolution on guiding principles on the cultural aspects of wetlands (COP8 DOC.15 and DR 19), stressing that the resolution is a source of ideas and advice rather than a constraint.

Many delegates endorsed the resolution. SPAIN and DENMARK highlighted the value of hunting. NGOs called for recognition of indigenous peoples' cultural rights. UNESCO welcomed joint activities with Ramsar to improve the conservation of cultural and biological diversity, and promote a bio-cultural approach to sustainable development. Deputy Secretary General Davidson reminded delegates that the Ramsar Convention affirms the cultural value of wetlands in its preamble.

REGIONAL GROUPS: Africa: Delegates endorsed the draft resolution on culture and wetlands with a number of amendments, including a reference to community property rights and prior informed consent. SOUTH AFRICA urged delegates to make the link with cultural and socio-economic aspects in the draft resolution on the Ramsar list (COP8 DR 10 Rev.1). Regarding the draft resolution on climate change (COP8 DR 3 Rev.1), delegates supported stronger wording on commitments, and retaining reference to climate change adaptation and linkages with other organizations. Delegates endorsed the draft resolution on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (COP8 DR 44) without amendments.

The Americas: On culture and wetlands, the group suggested making a reference in the preamble to the relevant COP7 Resolution (COP7 Res.8), which acknowledges the Convention's commitment to wetlands' cultural value. Participants called for consistency of terminology with other international instruments and considered the use of the terms "cultural aspects" and "cultural values." They agreed that regional representatives should establish regional working groups while national groups should be established by Contracting Parties.

Asia and Oceania: Regarding the draft resolution on culture and wetlands, delegates deleted language on wetlands as a resource for tourism and recreational activities, and suggested amendments on: synergies with other MEAs; reporting requirements pursuant to the resolution; and avoidance of trade-related concerns in reference to quality labels. They agreed to text encouraging Parties to "consider," instead of "adopt and use," the guiding principles. PAKISTAN suggested recognizing indigenous peoples' role. AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND proposed deleting text on the contribution of traditional activities to wetland conservation and wise use, or specifying that these activities should "be consistent with the WTO requirements." MALAYSIA and the PHILIPPINES opposed references to the WTO, and the text remained bracketed.

Europe: On the contribution of knowledge of past wetland management practices to wetland conservation, some delegates proposed language stating that the practices should be traditional. NORWAY advocated using the term indigenous peoples, and a number of delegates supported referring to cultural values rather than cultural aspects. SPAIN proposed taking into account customary laws when considering the systematic compilation and assessment of cultural elements. WWF added language on stakeholder involvement in planning, management and monitoring

activities. ALBANIA proposed recognizing the need to protect the wetland archeological heritage. SWEDEN suggested adding the mobilization of necessary resources to the list of guiding principles.

COMMITTEES

FINANCE: Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco introduced a revised draft budget for 2003-2005, including a 4% annual budget increase and decreases in several budget lines, including regional initiatives. While many Parties supported this budget, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION expressed concern that the increase was too high. BELGIUM, COLOMBIA and SWITZERLAND lamented the absence of funding for regional initiatives other than MedWet. Delegates agreed to allocate extra annual savings to COP-related costs, and endorsed the revised budget. They also sought further information on the proposed Endowment Fund.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN: The Committee on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan completed its work, having approved amendments to the Strategic Plan (COP8 DR 25 Rev.1) and Work Plan (COP8 DR 26) that were required in view of the decision to eliminate the global priorities and move the targets to an annex. Revised draft resolutions are expected on Saturday.

CONTACT GROUPS

AGRICULTURE: Delegates were unable to agree on Brazil's proposed language specifying trade-related agreements with respect to ensuring consistency of agricultural policies with international agreements. Text on the positive impacts of agricultural practices on wetland ecosystems also remained bracketed. However, delegates accepted Uganda's proposals relating to: dependence of the poor, particularly women, on wetlands; dependence of local communities on wetland resources, particularly as it relates to small-scale agriculture; and consideration of wetland tenure systems and user rights when reviewing land tenure policies. Brazil expressed its concerns over the resolution as it is drafted.

CLIMATE CHANGE: Despite extensive discussions on the draft resolution (COP8 DR 3), no decision was taken on whether to retain the annex or delete it and insert an executive summary in the accompanying Information Paper instead (COP8 DOC.11). Following the Contact Group meeting, a revised draft resolution was circulated on Friday afternoon (COP8 DR 3 Rev.1).

SAN JOSE RECORD: Parties agreed that the Record should focus on "effective management examples and demonstration practices" rather than on well-managed Ramsar sites. The resolution will be amended accordingly, including the title, which will now read: "San José Record for the promotion of Management Implementation."

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates emerging from Friday's Finance Committee meeting seemed satisfied after reaching a compromise on the budget. Meanwhile, the Strategic Plan and Work Plan Committee also successfully completed its work.

Elsewhere the news was less positive. A compromise proposal on invasive species generated some support, but with the EU apparently holding out for stronger language, a deal on the resolution remains elusive. References to trade in the resolution on agriculture remain bracketed. And there were also rumors that a few Parties remain bitterly opposed to the current resolution on the World Dams Commission. In spite of this, several observers were quick to point out that negotiators still have several days to complete their work.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: A Plenary session will begin at 9:30 am to hear the report of the Credentials Committee, and briefings on progress in the Committees on Finance, Future COPs, and the Strategic Plan and Work Plan. In the afternoon, delegates will consider reports and recommendations from the Technical Sessions, and the *modus operandi* del STRP.