



RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates met in Plenary to begin finalizing and adopting some of the numerous resolutions on the agenda, completing their work on 21 of these. Contact groups were held to help delegates reach agreement on the remaining contentious issues, including agriculture, climate change, culture, future COPs, the Strategic Framework, and the World Commission on Dams (WCD).

PLENARY

FUTURE COPs: Regarding the draft resolution on the operation of future COPs (COP8 DR 45), SOUTH AFRICA suggested that COP9 amend the rules of procedure following a review of the process for adopting resolutions, and stressed the need for clear criteria for categorizing resolutions as technical or other types. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL suggested deleting language specifying that a review of effectiveness should be of a general nature rather than focusing on a country-by-country basis. A contact group on this resolution was established.

WETLAND INVENTORY: On the resolution on a Ramsar Framework for wetland inventory (COP8 DR 6 Rev.1), delegates agreed to a proposal by JAPAN requesting Parties to give priority to wetlands inventory projects for submission to the Small Grants Fund. The COP adopted the resolution, as amended.

STATUS AND TRENDS: Regarding the draft resolution on assessing and reporting status and trends (COP8 DR 8 Rev.1), the COP adopted BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL's proposed deletion of text indicating how information on change is to be acquired. Delegates also agreed to delete explicit reference to indirect human-induced adverse change in the instructions on content of reports, and adopted the resolution as amended.

UNDER-REPRESENTED WETLANDS: In the draft resolution on under-represented wetlands (COP8 DR 11 Rev.1), references were added to sandflats in the section on mangroves and to sustainability of commercial exploitation. Following consultations involving Norway, Australia and the UK, delegates agreed that the resolution should not focus solely on warm water coral reefs.

MOUNTAIN WETLANDS: On the draft resolution addressing the wise use and conservation of mountain wetlands (COP8 DR 12 Rev.1), delegates agreed to, *inter alia*: remove reference to arid and semi-arid areas in relation to biogeographical islands; reflect the fact that some communities and species are endangered; and delete qualifying language when discussing endemic communities and species. Following the addition of several minor amendments, the resolution was adopted.

WETLAND RESTORATION: Delegates adopted the principles and guidelines for wetland restoration (COP8 DR 16), with added reference to relevant paragraphs from the WSSD's *Plan of Implementation*.

MANAGEMENT PLANNING: Delegates adopted the resolution on new guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands (COP8 DR 14 Rev.1), after deleting language on reporting under the terms of Article 3.2 (information on changes in wetlands' ecological character).

PEATLANDS: On guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (COP8 DR 17 Rev.1), delegates agreed to Canada's suggestions relating to the proposed Coordinating Committee, including deleting a reference to extra-budgetary resources and reflecting the fact that invited partner organizations would be included in the Committee. Delegates also agreed to address the issue of mires in a footnote. The COP then adopted the resolution, as amended.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY MATTERS:

Commenting on the resolution on financial and budgetary matters (COP8 DR 27 Rev.1), the RUSSIAN FEDERATION stressed that, in the interest of consensus, it would not put the resolution to a vote, in spite of its disagreement with the annual budget increases. SPAIN, on behalf of the EU, expressed satisfaction with the revised budget. The COP adopted the resolution without amendment.

MANGROVES: Regarding the draft resolution on mangroves (COP8 DR 32 Rev.1), the PHILIPPINES supported the resolution and the inclusion of language on sustainable use of mangrove resources. WWF commended inclusion of, *inter alia*, unsustainable aquaculture as a major threat. GREENPEACE proposed text requesting Parties to reject projects in coastal areas that would negatively impact mangroves. The resolution was adopted without this amendment.

COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC

AWARENESS: On communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) (COP8 DR 31 Rev.1), the COP agreed to a proposal by JAPAN to include text noting that the proposed CEPA expert working group's activities should begin when resources permit. The resolution was adopted, as amended.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: Regarding the draft resolution on the Strategic framework (COP8 DR 10 Rev.2), COP8 Rapporteur Tim Jones reported that the contact group had agreed to withdraw the African proposals and amend the text to express appreciation to Ramsar's International Organization Partners and other partners. However, differences remained on the issue of socio-economic and cultural criteria. DENMARK proposed referring to "relevant features, other than those of an ecological character, as listed in Annex I of the CBD" rather than to socio-economic and cultural criteria. JAPAN suggested referring to "guidelines" rather than "criteria." Ramsar Secretary General Blasco urged Parties to bring the Convention in line with other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and consider the consequences of continued resistance to change. Following consultations, AUSTRALIA proposed text on "additional guid-

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ance...to support existing criteria and guidelines." This proposal will be discussed on Tuesday along with other matters related to the draft resolution.

TEMPORARY POOLS: Regarding the resolution on temporary pools (COP8 DR 33 Rev.1), the COP agreed to amendments proposed by the US on the importance to wetlands conservation of voluntary actions by informed citizens, and by BOLIVIA on the importance of temporary pools as nesting places for waterfowl. Parties then adopted the resolution, as amended.

OTHER RESOLUTIONS: Delegates considered and adopted, with a minor revision, the draft resolution on wetland issues and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) (COP8 DR 4 Rev.1), while the resolution on guidelines for incorporation of biodiversity issues (COP8 DR 9 Rev.1) was approved after the correction of several drafting errors.

The COP also adopted draft resolutions on: partnerships and synergies (COP8 DR 5 Rev.1); Ramsar guidance on wetland ecological character, inventory, assessment, and monitoring (COP8 DR 7 Rev.1); guidance for interpreting "urgent national interests" (COP8 DR 20); defining Ramsar site boundaries more accurately (COP8 DR 21); Ramsar sites that cease to fulfil or have never fulfilled the criteria for designation as wetlands of international importance (COP8 DR 22 Rev.1); incentive measures as tools for achieving the wise use of wetlands (COP8 DR 23); enhancing compliance with multilateral environmental agreements and national enforcement (COP8 DR 24 Rev.1); and the *modus operandi* of the STRP (COP8 DR 28 Rev.1).

Delegates also adopted resolutions on evaluating the Small Grants Fund and establishing a Ramsar Endowment Fund (COP8 DR 29 Rev.1), and on regional initiatives for further implementation of the Convention (COP8 DR 30 Rev.1).

CONTACT GROUPS

AGRICULTURE: The Contact Group continued its work on the draft resolution (COP8 DR 34 Rev.1), debating whether to retain two bracketed paragraphs ensuring consistency of agricultural policies with other international agreements, including trade agreements. Pending consultations with capitals, they agreed to include one paragraph in the operational section of the resolution and to leave discussions on the preambular paragraph to Plenary. References to other international agreements also remained bracketed. A paragraph stating that agricultural activity has created distinctive and characteristic landscapes was also left bracketed at the request of AUSTRALIA. Delegates agreed to language on, *inter alia*: identifying possible subsidies and incentives when reviewing agricultural policies; and enhancing positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

CLIMATE CHANGE: Parties considered a revised draft resolution (COP8 DR 3 Rev.2), agreeing to replace the annex with an interim executive summary in the background document (COP8 DOC.11). SOUTH AFRICA, supported by AUSTRIA and BURKINA FASO, proposed additional text requesting the STRP to continue assessing new information on climate change and make it available as an information paper. The US expressed its reservations, and agreed to consult informally on the issue.

Delegates worked through the text paragraph-by-paragraph, resolving most of the remaining differences. Closing the meeting, Contact Group Chair Peter Schei (Norway) indicated that the two remaining disputed issues would be taken up in Plenary.

CULTURE AND WETLANDS: In an afternoon meeting, delegates could not agree on AUSTRALIA's proposal to delete text on the contribution of traditional activities to wetland conservation and use, or to add a reference to the WTO. They removed a reference to the prior informed consent principle, inserting instead references to the CBD and the World Intellectual Property Organization. Delegates decided that the resolution should refer to the knowledge of traditional practices and the practices themselves,

and "take note of," instead of "endorse," the guiding principles. They also discussed the guiding principles, particularly those relating to cultural landscapes, traditional production systems and practices related to wetlands. MEXICO stressed difficulties with references to "managing cultural values."

After reconvening in the evening, delegates agreed to text recognizing that sustainable use of wetland resources has created cultural landscapes of significant value to wetland conservation, deleting language referring to the contributions to conservation by maintaining wetlands and "wise use." Delegates also agreed to text encouraging Parties to consider using the Guiding principles to take into account "exclusively" the conservation of cultural values of wetlands. The Group agreed to accept the principles, and concluded its work.

FUTURE COPS: The Contact Group refined the draft resolution on operation and effectiveness of future COPS (COP8 DR 45), agreeing that the Standing Committee would not have to classify resolutions that do not easily fit into one of the listed categories.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: African delegates agreed to withdraw the region's proposal for extensive changes to the draft resolution (COP8 DR 10 Rev.2). The Group adopted WWF's proposal to extend appreciation to additional International Partner Organizations, and discussed inclusion of socio-economic and cultural criteria in designation of Ramsar sites.

WATER AND THE WCD: Regarding the draft resolution on the Report of the WCD (COP8 DR 2 Rev.1), the Group agreed to insert a paragraph on reviewing resolutions on water allocation management and on the WCD report and preparing further guidance for COP9. They also decided to delete a quote from the WCD's report that refers to dams' contributions to human development and their social and environmental impacts. In addition, Parties deleted remaining brackets around paragraphs on, *inter alia*: using all available information, including WCD's information, for managing and assessing dams' impacts; and systematically implementing environmental flow assessments to mitigate large dams' socio-economic and environmental impacts. A representative of the Convention on Migratory Species requested that a paragraph be inserted on dams' impacts on migratory species and river dolphins.

Regarding the guidelines for water allocation and management (COP8 DR 1 Rev.1), delegates, *inter alia*: accepted all amendments proposed by the regional groups; rejected referring to "water as a commodity" instead of "water resources"; and agreed to refer to "conflict resolution" instead of "conflict resolution mechanisms."

IN THE CORRIDORS

With just one day remaining at COP8, delegates seemed satisfied with the adoption of roughly half of the resolutions on their agenda on Monday. However, several participants were quick to point out that Plenary had yet to stamp its final seal of approval on the most contentious issues, including invasive species and agriculture. More than one participant thought discussions on the San José Record and on future COPs might also "spring some last minute surprises." In spite of these concerns, many observers seemed cautiously optimistic that a harmonious conclusion to COP8 was on the cards.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary will begin at 9:30 am to continue adopting the remaining resolutions.