



SUMMARY OF THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS: 18-26 NOVEMBER 2002

The Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP8) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was held from 18-26 November 2002, at the Prince Felipe Science Museum in Valencia, Spain. The theme of the Conference was "Wetlands: Water, Life, and Culture."

More than 1000 officials representing 119 Contracting Parties, as well as a number of observer States, UN agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, attended the session. In conducting their work, participants convened in plenary sessions, regional and contact groups, and several committees. They also met in five technical sessions on: major challenges and emerging opportunities for wetlands, water and sustainability; wetland inventory and assessment; the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance; management of wetlands for sustainable use and human well-being; and cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use.

Delegates considered and adopted more than 40 resolutions addressing a broad range of policy, technical, programme and budgetary matters, including wetlands and agriculture, climate change, cultural issues, mangroves, water allocation and management, and the Report of the World Commission on Dams. They also approved the Convention's budget and Work Plan for 2003-2005, and its Strategic Plan for 2003-2008.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (also known as the Ramsar Convention) was signed in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971, and came into force on 21 December 1975. The Convention provides a framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

CONVENTION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE: Originally emphasizing the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily to provide a habitat for waterbirds, the Convention has subsequently broadened its scope to address all aspects of wetland conservation and wise use. This shift in focus reflects the increasing recognition of the importance of wetlands as an

ecosystem that contributes to biodiversity conservation and to the well-being of human communities. According to some estimates, wetlands cover at least 6% of the Earth's land surface, and contribute significantly to the global economy in terms of water supply, fisheries, agriculture, forestry and tourism.

The Ramsar Convention is the only environmental treaty dealing with a particular ecosystem, and currently has 134 Parties. A total of 1229 wetland sites covering 105.9 million hectares are included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (the "Ramsar List"). Parties to the Convention commit themselves to: designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar Criteria for inclusion in the Ramsar List and ensure maintenance of the ecological character of each Ramsar site; include wetland conservation within national land-use planning in order to promote the wise use of all wetlands within their territory; establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote training in wetland research and management; and consult with other Parties about Convention implementation, especially with regard to transboundary wetlands, shared water systems, shared species, and development projects affecting wetlands.

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Contracting Parties meet every three years to assess progress in implementing the Convention and wetland conservation, share knowledge and experience on technical issues, and plan the next triennium. In addition to the Conference of the Parties (COP), the Convention's work is supported by a Standing Committee, a Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and a Secretariat. The Standing Committee includes Regional Representatives of Ramsar's regions (Asia, Oceania, Europe, Africa, North America, and the Neotropics). Its duties include the supervision of policy implementation by the Secretariat and the administration of the Convention's budget. The STRP provides guidance on key issues related to the application of the Convention. The Secretariat (known as the Ramsar Bureau) deals with the Convention's day-to-day operations, and is housed in the headquarters of IUCN–The World Conservation Union in Gland, Switzerland.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE COP: There have been seven meetings of the COP since the Convention's entry into force: COP1 in Cagliari, Italy (24-29 November 1980); COP2 in Gröningen, the Netherlands (7-12 May 1984); COP3 in Regina, Canada (27 May-5 June 1987); COP4 in Montreux, Switzerland (27 June-4 July 1990); COP5 in Kushiro, Japan (9-16 June 1993); COP6 in Brisbane, Australia (19-27 March 1996); and COP7 in San José, Costa Rica (10-18 May 1999), the first time a Ramsar COP was held in a developing country.

At COP7, delegates focused on the interrelations between human societies and wetland habitats under the theme of "People and Wetlands – The Vital Link." They considered the Convention's implementation in each region, the Work Plan and budget for 2000-2002, and regional categorization of countries under the Convention. Delegates adopted 30 resolutions and four recommendations on policy, programme and budgetary issues. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Ramsar Bureau and the World Heritage Center.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: Since COP7, 18 additional Parties have ratified the Convention, and numerous relevant wetlands meetings were held, including those of the Convention's Subsidiary Bodies, eleven informal regional and subregional meetings held at the request of the Ramsar Standing Committee, and various other international, regional and subregional events.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg from 26 August - 4 September 2002, delegates adopted a *Plan of Implementation* containing a number of commitments and goals on water management, biodiversity, and other matters relevant to the Ramsar Convention.

REPORT OF RAMSAR COP8

COP8 opened on Monday morning, 18 November, with Parties electing María del Carmen Martorell Pallás, Secretary General of Spain's Environment Ministry, as President. Hector Condé (Cuba) and Javad Amin Mansour (Iran) were appointed Vice-Presidents. COP8 President Martorell said she would make every effort to hear all delegates' views and concerns and pay close attention to comments and interventions from observers, particularly NGOs.

Philippe Roch, Swiss Secretary of State, Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape, spoke on "Sustainable Management of Water: The Need for a Holistic Ecosystem Approach." He stated that the relationship between poverty, development and environmental protection, underscored at the WSSD, had been recognized earlier by the Ramsar Convention's wise use concept. He highlighted Ramsar's visionary aspect, indicating its conceptual and practical role in promoting an ecosystem approach to providing a sustainable supply of water. He called for strengthening cooperation between Ramsar and other institutions, including the United

Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). He also supported a multidisciplinary approach to wetlands management at all levels, involving all stakeholders.

President Martorell transmitted the address of Prince Felipe of Spain, who was unable to attend the conference. The statement highlighted COP8's importance in formulating a strategic plan for Ramsar and drew attention to the themes of the Technical Sessions, particularly those on sustainable use and management of wetlands, and on cultural linkages.

Rita Barberá, Mayor of Valencia, underscored Valencia's commitment to wetland preservation and conservation and to raising public awareness. She expressed hope that UNESCO would soon declare the city's Albufera area a world heritage site.

Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco stated that, with 1200 registered participants, COP8 was the largest Ramsar COP to date, and expressed a desire to involve in the discussions all present and future Parties, other multilateral environmental organizations, and governmental and non-governmental institutions, including community-based organizations, indigenous peoples, scientists, and the private sector.

José Luis Olivas Martínez, President of the Region of Valencia, noted the importance of traditional and sustainable use for preserving wetlands for future generations. He commended the Convention as a dynamic tool for integrated water and watershed management, environmental impact assessment (EIA), and the involvement of local communities.

Claude Martin, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), outlined the Convention's key challenges, including: implementing commitments; increasing the Convention's voice in international conservation fora; and influencing national and international policy and legislation, including in the areas of water and agriculture. He expressed concern at the absence of a strategic approach to the wise use of wetlands and about the Spanish National Hydrological Plan; and urged financial support for the Convention. Noting lack of reference to the Convention in the freshwater section of the WSSD *Plan of Implementation*, he recommended that COP8 ensure the Convention's meaningful role in poverty eradication and water management, and proactively plan the next triennium.

Peter Bridgewater, Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF), reported on the Forum's 17th Session, held from 15-17 November 2002, in Valencia. He highlighted the GBF's call for bridging the gap between global policy and practice and its recommendations for enhancing the Convention's role in sustainable development, including: addressing emerging issues, such as agriculture, wetlands restoration, climate change and sound environmental governance; and securing the financial means to facilitate involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Reporting on outcomes from the World Congress of NGOs and Local Communities on Wetlands held in Valencia from 15-16 November, Theo Oberhuber, Ecologistas en Acción, lamented the failure of Parties to abide by provisions and resolutions adopted. She said the Congress supported, *inter alia*: the development of enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the Convention; greater grassroots involvement of indigenous peoples in managing their natural environment; respect for indigenous rights; a moratorium on building large dams; EIAs for projects that might affect wetlands; and a cessation of public sector support for intensive aquaculture programmes and use of wetlands as waste dump sites.

Reporting on outcomes of the Latin American Seminar for International Cooperation for Wetlands, held from 13-14 November, in Toledo, Spain, Spokeswoman Maite Martín Crespo



called for strengthening funding mechanisms, rapprochement with the private sector, and enhancing effectiveness of donors and recipients. She recommended that COP8 address several priority issues, including regional processes for wetland management, training, planning, environmental management, and updating national inventories.

AWARD CEREMONY: On Monday, 18 November, Secretary General Delmar Blasco presented three Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, in recognition of the work of those who have made a significant contribution to wetlands conservation and sustainable use. These awards are presented every three years, and are complemented by the Evian Special Prize, a cash award of US\$10,000 donated by the Danone Group. The awards for 2002 were presented to the Chilika Development Authority of India, the Trinational Initiative for the Morava-Dyje Floodplains operating in Austria, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, and Banrock Station Wines in Australia. In addition, Monique Coulet of France and Max Finlayson of Australia were honored for their efforts on wetland conservation and wise use in a "Recognition of Excellence" ceremony.

Delegates then witnessed the signing of the "Danone-Evian Fund for Water, in Support of the Ramsar Convention Programme 2003-2006," an agreement between the Ramsar Convention and the Danone Group Corporation. Danone Group President Franck Riboud outlined his company's support for water management and conservation initiatives, inviting proposals for projects that might be supported by his company.

AGENDA AND RULES OF PROCEDURE: On Monday, 18 November, the COP adopted its the provisional agenda (COP8 DOC.1, Rev.3) and rules of procedure (COP8 DOC.2) without amendment.

COMMITTEES AND CONTACT GROUPS: Parties agreed to establish Committees on Credentials, the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, Finance and Budget, and the content and duration of future COPs. The COP then established a number of contact groups to consider draft resolutions (DRs) expected to require substantial deliberations, including on: water allocation and the World Commission on Dams; invasive species; climate change; management planning and the San José Record; the *modus operandi* of the STRP; the strategic framework for the Ramsar List; cultural issues; mangroves; agriculture; and High-Andean wetlands.

ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS: COP8 President Martorell presented the list of registered observers (COP8 DOC.36). Argentina expressed its reservation over registering the "UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum" as British, as this NGO relates to the South Georgia and Falklands/ Malvinas Islands. The UK reiterated its position on the sovereignty of the islands. Samoa announced that it had approved its instrument of accession to Ramsar on 12 November. The list of observers was then adopted by the COP.

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE AND THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL

On Monday, 18 November, Standing Committee Chair Stephen Hunter (Australia) briefed Plenary on the Committee's work during the 1999-2002 triennium (COP8 DOC.3). He highlighted key activities and trends in the Committee's work, including increasing cooperation with other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan as guidance for actions, and a widening of the wetlands policy context.

Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) Chair Jorge Jiménez Ramón (Costa Rica) presented his report (COP8 DOC.4) and underscored factors limiting the STRP capabilities, including: the large number of tasks on its agenda; membership turnover; and

insufficient expertise. He urged COP8 to establish priorities for the STRP's work and address the need to: review STRP's *modus operandi*; increase its resources and expertise; and ensure access to global experts and set out a global expert network.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

On Tuesday, 19 November, Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco reported on the implementation of the Convention at the global level (COP8 DOC.5), highlighting key challenges for implementation. Reporting also on the WSSD (COP8 DOC.7), Blasco said the challenge was to identify how the Convention could contribute to sustainable development and implementation of the WSSD's outcomes. He highlighted new listings of Ramsar Sites, changes in areas and ecological character, and restrictions on sites in the Ramsar List (COP8 DOC.6).

Commenting on this report, Guinea, Benin, Ghana, Malawi, Latvia, Costa Rica, Paraguay and others described their national and regional activities. Guyana and Barbados announced their intention to accede to the Convention.

WWF urged Parties to designate new Ramsar sites, and recommended that the COP consider a resolution on conservation of fish biodiversity. Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritius and Papua New Guinea urged greater financial assistance for developing countries in implementing the Convention. Iran, Niger, and Cuba called for GEF support to the Convention. Mali urged support for capacity building.

Japan highlighted its contribution of 100,000 Swiss Francs to the Small Grants Fund (SGF), supported strengthening the STRP and prioritizing work of the COP and the Standing Committee, and opposed overloading the STRP. Azerbaijan requested that, having acceded to Ramsar, it should participate in the Europe regional group.

REGIONAL OVERVIEWS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Delegates reviewed implementation of the Convention and resolutions on the COP8 agenda in regional group meetings held on Wednesday morning, 20 November.

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, socioeconomic 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; and joint management of transboundary resources.

THE AMERICAS: Delegates considered reports on implementation (COP8 Docs 28 and 29) and discussed changing the proposed format for submitting national reports, expressing support for a simplified format. Referring to consultations held earlier this year in Ecuador, they underlined the need to address issues related to mangroves, and questioned the appropriateness of prioritizing Convention objectives within the Strategic Plan and Work Plan.

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, proposals relating to future COPs, and the designation of STRP experts. On priorities for future actions, delegates stressed, *inter alia*, the importance of: promoting and providing financial and technical support to regional cooperation; dealing with water management



issues and natural disasters; and evaluating and promoting socioeconomic values of wetlands. Jordan and Iraq agreed to cooperate on transboundary wetlands.

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.

OCEANIA: Delegates discussed a variety of issues relating to Convention implementation (COP8 DOC.30), including key challenges raised during a regional preparatory meeting held in Samoa in May 2002, implementation of the Joint Work Plan of Ramsar and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and Bureau support for the region. On Bureau support, participants advocated establishing a coordinator for the Oceania region, the only region without one. WWF proposed appointing a Small Island Developing States (SIDS) coordinator in Oceania, and said it would contribute US\$20,000 over the next two years to help finance this post, provided that Parties also contribute funds.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Delegates convened in five technical sessions held from Wednesday to Friday, 20-22 November. The sessions addressed the following themes: major challenges and emerging opportunities for wetlands, water and sustainability; wetland inventory and assessment; the Ramsar List; management of wetlands for sustainable use and human well-being; and cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use.

Each technical session began with panel presentations on the theme and on relevant draft resolutions being considered by the COP. Delegates then discussed the draft resolutions in four regionally-based groups representing Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia-Oceania. Regional group positions on all the draft resolutions considered in the Technical Sessions are reported in the section on COP8 Resolutions below.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

During the course of COP8, a number of special presentations on wetland-related issues and activities were delivered by representatives of two Contracting Parties and various UN agencies and MEAs.

MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT: On Tuesday, 19 November, Angela Cropper, Co-President of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) Board, presented a status report on the MA (COP8 DOC.8). She highlighted the dynamic relationship of the MA with Ramsar and expressed hope for its continuation, primarily through the STRP.

SPAIN'S WETLAND CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES: Inés Gonzalez Doncel, Spain's Director General for Nature Conservation, presented a comprehensive overview of wetland conservation and sustainable use in Spain and plans to designate 11 new wetlands sites, thus improving the geographic spread of wetlands listed.

WWF highlighted concerns about the new Spanish National Hydrological Plan (SNHP) in its current form, stating that it is inconsistent with the Ramsar Convention and EU Directives, and might lead to the "misuse" of up to eight billion Euros of EU funds. Birdlife International expressed concern at the lack of proper NGO involvement in dealing with wetland issues in Spain and the process for assessing the SNHP's impact on Ramsar sites. Greenpeace Spain said the SNHP does not provide for an EIA. Plataforma en Defensa del Ebro expressed its concerns for the state

of the Ebro River Basin. Spain acknowledged that some policies were controversial, expressed its commitment to preserving water resources, and noted that conflicts between interested stakeholders are inevitable in all activities.

UNEP: Paul Chabeda, on behalf of UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer, stressed the need for enhanced synergies between MEAs, and for partnerships with all stakeholders. He outlined UNEP's Ramsar-related work, and noted the importance of capacity building and equitable benefit sharing.

CARTAGENA CONVENTION: On Wednesday, 20 November, 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.

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD): Arthur Nogueira, on behalf of CBD Executive Secretary Hamdallah Zedan, stressed the importance of COP8, which was following the WSSD and preceding the 2003 International Year of Freshwater. He highlighted successful cooperation between Ramsar and the CBD.

UNESCO: 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.

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY: On Saturday, 23 November, Gonzalo Castro, GEF Secretariat, reported on a study by the World Bank and WWF to assess the impact of the Ramsar List, which concluded that listing sites increases effectiveness by raising awareness, improving conservation action, reducing threats, and promoting local participation in management.

Stating that this study reinforces the view that the Ramsar Convention contributes significantly to biodiversity, the Bahamas said this should be reflected in eligibility for GEF funding. Castro said the GEF/World Bank recognized Ramsar's contribution, and would be giving it a higher priority when making funding decisions.

Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco stressed that, while there is no direct access to GEF funding through the Ramsar Convention, wetlands projects can be funded through the GEF's focal areas on biodiversity and climate change.

STATEMENT FROM NIGERIA: Imeh Okopido, Minister of the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria, addressed the COP on Nigeria's status and activities in relation to Ramsar, various regional instruments, and other MEAs.

SIGNING CEREMONY: Delegates also witnessed the signing of Ramsar Convention cooperation agreements with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Niger Basin Authority. Secretary General Blasco commended the WWF on its role in facilitating these agreements.

COP8 RESOLUTIONS

During COP8, delegates considered and adopted 46 resolutions, conducting their work in Plenary and Technical Sessions, regional meetings, contact groups, and Committees. Most of these resolutions were prepared in advance by the Standing Committee and Ramsar Bureau. The following is a summary of all the resolutions adopted by the COP, including highlights of the negotiations and substantial amendments.

GUIDELINES FOR WATER ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT FOR MAINTAINING THE ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF WETLANDS: Delegates discussed the issue of water allocation and management during the Technical Session on Major Challenges and Emerging Opportunities, and subsequently in a contact group.



On Wednesday, 20 November, during the Technical Session, 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 water allocation and management (COP8 DOC.9). During ensuing regional group discussions, the Americas group agreed to delete preambular reference to the World Water Commission and Global Water Partnership, and to emphasize socioeconomic values. Within the Europe group, the UK, Norway, Sweden and WWF, opposed by Turkey and Spain, supported reference to the Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD).

On Tuesday, 26 November, the Plenary adopted the revised draft resolution with minor corrections.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.1 on guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands adopts the annexed *Guidelines for allocation and management of water for maintaining ecological functions of wetlands*. It urges Parties to give priority to the Guidelines' application, adapting them to national conditions, take into account relevant guidance and information, including information from the WCD's report, and ensure that the Guidelines' principles are incorporated into water and wetlands national policies. The resolution also, *inter alia*: encourages Parties with shared wetlands to cooperate to apply the Guidelines; urges donors to ensure that water allocation and management and wetlands production potential are addressed in river basin and water resource management projects; and encourages the development of projects promoting good practice in water allocation and management for maintaining wetlands' ecological functions.

The *Guidelines for allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands*, contained in an annex, include sections on, *inter alia*, principles, the decision-making framework, the process for determining water allocations, tools and methods, and implementation.

REPORT OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON DAMS:

The Report of the WCD was discussed on Wednesday, 20 November, during the Technical Session on Major Challenges and Emerging Opportunities, and subsequently within a contact group.

In the Technical Session, Jamie Skinner, IUCN, presented the draft resolution on the report of the WCD and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention (COP8 DR 2), stressing that the WCD report offers non-binding responses to conflicting environmental, social and economic objectives. During the ensuing regional group discussions, the Americas group agreed, *inter alia*, to reduce the emphasis on WCD guidance, and the Asia-Oceania group supported including text stressing the need to adapt WCD guidance to local conditions. Within the Europe group, Turkey stated its opposition to the draft resolution.

On Saturday, 23 November, Ruhakana Rugunda (Uganda), Chair of the Technical Session, reported to Plenary that an alternative draft resolution was being negotiated. The EU reiterated its support for recognizing the WCD's work. The contact group convened later that day, with China, speaking for India, Turkey, Nepal, and Brazil, introducing the alternative draft resolution, and Turkey reiterating its opposition to any reference to the WCD's report. Iran, China and Turkey stated that the original draft and the WCD report did not balance environmental and development needs, while Iran added that the WCD report was not widely accepted internationally. Delegates then debated text on water diversions as a source of conflicts.

Informal consultations on the draft produced compromise wording omitting specific factual information on dams' impacts, but recognizing both beneficial and negative impacts, including as a source of potential conflicts. Delegates still could not agree on several issues, however, retaining brackets around paragraphs on: a quote from the WCD report regarding dams' impacts; the WCD guidelines as an advisory tool to support decision making; and the use of "all available information, including information provided by the WCD." On conflict resolution processes, delegates agreed to compromise wording on "a forum for interaction and conflict resolution."

On Monday, 25 November, the contact group discussed a revised draft resolution, and 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 the quote from the WCD's report, and remaining brackets. A representative of the Convention on Migratory Species requested that a paragraph be inserted on dams' impacts on migratory species and river dolphins.

On Tuesday, 26 November, the Plenary adopted the revised draft resolution.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.2 recognizes that large dams, *inter alia*: have significantly contributed to development; may create artificial water bodies that provide wetland values and functions; and affect wetland hydrology and threaten freshwater species. It also recognizes that water diversions may be a source of conflict between users of wetland goods and services, urban and agricultural communities, and that the WCD is a non-governmental process that is not binding on governments.

The resolution encourages Parties to use all available information, including information from the WCD, to guide water resources allocation and decision making, and to take the necessary steps to maintain migration access for indigenous fish and other species. It also requests Parties to engage in national- and basin-level processes to assess alternatives to dam infrastructure. In addition, Parties are urged to implement the *Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands* when planning and operating dams, and undertake systematic environmental flow assessments to mitigate large dams' socioeconomic and ecological impacts. The resolution requests the STRP to review this resolution and the resolution on water allocation and management, and prepare guidance on these issues.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WETLANDS: The draft resolution on climate change and wetlands was taken up in the Technical Session on Major Challenges and Opportunities, and in a contact group that met almost daily throughout COP8.

On Wednesday, 20 November, Habiba Gitay, Australian National University, introduced the resolution (COP8 DR 3) during the Technical Session, highlighting climate change impacts on wetlands and biodiversity, including increased risk of extinction for wetland-dependent species, coral bleaching, and possible transformation of peatlands.

The contact group began by considering amendments proposed by Parties and representatives of the Global Biodiversity Forum, agreeing to include reference to the vulnerability of SIDS and the WSSD *Plan of Implementation*. However, a number of disagreements soon emerged, including over a proposed annex to the resolution, which set out key issues for addressing the impacts of climate change on wetlands, as well as options for adaptation and mitigation responses. While the US and Australia questioned the usefulness and accuracy of the annex, South Africa and several other Parties supported it, arguing that its removal would weaken



the resolution. After extensive discussions over several days, delegates finally agreed to remove the annex from the resolution, and insert similar text as an executive summary in the relevant background document on climate change (COP8 DOC.11). Other disagreements in the contact group related to text requesting that the STRP conduct further work on this issue, and to the strength of language on climate change science.

Following further informal consultations, participants reached agreement on a consensus text on Tuesday, 26 November, and a final revised draft was adopted in Plenary.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.4 recognizes that climate change may substantially affect wetlands, and notes the potentially important role of wetlands in adapting to and mitigating climate change. It calls on Parties to manage wetlands so as to increase their resilience to climate change and extreme climatic events, and calls on all relevant countries to take action to preserve and restore peatlands and other wetland types that are significant carbon stores. It urges Parties to make every effort when implementing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and, where appropriate, the Kyoto Protocol, to ensure that implementation does not lead to serious damage to wetlands' ecological character. It requests the STRP to draw on the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and other bodies, and to report on the status of international discussions at COP9.

INTEGRATED COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT:

Parties considered wetlands issues in integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) during the Technical Session on major challenges and emerging opportunities, which took place on Wednesday afternoon, 20 November. During the Technical Session, STRP Chair Ramón 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.

During regional groups' meetings, the Africa group proposed adding a paragraph welcoming the WSSD *Plan of Implementation's* emphasis on Ramsar Convention implementation as a tool to protect marine and coastal areas, while the Europe group proposed text urging Parties to take steps to halt commercial exploitation of wetland resources. On Monday, 25 November, the COP adopted the revised draft resolution incorporating amendments proposed by the regional groups.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.4 urges Parties to ensure that coastal wetlands and their values and functions for human well-being are fully recognized in planning and decision making in the coastal zone, including through ICZM initiatives. It further urges Parties to ensure that those responsible for implementing ICZM utilize the Ramsar *Principles and Guidelines* annexed to the resolution. The resolution calls on Parties to document case studies of good practices in integrating wetlands into ICZM, and requests the STRP to review these studies as the basis for providing further guidance on ICZM.

PARTNERSHIPS AND SYNERGIES: Delegates discussed partnerships and synergies with MEAs and other institutions during the Technical Session on Challenges and Opportunities, on Wednesday, 20 November. Ramsar Secretary General Blasco introduced the draft resolution (COP8 DR 5), highlighting a paragraph urging Parties to Ramsar and the CBD to develop projects on inland water ecosystems suitable for GEF consideration. During ensuing regional group discussions, the Africa group proposed adding a specific paragraph on cooperation between Ramsar and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary adopted the resolution.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.5 welcomes, *inter alia*:

Ramsar Convention's participation in various cooperative activities, including the Joint Work Plan with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Africa-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), regional seas conventions, and the third Joint Work Plan with the CBD; and the invitation to share information with, and participate in, the Joint Liaison Group between the CBD, the UNCCD and the UNFCCC. The resolution urges Parties to: increase collaboration at the national level between institutions and focal points responsible for the implementation of various MEAs; contribute to the joint Ramsar/CBD River Basin Initiative; and, for Parties that are also Parties to the CBD, develop projects on inland water ecosystems for consideration by the GEF. It also requests: the Bureau to strengthen its relations with the GEF Secretariat; directs the STRP to exchange information and cooperate with other MEAs; and invites the GEF Council to consider affording to the Ramsar Convention the status of observer.

FRAMEWORK FOR WETLAND INVENTORY: Delegates considered the issue of wetland inventory during the Technical Session on Baselines for Sustainable Use, on Thursday, 21 November. Max Finlayson, Wetlands International, gave a presentation on improving tools for identifying wetland assets (COP8 DOC.16) and introduced the draft resolution on a Ramsar Framework for Wetland Inventory (COP8 DR 6). During ensuing regional group discussions, the Africa group supported retention of a paragraph giving priority to wetland inventory projects in the SGF. Within the Americas group, the Caddo Lake Institute proposed including NGO- and locally-generated reports in the reporting system.

On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary adopted the resolution, incorporating amendments from the regional groups.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.6: adopts the annexed *Framework for Wetland Inventory*; urges Parties to continue giving a high priority to the compilation of comprehensive national wetland inventories; calls upon donors to assign priority to wetland inventory projects; and directs that priority be given to wetland inventory projects when considering projects submitted to the SGF. The annex to this resolution contains the *Framework for wetland inventory*, which includes sections on: background information and context; planning; and implementation of the inventory.

RAMSAR GUIDANCE ON WETLAND ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER: Delegates discussed Ramsar guidance on wetland ecological character during the Technical Session on Baselines for Sustainable Use, on Thursday, 21 November. Max Finlayson, Wetlands International, introduced the draft resolution on gaps in and harmonization of Ramsar guidance on wetland ecological character, inventory, assessment, and monitoring (COP8 DR 7). In the ensuing regional group discussions, the Asia-Oceania group considered text on the need for a methodology to identify wetlands' ecological boundaries, and on recognition of Parties' abilities to implement the task in the local context.

On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary adopted the revised draft resolution without amendments.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.7 requests the STRP to, *inter alia*, further review and develop guidance on gaps in defining and reporting the ecological character of wetlands, and ensure that the guidance and mechanisms provided can be applied according to Parties' capacity, priorities, and objectives. The resolution also urges Parties to use the MA guidance and methods for sub-global ecosystem assessments.

ASSESSING AND REPORTING THE STATUS AND TRENDS OF WETLANDS: Delegates considered the issue of assessment of and report on wetlands' status and trends during the



Technical Session on Baselines for Sustainable Use, on Thursday, 21 November. David Pritchard, Birdlife International, introduced the draft resolution (COP8 DR 8). During ensuing regional group discussions, the Asia-Oceania group recommended reflecting the need for a threshold and the precautionary approach in reporting.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.8 urges Parties, as a matter of high priority, to, *inter alia*, put in place information mechanisms on the changes or likely changes in the ecological character of any wetland in their territory. It also requests the STRP to prepare a report on the status and trends in the ecological character of sites in the Ramsar List, and further guidance on detecting, reporting and responding to change in ecological character. It also encourages Parties to take a precautionary approach, and calls on Parties to maintain or restore the ecological character of Ramsar sites. On Monday, 25 November, Plenary considered a revised draft and accepted Birdlife International's proposal not to limit the means in which information on change may be acquired. Delegates also agreed on language relating to human-induced adverse change. The COP then adopted the resolution.

GUIDELINES FOR INCORPORATING BIODIVERSITY-RELATED ISSUES INTO ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

During the Technical Session on Baselines for Sustainable Use, on Thursday, 21 November, Andrea Athanas, Shell/IUCN, presented the draft resolution on the guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into EIA legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment (SEA) adopted by the CBD (COP8 DR 9). Kenya urged further consideration of socioeconomic impacts. During ensuing regional group discussions, the Americas group agreed that references to "biodiversity" should apply equally to "conservation and wise use of wetlands." The Asia-Oceania group suggested clarifying definitions, and examining possible STRP assistance. Birdlife International recommended inserting a reference to the recently adopted CMS resolution on impact assessment.

On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary adopted the resolution with minor drafting corrections.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.9 urges Parties to use the annexed CBD *Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into EIA legislation and or/processes and in strategic environmental assessment*, and encourage local communities' and indigenous peoples' participation in impact assessments. The resolution also requests the STRP to continue identifying wetland-related elements of existing guidelines on impact assessment to identify gaps and prepare advice on applying SEA.

The resolution contains appendices on: questions pertinent to screening biodiversity impacts; screening criteria; examples of functions of the natural environment that are directly or indirectly derived from biodiversity; and a checklist on scoping for the identification of impacts of proposed projects on biodiversity components.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE RAMSAR LIST:

Delegates discussed the Strategic Framework for the Ramsar List in a Technical Session on the Ramsar List and in a contact group. On Thursday, 21 November, during the Technical Session, David Stroud, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, UK, discussed new approaches to using the Ramsar List and highlighted limited progress in implementing the Strategic Framework. The draft resolution (COP8 DR 10) was then taken up in the regional groups. The Americas group rejected reference to socioeconomic and cultural criteria, arguing that granting such criteria the same importance as that of scientific and ecological criteria would jeopardize the Convention's implementation and exceed its scope. The Africa group endorsed the resolution, arguing that the criteria are essential

for designing sites. The Europe group added an instruction to the STRP to analyze the consequences of introducing such criteria to the Ramsar sites' management. These diverging views were reflected in the contact group, and subsequently in Plenary. Delegates reached a compromise, and with additional amendments, adopted the resolution on improving implementation of the strategic Framework and Vision for the Ramsar List on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.10 instructs the STRP to develop "additional criteria and guidelines for the identification and designation of Ramsar sites, concerning socioeconomic and cultural values and functions that are relevant to biodiversity as listed in Annex I of the CBD." These would be applied on each occasion in conjunction with one or more existing criteria for the identification and designation of Ramsar sites, including a full analysis of the implications for Parties of the implementation of such criteria for the management of Ramsar sites. The resolution also expresses concern that Parties are not meeting their pledges and commitments under the Convention, and lists Parties from which Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) are needed as a matter of priority.

GUIDANCE ON UNDER-REPRESENTED WETLAND

TYPES: Under-represented wetland types were considered during the Technical Session on the Ramsar List on Thursday, 21 November. David Stroud introduced the draft resolution on additional guidance for identifying and designating under-represented wetland types as Ramsar sites (COP8 DR 11). During ensuing regional group discussions, the Americas group analyzed references to mangroves and coral reefs. Within the Asia-Oceania group, Birdlife International suggested language requesting the STRP to investigate methods for defining targets for representation of wetland types in the Ramsar List. The Europe group agreed to delete a glossary of peatland and mire terms.

On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary considered a revised draft. Delegates added references to sustainability of commercial exploitation and to sandflats in the section on mangroves. At Norway's request, amendments were introduced to avoid focusing solely on warm water coral reefs. The draft resolution was adopted with these amendments.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.11 adopts the annexed *Guidance for identifying and designating peatlands, wet grasslands, mangroves, and coral reefs as wetlands of international importance*. It also requests the STRP to interpret the term "under-represented type," and investigate methods for defining targets for representation of these wetland types in the Ramsar List.

MOUNTAIN WETLANDS: Delegates considered the resolution on mountain wetlands (COP8 DR 12) in Plenary and in informal discussions, adopting the text with minor amendments on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.12 recognizes the value of mountain wetlands as ecosystems with rich biodiversity and as sources of information on change, and calls on Parties, International Organization Partners (IOPs) and others to recognize their hydrological, biological, cultural and socioeconomic importance. It invites Parties to develop strategies and plans for wise use and conservation of mountain wetlands, and instructs the STRP to propose amendments to the Ramsar Classification System to cover all mountain wetlands.

ENHANCING INFORMATION ON RAMSAR SITES:

The COP considered enhancing the information on Ramsar sites in the Technical Session on the Ramsar List on Thursday, 21 November. Douglas Taylor, Wetlands International, presented the revised Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) and Explanatory Note and



Guidelines (COP8 DR 13). The subsequent regional group discussions focused on conditions for inclusion of information from non-Party sources. A revised text, taking account of these discussions, was adopted by Plenary on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.13 approves the annexed revised RIS, Note and Guidelines. The resolution requests the Bureau and Wetlands International to proceed with RIS compilation, management and dissemination, and to manage other relevant data subject to consultation with the Party concerned. It also requests the STRP to further develop guidance to the RIS, examine the Ramsar wetlands classification system to include additional types, and make recommendations to COP9 on reporting harmonization.

NEW GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT PLANNING:

Delegates discussed the new guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands on Friday, 22 November, during the Technical Session on Managing Wetlands for Sustainable Use and Human Well-Being, and in a contact group. Chaman Lal Trisal, Wetlands International, presented the guidelines (COP8 DR 14), which 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 socioeconomic and cultural features. The regional groups subsequently endorsed the guidelines with minor changes, and the revised resolution was adopted by the Plenary on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.14 adopts the annexed Guidelines, but recognizes that other valid management processes exist. It calls on Parties to ensure involvement of all stakeholders in all stages of management planning, and requests the Bureau to develop a field guide for the Guidelines' application.

SAN JOSÉ RECORD: Delegates discussed the San José Record on Friday, 22 November, in the Technical Session on Managing Wetlands for Sustainable Use and Human Well-Being, and in a contact group. During the Technical Session, Marie-Odile Guth, Director of Nature Conservation, France, presented the draft resolution (COP8 DR 15), stressing the Record's usefulness in exchange and dissemination of information on methods used in such sites, and in promotion of cost-effective management planning. The regional groups for Africa, Asia-Oceania and Europe subsequently endorsed the text subject to minor changes, while the Americas group reaffirmed its previously-formulated opposition to the Record, on the grounds that it relates to sites rather than to management methods, and would discriminate against well-managed sites that are in bad conservation status, and entail unjustified costs. The contact group agreed that the Record should focus on effective management practices rather than on well-managed sites. The Plenary adopted the resolution on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.15 approves the establishment of the Record for the promotion of wetlands management, subject to the availability of resources, and decides that its purpose is to focus attention on examples of effective management and exemplary practices. Criteria for acceptance to the record should conform to national guidelines, local requirements or the new management planning guidelines.

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR WETLAND

RESTORATION: Delegates considered the principles and guidelines for wetland restoration on Friday, 22 November, during the Technical Session on Managing Wetlands for Sustainable Use and Human Well-Being. STRP Member George Zalidis (Greece) presented the draft resolution (COP8 DR 16), highlighting the need for, national plans, performance standards, consideration of

existing natural conditions, multi-stakeholder involvement, and integration of the guidelines into wider policies. The topic was then taken up by the regional groups, with the Africa group proposing to add references to the WSSD *Plan of Implementation*, and the Asia-Oceania group discussing the need to pay particular attention to peatlands. These and other amendments were incorporated in a revised text, which was adopted on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.16 adopts the annexed principles and guidelines for wetland restoration. It welcomes WSSD's acknowledgement of the potential role of wetland restoration in mitigating effects of floods and droughts. It encourages investigation of opportunities to link poverty relief to wetlands restoration and calls on Parties to ensure that the cultural significance of wetlands considered for restoration is recognized.

GUIDELINES ON PEATLANDS: On Friday, 22 November, delegates considered the guidelines for global action on peatlands in the Technical Session on Managing Wetlands for Sustainable Use and Human Well-Being. Jack Rieley, International Peat Society, introduced the guidelines (COP8 DR 17). Noting that peatlands are under-represented in the Ramsar List, he stressed their cultural and socioeconomic values, and barriers to their sustainable and wise use. The topic was then taken up by the regional groups, which endorsed the draft resolution with minor changes. Discussion in Plenary led to insertion of a footnote on mires and other amendments. The revised resolution on guidelines was adopted on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.17 recognizes that peatlands, especially mires, comprise a large proportion of the world's wetlands, adopts the guidelines, and encourages Parties to implement them within their capacity. It requests the Convention bodies and others to establish a Coordinating Committee for global action on peatlands with extra-budgetary resources, and urges Parties to consider, as appropriate, the cultural heritage features of peatlands in implementing the guidelines in their management planning.

INVASIVE SPECIES: The resolution on invasive species was discussed by a contact group as well as in numerous informal consultations, and during the Technical Session on Wetlands Management. In the contact group, which met on Tuesday, 19 November, Australia, supported by the US and Brazil, requested deleting a reference to CBD Decision VI/23 on Guiding Principles on alien species, arguing that the decision had not been properly adopted by CBD COP6. The EU said that the decision was valid, and opposed deleting the reference. The contact group was unable to resolve this issue, and forwarded the resolution to Plenary.

On Wednesday, 20 November, the resolution was discussed during a meeting of the Europe regional group. The group unanimously endorsed the EU position regarding reference to the CBD decision.

During the Technical Session on Friday, 22 November, Geoffrey Howard, IUCN, explained the draft resolution on invasive species (COP8 DR 19), highlighting threats to wetlands posed by invasive species. Delegates then discussed the resolution in regional groups. The Africa group opposed reference to the CBD Biosafety Protocol. The Americas group discussed compromise language proposed by IUCN that referred to "any relevant guidelines adopted under other conventions," instead of a direct reference to the CBD Guiding Principles. The US supported the proposal. In the Asia-Oceania group, Japan opposed establishing a new STRP task to compile guidance on invasive species. The Europe group agreed to a proposal by Ecologistas en Acción for language on examining the impacts of water transfer associated with invasive species.



On Tuesday, 26 November, Plenary considered the revised draft resolution on invasive species, which incorporated IUCN compromise language and amendments proposed by the regional groups. The EU reiterated its position that the CBD decision is valid, and disagreed with the view that the usefulness of the reference to the CBD Guiding Principles was marginal. Norway supported the EU and stressed the need to address invasive species as one of the most serious threats to biodiversity. Australia reiterated its position that the CBD decision is not valid and that a direct reference to the CBD Guiding Principles would be inappropriate. The EU, Australia and Norway requested that the meeting's report reflect their statements, and the revised resolution was adopted.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.18 notes the relevance of the CBD Decision on guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into EIA legislation. The resolution urges Parties to: address problems of invasive species in a decisive and holistic manner, making use of any relevant guidelines or guiding principles adopted under other conventions; and undertake risk assessments of alien species, taking into account the effects of climate change and examine environmental impacts when moving water between river basins. It also encourages Parties to contribute to development of appropriate tools and guidance for addressing these problems; and further encourages cooperation with international organizations and MEAs in dealing with the threats of invasive species.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON THE CULTURAL VALUES OF WETLANDS: Delegates discussed the draft resolution on culture and wetlands in a Technical Session on Friday, 22 November, and in a contact group, which met three times.

During contact group discussions on Tuesday, 19 November, and Wednesday, 20 November, delegates provided general responses to the draft resolution (COP8 DR 19). Australia, Brazil, the US, and others opposed the proposed resolution and its guidelines in their current form, some stating that the language went beyond Ramsar's mandate, while other delegates, including some representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations, supported the proposed resolution.

On Friday, 22 November, a Technical Session on Cultural Aspects of Wetlands included an audio-visual presentation outlining different perspectives on cultural heritage of wetlands, and a presentation of an information paper and the draft resolution on guiding principles on the cultural aspects of wetlands (COP8 DOC.15 and DR 19). 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 to promote a bio-cultural approach to sustainable development.

Delegates then discussed the draft resolution in their regional groups. The Africa group supported adding reference to community property rights and prior informed consent. The Americas group called for consistency of terminology with other international instruments. The Asia-Oceania group supported deleting language on wetlands as a resource for tourism and recreational activities. Australia and New Zealand proposed either deleting text on the contribution of traditional activities to wetland conservation and wise use, or specifying that these activities should be consistent with World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements. Malaysia and the Philippines opposed references to the WTO. The Europe group discussed proposals on taking into account customary laws, referring to cultural values, instead of cultural aspects, and stakeholder involvement in planning, management and monitoring activities.

In the contact group on Monday, 25 November, delegates discussed a revised draft, but could not agree whether to delete text on the contribution of traditional activities to wetland conservation and use, or add a reference to the WTO. They agreed to text recognizing that sustainable use of wetland resources has created cultural landscapes of significant value to wetland conservation.

In Plenary on Tuesday, 26 November, delegates considered a new revised draft. Brazil opposed adoption of the resolution, stating that it went beyond Ramsar's mandate and that some language could be construed as disguised trade barriers. After some debate, the resolution was adopted by consensus, with Brazil registering its concern in the report of the meeting.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.19 recognizes that sustainable traditional uses of wetland resources have created landscapes of significant value to wetland conservation and wise use. It takes note of the Guiding Principles annexed to the resolution, and encourages Parties to consider using the Principles to take into account exclusively the conservation and enhancement of the cultural values of wetlands.

The resolution further encourages Parties, within their national and legal frameworks and available resources and capacity, to, *inter alia*:

- include aspects of cultural heritage in designing and implementing wetland management;
- carry out efforts with active participation of indigenous peoples and local communities;
- consider using cultural values of wetlands as a tool to strengthen this involvement;
- integrate cultural and social impact criteria into environmental assessments; and
- consider the compilation and assessment of cultural elements related to wetlands and water, particularly when preparing the Ramsar Information Sheet, taking into account, as appropriate, intellectual property rights, customary law, and prior informed consent, in accordance with CBD and World Intellectual Property Organization rules.

The resolution includes an annex containing the Guiding Principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites. The resolution also includes provisions on: recognizing cultural and heritage values in existing heritage, protection, legal framework and policies; and establishing mechanisms to consider how the Guiding Principles might be applied.

GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR INTERPRETING "URGENT NATIONAL INTERESTS" UNDER THE CONVENTION:

The COP considered the resolution on guidance for interpreting "urgent national interests" and considering compensation under Article 2.5 of the Convention (COP8 DR 20) in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November. On Monday, 25 November, the resolution was adopted.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.20 adopts the annexed *General guidance for interpreting "urgent national interests" under the Article 2.5 of the Convention and considering compensation under Article 4.2 of the Convention*, and encourages Parties to take this guidance into account, when invoking their rights under the Convention. The annex provides relevant general guidance on urgent national interests, compensation, and relevant procedural matters.

DEFINING RAMSAR SITE BOUNDARIES MORE ACCURATELY IN RAMSAR INFORMATION SHEETS: The draft resolution on defining Ramsar Site boundaries more accurately in RIS (COP8 DR21) was considered in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November, and adopted on Monday, 25 November.



Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.21 urges Parties to make efforts to ensure that the RIS and map for each site provide an accurate and up to date description of the site. It also calls upon the STRP to allow for a precise site boundary description in the *RIS Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*.

RAMSAR SITES NOT FULFILLING THE CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION ON THE RAMSAR LIST: The draft resolution on issues concerning Ramsar Sites that cease to fulfill or never fulfilled the Criteria for Designation as Ramsar Sites (COP8 DR 22) was considered in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November. Birdlife International and delegates proposed that the resolution request the Standing Committee to develop guidance on the relationship of the issues covered in this resolution with the resolutions on “urgent national interests” and on Ramsar site boundaries. The Plenary adopted the resolution, including the proposed amendment, on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.22 requests the Standing Committee to develop guidance on: identification of scenarios in which a listed Ramsar site may cease to fulfill the Criteria, obligations under the Convention and possible compensation measures, and procedures for possible deletion or restriction of boundaries of such sites; and the relationship of these issues to the resolutions on “urgent national interests” and on defining Ramsar site boundaries.

INCENTIVE MEASURES AS TOOLS FOR THE WISE USE OF WETLANDS: The draft resolution on incentive measures as tools for achieving the wise use of wetlands (COP8 DR 23) was considered in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November. 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. The resolution was adopted without amendments on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.23 urges Parties to continue review of the existing legislation and practices in order to identify and remove perverse incentives. It also encourages the use of a relevant IUCN web-based resource kit, and encourages the STRP to investigate linkages among incentives and related topics, including financial mechanisms and trade.

ENHANCING COMPLIANCE WITH MEAS AND NATIONAL ENFORCEMENT: On Thursday, 21 November, the COP considered the draft resolution on UNEP Guidelines for enhancing compliance with MEAs and national enforcement (COP8 DR 24). The EU proposed adding reference to the WSSD *Plan of Implementation*'s call for urgent action to promote corporate responsibility and accountability, including through the development and implementation of intergovernmental agreements and measures.

The COP adopted the revised resolution incorporating the proposed amendment on Monday, 25 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.24 invites Parties to make use of the assistance provided by the UNEP Guidelines. It also requests the Ramsar Bureau to continue “work with the UNEP Executive Director in efforts to include Administrative Authorities of the Ramsar Convention in activities” designed to strengthen the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the areas of compliance with and enforcement of MEAs.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2003-2008 AND WORK PLAN 2003-2005: On Monday, 18 November, Secretary General Blasco introduced the revised draft Strategic Plan 2003-2008 (COP8 DR 25 and Rev.1). Parties considered the drafts, along with the draft resolution on the Work Plan for 2003-2005 (COP8 DR 26) in Plenary on

Tuesday, 19 November, and in regional groups on Wednesday, 20 November. In addition, the Committee on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan convened four times, with discussions focusing on the relationship between Convention objectives and trade issues, reference to WSSD outcomes, and prioritization of objectives.

Regarding trade, some delegations, particularly Brazil, called for reference to compatibility of the Ramsar objectives with trade instruments, while others, led by the EU and Japan, contended that trade matters are outside the scope of Ramsar and should therefore not be addressed. After lengthy discussions, compromise text was agreed.

On WSSD references, delegations questioned the need for a detailed listing of Ramsar-related WSSD *Plan of Implementation* items, finally agreeing to refer to broad Ramsar-related key issues in the WSSD outcomes rather than to specific objectives.

The issue of prioritization was discussed at length in the regional groups, particularly the Americas and Asia. Objections were raised to the imposition of the global target identification on individual Parties, and to the specifically proposed prioritizations. The Committee agreed to remove reference to priorities from the Strategic Plan, and to move the targets to an Annex to the draft resolution on the work plan for the coming triennium (COP8 DR 26), in order to provide the Convention's bodies with general guidance on priorities for the work. Other issues raised in the regional groups and in the Committee included the appointment of a regional coordinator for the Oceania region, and the format of national reports. Additional drafting changes were introduced during the final debate in Plenary, and many Parties pledged to designate additional Ramsar sites. The revised draft resolution on the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008 and the resolution on implementation of the Strategic Plan 2003-2008 during the triennium 2003-2005 and national reports for Ramsar COP9 were adopted on Tuesday, 26 November, as orally amended in Plenary.

Final Resolutions: Strategic Plan: Resolution VIII.25 describes the progress, future challenges and general objectives for wetlands conservation and wise use, including demands for water services for agriculture, industry and human consumption, climate change, globalization of economic development, privatization and ecological damage. The response to these challenges is addressed through five general objectives of the Strategic Plan – wise use of all wetlands, implementation, international cooperation, implementation capacity and membership. These are delivered by 21 operational objectives, which further are divided into actions. These actions are detailed in Section 2 of the Strategic Plan.

Work Plan: Resolution VIII.26 approves annexed global targets for the management planning of the Convention for 2003-2005, and instructs the Bureau to prepare a Work Plan for the triennium by incorporating the targets into Section 2 of the Strategic Plan. It: urges Parties to prepare National targets and actions for implementing the Strategic Plan in the triennium; instructs the Bureau to analyze the priorities indicated by the resolutions; and requests the Standing Committee to determine the priority activities for the Bureau and the STRP. The resolution also instructs the Bureau to prepare a simple national report format for consideration at COP9.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY MATTERS: Financial and budgetary matters were taken up by the Plenary on Tuesday, 19 November, and subsequently by a Committee on Finance, which met four times.

On Tuesday, 19 November, Karen Jenderedjian (Armenia), Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, introduced the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters in the Plenary (COP8 DR 27). Argentina requested adjustments in its assessed contributions for



the next triennium. Some delegates objected to the scale of contributions, including Brazil, which requested its objection be recorded in the meeting's report. Cuba supported the proposed scale of contributions but objected to the procedure adopted by the UN to define it. While several delegates opposed a 5% budget increase for the next triennium and called for a nominal zero growth, most delegates supported a new proposed budget line for regional initiatives and COP-related costs. The EU called for prioritizing activities.

These issues were then taken up in the Finance Committee, where delegates sought clarifications on several budget lines. The Russian Federation reiterated its opposition 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. Delegates subsequently discussed a revised draft budget for 2003-2005, including a lower proposed annual increase of 4.5%.

In its final meeting held on Friday, 22 November, the Committee discussed a revised draft budget including a 4% annual budget increase. While many Parties supported this budget, the Russian Federation said the increase was still too high. Most delegates lamented the absence of funding for regional initiatives other than the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), a broad-based collaboration within the Ramsar framework covering the Mediterranean Basin. The Committee agreed to allocate extra annual savings to COP-related costs, and endorsed the revised budget.

On Monday, 25 November, the Plenary considered the revised draft resolution. 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. The COP then adopted the resolution by consensus.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.27: approves the annexed budget for 2003-2005; decides that each Party's contribution to the budget will follow the UN scale of assessments except for Parties with contributions of less than SFR 1,000; and calls upon Parties to pay their dues promptly and settle their arrears.

Annex I to the resolution includes a table on the core budget for 2003-2005, which provides for a 4% annual budget increase to a total of US\$3,678,564 in 2003. Annex II contains the list of Parties' annual contributions for 2003.

MODUS OPERANDI OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL (STRP): On Monday, 18 November, STRP Chair Jorge Jiménez Ramón presented his report (COP8 DOC.4), urging COP8 to review STRP's *modus operandi*. On Tuesday, 19 November, a contact group discussed and agreed on the need for an STRP Supporting Service, its terms of reference, and possible financing means, with the STRP representatives stressing that a contractual arrangement for the Service is more cost-effective than an expansion of STRP staff. Delegates also discussed, but could not agree on, a proposed change mandating the Standing Committee, rather than the COP, to select STRP members, which would enable appointing the members with the expertise relevant to the STRP's task list. The issue was carried to Plenary, where wide support was expressed for the proposed change, while the Russian Federation favored retaining elections by the COP. After further discussion, Parties adopted the resolution on Monday, 25 November, including the proposed change.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.28 approves the annexed STRP *modus operandi*. It also:

- endorses the establishment of an STRP Supporting Service;

- urges Parties to give priority to funding the STRP and the Bureau;
- invites seventeen bodies and organizations to consider establishing close working cooperative arrangements with the STRP;
- requests the Standing Committee to define and estimate the costs of the principal tasks and priorities for the STRP work plan, as well as appoint STRP members, Chair and Vice-Chair; and
- requests Parties to ensure continuity of STRP membership.

EVALUATION OF THE RAMSAR SMALL GRANTS FUND AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A RAMSAR ENDOWMENT FUND:

On Tuesday, 19 November, delegates discussed establishing a Ramsar Endowment Fund (COP8 DR 29), with Sweden and the Netherlands preferring alternative means to support Convention implementation. Secretary General Blasco stressed that the COP would have to either close down the SGF, or secure resources for its continued operation, and that the Endowment Fund was a means to do the latter. WWF supported broader criteria and simplified procedures for small grant allocation. On Monday, 25 November, in Plenary, delegates adopted the resolution on evaluating the SGF and establishing an endowment fund.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.29 notes that renewed efforts to attract greater financial resources for the SGF are required, and requests the Standing Committee to consider improving the SGF mechanism, particularly in relation to project submission and selection, and in monitoring and evaluation. It also urges Parties to continue making annual voluntary contributions, and agrees to establish a Ramsar Endowment Fund. Furthermore, the resolution calls on foundations, NGOs, businesses and individuals to contribute to the Endowment Fund.

REGIONAL INITIATIVES FOR FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION: In Plenary on Tuesday, 19 November, delegates considered a draft resolution on regional initiatives (COP8 DR 30). Japan supported strengthening the COP's authority in using the core budget, while Spain stressed the need for long-term self-sustainability of initiatives.

On Monday, 25 November, delegates adopted the resolution on regional initiatives for further implementation of the Convention without amendments.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.30 acknowledges that the MedWet Initiative can be a model example for other regional initiatives.

The resolution, *inter alia*:

- considers that including a budget line "Support to Regional Initiatives," warrants financial support from the Convention's core budget;
- approves financial support from the core budget for MedWet; and
- requests the Secretary General to ensure that the experience of the MedWet Coordination Unit and its partners will be at the disposal of other regional initiatives.

The resolution includes an annex on guidance for the development of regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention. Another annex includes the MedWet Coordination Budget for 2003-2005.

PROGRAMME ON COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS 2003-2008: On Monday, 25 November, in Plenary, delegates considered the draft resolution on communication, education and public awareness (CEPA). The COP agreed to a Japanese proposal reflecting that the proposed CEPA expert working group's activities should begin when resources permit, and the resolution was adopted.



Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.31 recognizes the importance given to CEPA in WSSD outcomes and states that sustainable development should be a focus of Ramsar's future CEPA activities.

The resolution instructs the STRP to establish, as appropriate, an Expert Working Group on CEPA and requests the Standing Committee to ensure that the STRP's programmes integrate CEPA as a cross-cutting tool in all tasks. It also contains provisions on, *inter alia*:

- adopting the term CEPA for Sustainable Development;
- establishing Wetland CEPA Action Plans, integrating them into environment, biodiversity wetland and water management policy instruments and programmes, and evaluating their effectiveness; and
- submitting case studies on lessons learned from CEPA-related efforts, and improving wetland-related components of education curricula;

The resolution contains provisions on strengthening collaboration with the CBD programmes, and participation in communication networks.

The resolution also contains annexes elaborating on the CEPA Programme for 2003-2005, and on priority tasks of the STRP's CEPA Working Group 2003-2005. It also includes appendices on the terms "CEPA" and "mainstreaming," and on possible target groups and stakeholders of the CEPA Programme.

MANGROVE ECOSYSTEMS: The draft resolution on the wise use of mangrove ecosystems (COP8 DR 32) was discussed in Plenary and in a contact group. The contact group met three times from 19-21 November. It agreed to: retain a reference to good practices on conservation and wise use of mangroves; change the resolution's title to "conservation, integrated management and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources"; and note mangroves' importance for indigenous peoples. The group did not adopt an NGO proposal for language discouraging investments in aquaculture and other activities that damage mangroves. Delegates also discussed adding references to sustainability in the paragraph on incorporating environmental criteria in activities affecting mangrove ecosystems, and supported the US proposal to recognize local communities' rights, uses and traditional customs in text on reviewing and implementing mangrove conservation policies. The draft resolution was also briefly discussed in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November, when Mangrove Action Project expressed concern about shrimp farming lobbyists' efforts to weaken the text. On Monday, 25 November, the COP adopted the revised resolution without further amendment.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.32 requests Parties to: modify their national policies and strategies that could have harmful effects on mangrove ecosystems; promote conservation, integrated management and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems in accordance with SEAs of the potentially harmful activities; and designate mangrove ecosystems for inclusion in the Ramsar List. It also exhorts updating and exchanging information on mangroves and their integrated management and sustainable use.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR IDENTIFYING, SUSTAINABLY MANAGING AND DESIGNATING TEMPORARY POOLS AS RAMSAR SITES: On Thursday, 21 November, delegates considered a draft resolution on additional guidance for temporary pools (COP8 DR 33). Australia and El Salvador proposed amendments regarding the role of temporary pools for local communities and indigenous peoples. On Monday, 25 November, the COP agreed to proposals on the importance of: voluntary actions by informed citizens to wetlands conservation; and temporary pools as nesting places for waterfowl. Parties then adopted the resolution.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.33 calls on Parties to, *inter alia*: undertake baseline inventory and regular surveillance of temporary pools; ensure maintenance of hydrological functions, and that temporary pools' natural resources are sustainably used; and recognize the importance of temporary pools to local communities and indigenous people. The resolution also includes provisions on working in collaboration with local communities and indigenous peoples to designate examples of temporary pools for the Ramsar List.

An annex to the resolution elaborates on guidance for identifying, sustainably managing and designating temporary pools as Ramsar sites.

AGRICULTURE, WETLANDS AND WATER

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: Delegates considered the draft resolution on agriculture and wetlands (COP8 DR 34) in a contact group and in Plenary. Contentious issues included references to landscapes, the CBD and the Ramsar-CBD Joint Work Plan, perverse incentives and subsidies, and unsustainable aquaculture. Delegates reviewed a revised draft resolution, but despite extensive discussions, differences remained on references to subsidies, the CBD and food security. Delegates were unable to agree on Brazil's proposal to specify 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 disputed. Delegates accepted Uganda's proposals relating to: dependence of the poor, especially women, on wetlands; dependence of local communities on wetland resources; and consideration of wetland tenure systems and user rights when reviewing land tenure policies.

In Plenary on Tuesday, 26 November, Ramsar Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson introduced amendments agreed to in the contact group, noting that two references to international agreements remained unresolved in paragraphs on ensuring consistency with other international agreements, including trade-related agreements. The Philippines said wetland management and conservation should not be subject to trade-related agreements, and proposed to delete paragraphs on consistency with trade, and add text affirming that the resolution is intended for wetland management and conservation. Brazil recommended that the issue be debated in the WTO, not within Ramsar, and opposed the resolution, requesting that his statement be registered in the meeting's report. Delegates adopted the resolution as amended by the contact group. The contact group continued discussions but failed to reach consensus on whether to refer to other international agreements when ensuring consistency of agricultural policies with trade-related agreements. Delegates agreed to language on identifying possible subsidies and incentives when reviewing agricultural policies, and enhancing positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.34 recognizes that agriculture has created distinctive and characteristic landscapes, including wetland ecosystems, and that ensuring compatibility between agricultural practices and wetland conservation objectives is a high priority. It also takes note of CBD Decision III/11 on agricultural biodiversity, and of uncertainties relating to wetland tenure systems, and that user rights over wetlands and water resources can have negative impacts on sustainable wetland management.

The resolution urges Parties to:

- identify and enhance positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, including sustainable agricultural systems related to these wetlands;
- consider wetland tenure systems and user rights to promote fair, transparent and sustainable management of wetlands and their resources when reviewing land tenure policies; and



- identify, when reviewing agricultural policies, possible subsidies or incentives that may have negative impacts on water resources and wetlands.

The resolution also requests Parties to ensure that activities and measures do not support agricultural policies that are inconsistent with trade-related agreements. It requests the STRP to establish a framework for informing on good agriculture-related practices and policies and to develop wetland-type specific management guidelines, and also requests it to ensure that consideration of agriculture and wetland issues is incorporated into other relevant areas of the STRP's work.

The resolution also invites IOPs, in cooperation with the Bureau, to work with other relevant bodies, particularly the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), WTO and CBD, to expand upon current reviews of the state of knowledge concerning interactions between agricultural practices and wetland functions.

THE IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS, PARTICULARLY DROUGHT, ON WETLAND ECOSYSTEMS: Delegates considered and adopted the resolution on the impact of natural disasters (COP8 DR 35) in Plenary on Tuesday, 26 November, with a minor amendment.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.35 recognizes the importance of synergies with other MEAs focusing on drought, particularly the UNCCD and the UNFCCC. The resolution: urges Parties affected by drought to maintain continued allocation of water to Ramsar sites in accordance with their natural hydrological regimes; and requests Parties to monitor and assess impacts of drought and other natural disasters on the ecological character of Ramsar Sites and on the livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples.

PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: On Thursday, 21 November, delegates discussed the resolution on participatory environmental management (PEM) (COP8 DR 36). Guatemala called for methodologies and funding for PEM. Australia recommended that the STRP elaborate on existing guidelines to include PEM, rather than prepare new ones. The EU proposed language: referring to the WSSD outcome; underscoring the importance of public participation in decision making; and recalling CBD Decision IV/4 on status and trends of the biodiversity of inland water ecosystems, and recommending Parties to involve local and indigenous communities in developing management plans and in projects that may affect inland water biodiversity.

On Tuesday, 26 November, the revised draft resolution was adopted without amendment.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.36 recalls relevant WSSD outcomes and CBD Decision IV/4, and recommends Parties to involve, as far as possible and as appropriate, local and indigenous communities in the development of management plans and projects that may affect inland water biodiversity.

The resolution also recognizes PEM as a useful tool for achieving sustainability in using and managing wetlands, and requests the STRP to prepare methodologies or guidelines for effective implementation of PEM.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: On Thursday, 21 November, in Plenary, delegates supported the draft resolution on migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Asia-Pacific region (COP8 DR 37), and on Tuesday, 26 November, adopted it.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.37 calls on Parties to extend support to the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee, and on development agencies to provide financial resources to governments and NGOs in the Asia-Pacific region to

implement the *Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 2001-2005*. It also requests the Standing Committee to provide regular reports on the progress and outcomes of implementing this Strategy, and to collaborate and share its experiences with waterbird flyway initiatives and agreements in other parts of the world.

WATERBIRD POPULATION ESTIMATES: The COP considered a draft resolution on waterbird population and the designation of Ramsar sites (COP8 DR 38) in Plenary on Thursday, 21 November. Brazil suggested reflecting the value of selecting Ramsar sites for the conservation of nationally or regionally threatened waterbirds. The COP adopted the resolution on Tuesday, 26 November, including Brazil's proposal.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.38 urges Parties to use 1% population thresholds as the basis for designating Ramsar sites, designate flyway-scale networks of Ramsar sites, and apply waterbird monitoring data to provide objective information for site management planning and the evaluation of national or regional wetland policies. It also welcomes the establishment of a Global Waterbird Monitoring Committee and Specialist Groups; and requests GEF support to the African/Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Flyway project.

HIGH ANDEAN WETLANDS: The draft resolution on high Andean wetlands (COP8 DR 39) was discussed in Plenary and by a contact group. On Wednesday, 20 November, the contact group agreed to insert references to sustainable tourism, the threat to wetlands from invasive species, and cultural values of wetlands and indigenous management practices. On Tuesday, 26 November, the Plenary adopted a revised draft resolution with minor amendments.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.39 supports the establishment of work programmes for High Andean wetlands, proposes a joint strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of High Andean ecosystems, and invites IOPs to support Parties in the design and implementation of joint activities. It also invites Parties with mountain ecosystems similar to those of the High Andean region to share information and experiences, and develop mechanisms for better planning and management of wise water use in the region. In addition, it requests Parties to retrieve, assess and document all ancestral practices of indigenous peoples that are compatible with the environment, and urges them to identify additional High Andean wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List.

GROUNDWATER USE AND WETLAND CONSERVATION: On Thursday, 21 November, the COP considered the resolution on guidelines for rendering the use of groundwater compatible with wetland conservation (COP8 DR 40) and supported the Netherlands' proposal to ensure that the resolution is relevant not only to arid and semi-arid areas, but also to other types of areas. On Tuesday, 26 November, the COP adopted, with this and other amendments, the revised draft.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.40 recognizes the link between ground and surface water and their use and management and that a large number of conflicts on this issue are stimulated by subsidies for various economic activities. It urges Parties to study the impacts of groundwater use on wetlands; invites them to review their respective subsidy programmes to avoid negative consequences for wetland conservation; and proposes that the STRP develop guidance on the sustainable use of groundwater resources. It also urges promoting participation of civil society within the framework of integrated water management.

REGIONAL RAMSAR CENTER FOR WESTERN AND CENTRAL ASIA: On Tuesday, 19 November, the COP considered a draft resolution on establishing a regional Ramsar center for training and research on wetlands in Western and Central Asia



(COP8 DR 41), with Belgium offering bilateral support for the center. The resolution was adopted without amendment on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.41 approves the initiative of Iran to establish a regional center in the subregion, and encourages interested Parties and organizations to contribute to its further development.

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES IN THE OCEANIA REGION: On Tuesday, 19 November, the COP considered the draft resolution on small island developing States (SIDS) (COP8 DR 42). Japan and France expressed concern over favoring one region. During regional group discussions on Wednesday, 20 November, the Oceania group proposed to reflect the need for an Oceania regional coordinator in the resolution's text. The COP adopted the revised resolution on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.42 urges the Bureau to recognize the need for a Regional Coordinator and to support, as interim arrangement, an intern for the Oceania Region. It also urges Australia and New Zealand, in cooperation with the US and France, to consider, *inter alia*, co-financing a Regional Coordinator post to help mobilize development assistance funds for implementing the Joint Work Programme of the Ramsar Bureau and the SPREP.

SUBREGIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AMERICA: On Tuesday, 19 November, the COP considered the draft resolution on a subregional strategy for South America (COP8 DR 43). On Tuesday, 26 November, the COP adopted the resolution with added language on national authorities' involvement in the strategy's design and implementation.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.43 approves the initiative to develop a subregional strategy and encourages its development and implementation.

NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT: On Thursday, 21 November, the Africa group considered and endorsed a draft resolution on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (COP8 DR 44), introduced by South Africa. On Tuesday, 26 November, the Plenary adopted the draft resolution without amendment.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.44 urges Parties to: provide support for implementing actions undertaken through NEPAD's Environment Initiative; use NEPAD, among others, to advance the Convention's objectives; and pay specific attention to the development and implementation of initiatives with transboundary elements. It also calls upon NEPAD development partners to provide support to African Parties to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan, and directs the Bureau to develop synergies between the Convention and NEPAD in Africa.

OPERATION OF THE COP AND EFFECTIVENESS OF RAMSAR RESOLUTIONS: On Monday, 18 November, the Conference established a Committee to consider the content and duration of future COPs. The following day, the Committee agreed that the efficiency of future COPs must be improved, and recommended: a procedural distinction between technical resolutions that can be finalized by the Standing Committee and the STRP, and those that require substantial discussion by the COP; mechanisms for preliminary review of draft resolutions; and longer lead-time for submission of draft resolutions. The regional groups endorsed the initiative, noting the need to allow Parties adequate opportunity to voice their positions on resolutions. The Committee's work resulted in the presentation of a draft resolution (COP8 DR 45) to Plenary on Monday, 25 November. The COP adopted a revised resolution on Tuesday, 26 November.

Final Resolution: Resolution VIII.45 directs the Standing Committee to review the process for adopting resolutions, from the drafting stage to implementation, focusing on effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention, and to make recommendations to COP9 on that basis. Parties agree that draft resolutions for COP9 should be considered for division by the Standing Committee into technical resolutions and others, with the technical resolutions receiving more attention by the STRP leaving the COP to only endorse them.

THANKS TO THE HOST COUNTRY: On Tuesday, 26 November, the COP adopted by acclamation a resolution thanking the Government of Spain for hosting COP8 (Resolution VIII.46).

DATE AND VENUE OF COP9

Ramsar Secretary General Blasco noted invitations from Uganda and Romania to host COP9. Romania withdrew its bid in favor of Uganda. The COP accepted Uganda's offer to host COP9 in 2005.

ELECTION OF PARTIES TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE

On Tuesday, 26 November, the COP elected Parties to the Ramsar Standing Committee. Japan, on behalf of the Asia region, noted that, because a 25th Party from Asia has recently acceded to the Convention, the region is now entitled to a third seat on the Committee. The COP elected the following Parties to the Committee: Africa – Botswana, Ghana and Morocco; Asia – Indonesia, Iran and Japan; Europe – Armenia, Austria, Romania, and Slovenia; North America – Canada; Neotropics – Argentina and Nicaragua; and Oceania – Papua New Guinea. The outgoing COP host, Spain, and the incoming host, Uganda, will also serve on the Committee.

Delegates agreed that, upon entry into force of a 25th Party from the Neotropics, the region will be entitled to a third member on the Committee - the Bahamas.

OTHER MATTERS

On Tuesday, 26 November, the COP considered the agenda item on Other Matters.

ANZALI WETLAND SITE: Iran announced a joint agreement with Japan on repairing and protecting the Anzali wetland site, and expressed hope this bilateral arrangement would serve as a useful model for future cooperation.

Iran also noted its disappointment at the small amount of voluntary funding for the SGF given its valuable role, and pledged US\$10,000 to the Fund for 2003.

SECRETARY GENERAL SELECTION PROCESS: Standing Committee Chair Hunter briefed the COP on the process to appoint a new Secretary General to replace Delmar Blasco, whose term ends in 2003. He noted that the selection panel had narrowed the list to five candidates, which would be interviewed prior to the Standing Committee meeting in February 2003.

OBITUARY NOTICE: Canada informed delegates of the death of James Patterson, noting his significant contribution to wetland conservation and protection.

CLOSING PLENARY

Delegates convened for the closing Plenary on Tuesday evening, 26 November, adopting the report of the meeting (COP8 DOC.41) with only minor amendments.

Following the adoption of the report, Ramsar Secretary General Blasco recognized the longstanding contribution of Eckhart Kuijken of Belgium to wetland conservation by presenting him with a "Wetlands Person of International Importance" award.



In their closing remarks, delegates congratulated Parties and observers, including IOPs and NGOs, and thanked Spain and the city of Valencia for their hospitality, as well as the Bureau, interpreters, translators, report writers, and the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*. Many speakers also thanked outgoing Secretary General Blasco for his invaluable contribution to the work of the Ramsar Convention, and expressed their gratitude to President Martorell for her chairing of COP8.

Wetlands International, speaking for the four IOPs, highlighted COP8 successes, including the budget increase and agreement on the Strategic Plan. He also drew attention to resolutions on dams, climate change, invasive species, culture, and agriculture, and urged Parties to implement the resolutions they had adopted. Noting the Convention's increasing focus on wetlands in the broader context of people and development, he congratulated Secretary General Blasco for encouraging the "mainstreaming of the Convention through partnerships."

Speaking on behalf of several NGOs, the Mexican Coordinating Agency for Managing Coastal Zones called on Parties to: show the political will needed to address and regulate sectors that impact negatively on wetlands; develop mechanisms to ensure that resolutions are implemented; and ensure effective participation of representatives of local communities, indigenous peoples and NGOs. A representative of indigenous peoples' organizations highlighted the links between culture and wetlands, and declared indigenous peoples' opposition to activities impacting negatively on wetlands, including shrimp farming and the construction of large dams. He suggested that representatives of local communities and indigenous peoples have a seat on the STRP.

Spain thanked participants for their hard work, and said she expected that it would be able to implement its strategic plan and ensure its compatibility with the Ramsar Strategic Plan.

Secretary General Blasco thanked Spain and Valencia for hosting a "successful, useful and pleasant experience." Observing that Ramsar is now a stronger and more mature Convention, he said the resolutions adopted at COP8 were extremely valuable for Ramsar's future. Participants thanked Secretary General Blasco with a standing ovation, and President Martorell presented him with a traditional, locally-made ceramic ornament. Thanking participants for their hard work, dedication and good will, she declared COP8 closed at 7:20 pm.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF COP8

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

For many delegates attending COP8, the biggest surprise was what greeted them when they first arrived. Valencia's Prince Felipe Science Museum is no ordinary conference center. Located in a district known as the "City of Arts and Science," the Museum is at the heart of a cluster of towering futuristic buildings – some still under construction – that look, almost literally, out of this world. Boasting an ultramodern style apparently plucked straight from a science fiction film, it seems the most unlikely of venues for a meeting on conserving wetlands and saving waterbirds.

In fact, the setting was appropriate. Like the neighborhood of downtown Valencia that hosted it, the Ramsar Convention is experiencing a transformation. Many who are close to the treaty would like to build it into an instrument fit for the future – something more visible, more relevant and of greater stature. These people viewed COP8 as crucial to continuing the Convention's evolution from a treaty to save waterfowl to a more comprehensive agreement housing the ambitious goal of managing one of the world's most important freshwater ecosystems.

A HUMBLE HOME

The Ramsar Convention had humble beginnings over thirty years ago with the rather narrow focus of protecting wetlands as a habitat for waterfowl. Since then, perceptions have changed. Awareness of environmental degradation, and ideas about how to respond, have evolved and expanded. The 1992 Earth Summit established the sustainable development agenda, stimulating heightened public and political interest and the development of new multilateral environmental instruments.

Many veterans of the Ramsar process believe the treaty is adapting well to this new environment. In 1999, participants at COP7 seemed impressed with the Convention's progress in broadening its relevance to wider environmental concerns, its success in initiating a closer dialogue with other environmental conventions, and the resolve of those seeking to make Ramsar a major player in the sustainable development arena.

As if confirming the growing profile of wetlands-related issues, the Convention has seen a jump in the number of Contracting Parties in the three years since COP7 – from 116 to 134. More impressive still, it has witnessed a 50% increase in the total area protected under the Ramsar List. Since COP7, wetlands issues have moved further into the spotlight. It is now clear that the world is facing a freshwater crisis, with some 1.5 billion people lacking ready access to drinking water. Wetlands, if managed sustainably, can play a key role in addressing this problem. They also have the potential to relieve other pressing problems by supporting biodiversity conservation, food security, and even poverty alleviation. In early September 2002, these issues were brought to the fore in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Although Ramsar itself received only a passing mention, the *Plan of Implementation* agreed in Johannesburg included many water- and wetlands-related goals.

A FULL HOUSE

The record number of participants attending COP8 provided further evidence that countries are taking wetlands more seriously. In Valencia, delegates faced a packed agenda aimed at further incorporating wetlands issues within the broader sustainable development agenda.

However, as a number of participants were quick to point out, the move to mainstream the Convention carries risks as well as benefits. The earlier narrow focus may have left Ramsar with less influence, but it also sheltered it from the political arguments that have plagued so many other MEAs during the past decade, including disputes over trade and environmental protection, and on the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples.

A TOWER OF BABEL?

The broader scope has brought more voices into the Convention. Diplomats versed in the hard world of climate change, biodiversity and trade talks now sit alongside waterfowl and wetland scientists, and not all these people seem to be speaking the same language. Successfully negotiating the political minefield of sensitive issues imported from other processes was clearly critical to the meeting's success.

A resolution setting out guiding principles on invasive alien species illustrates this problem. While it tried to tackle an important issue for wetland management, the resolution also imported text and ideas from a decision taken during COP6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This was controversial because Australia disputes whether the COP6 decision was actually adopted, and is clearly uncomfortable with its content. The Australians feel the CBD decision contains text on the precautionary approach that could be used to justify increased trade protectionism. The EU, on



the other hand, supports the CBD decision on the grounds that it is the only comprehensive framework to address the primary threat to global biodiversity. Naturally enough, it wanted the CBD decision reflected in the Ramsar resolution. Ultimately, a compromise proposed by IUCN broke the deadlock, but only after many days of tense negotiations. The compromise removed specific reference to the CBD decision, instead making a more general statement referring to related decisions in other MEAs.

Disputes from the WTO on trade barriers also spilled over into Ramsar in negotiations on agriculture and cultural issues, as did sensitivities over a resolution on climate change, which imported many of the arguments and rigid positions already aired during numerous UNFCCC negotiations. The resolution on the Report of the World Commission on Dams introduced another controversial issue onto COP8's agenda that deeply divided delegates. Turkey and some developing countries believe the Commission's report is too negative in its assessment of the environmental impacts of large dams, and have been actively opposing reference to it in several sustainable development fora. The EU and others support the Commission's assessment. Delegates managed to find compromises on all these issues, but only after intense and often fractious negotiations.

GETTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER

Another challenge resulting from Ramsar's ongoing transformation is whether the current structures developed to implement the Convention's work remain adequate or appropriate. In particular, some participants at COP8 were questioning the organization of Ramsar's COPs and Bureau, and the state of its budget.

Several delegates questioned why the agenda was so overloaded, and said the efforts to link wetlands with other processes had distracted them from "more important work" on practical guidelines and support for on-the-ground wetlands activities. In spite of the heavy agenda, however, a majority seemed to feel that COP8 was well organized, and had retained sufficient emphasis on practical matters. Many delegates also appreciated the informal, transparent and inclusive approach taken by Ramsar, which was a "refreshing change" from many other MEAs, while several also felt COP8 had profited from a longstanding Ramsar tradition of positive Party-NGO relations, and the ongoing input of the International Organization Partners.

Ramsar's higher profile also led some to question the role of its Bureau. Again, many observers like the way its NGO roots allow the Bureau to be more pro-active than the more neutral UN-based secretariats. Nevertheless, several delegates new to the process seemed surprised at the nature of Party-Secretariat relations. The choice of a successor to Delmar Blasco, who retires as Secretary General in July 2003, may well have an impact on the Bureau's sense of identity and future role.

HOME ECONOMICS

The Ramsar budget - small even by MEA standards - represented yet another challenge for Parties attending COP8. With donor fatigue and a proliferation of environmental treaties competing for limited funds, expectations were low. Most participants seemed pleased with the modest 4% annual increase for 2003-2005, especially as it provided for the STRP Support Service, a new budget line that funds outsourcing some STRP and Bureau work. NGOs believe this will reduce costs and better service Parties' needs. Participants were also pleased at the inclusion of a budget line for regional initiatives. Although only one such initiative was funded in the 2003-2005 budget, the new budget line opens up the prospect for funding other regional schemes, a move that could greatly advance Convention implementation.

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

As delegates departed COP8's futuristic venue on Tuesday evening, many seemed satisfied that the Convention had made progress on "mainstreaming" its work while avoiding many potential political pitfalls along the way through their ambitious agenda. According to one IGO representative, COP8 had given Ramsar a stronger mandate and higher profile, and shown its ability to respond to the challenges of a changing world. It had even, he claimed, "taken up the gauntlet" from the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development by linking Ramsar to the Summit's water, development and poverty priorities.

More skeptical delegates questioned how valuable these linkages really are. They point out that the Ramsar Convention still does not have the same profile as the climate change or biodiversity conventions, and probably never will.

Perhaps that isn't really the point. Although Ramsar's ongoing mainstreaming exercise has its uses, some of those closest to the Convention argue that Ramsar has been, and should always be, about promoting practical work on-the-ground.

According to a World Bank-WWF study presented at COP8, the designation of wetlands as Ramsar Sites often has a significant effect on the quality of conservation and wise-use. Broad principles on wetlands' linkages to cultural issues or climate change might help Parties take a more holistic approach in managing their wetlands. But it is just as likely that COP8's less controversial resolutions, advancing work on mundane matters such as site designation, under-represented wetland types, inventories and assessment frameworks, and integrated coastal zone management, will have a greater practical impact on the wetlands Ramsar aims to conserve.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR BEFORE COP9

CBD EXPERT MEETING: The Meeting of Experts on Methods and Guidelines for the Rapid Assessment of Biological Diversity of Inland Water Ecosystems, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, will take place from 2-4 December 2002, in Montreal, Canada. For more information, contact: CBD Secretariat; tel: +1-514-288-2220; fax: +1-514-288-6588; e-mail: secretariat@biodiv.org; Internet: <http://www.biodiv.org>

SECOND SOUTH ASIA WATER FORUM: The second South Asia Water Forum will take place from 17-19 December 2002, in Islamabad, Pakistan. The Forum will focus on "Groundwater in South Asia." Topics include: resources assessment and planning, groundwater institutions, natural environment and demand management, dams and development and groundwater. For more information, contact: Karamat Ali, Pakistan Water Partnership; tel: +92-51-285-6250; fax: +92-51-285-6286; e-mail: s.pwp@cgjar.org; Internet: <http://www.gwpforum.org/>

SECOND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: The second International Symposium on Integrated Water Resources Management will convene from 22-24 January 2003, in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa, under the theme "Towards Sustainable Water Utilization in the 21st Century." For more information, contact: André Görgens, International Association of Hydrological Sciences; tel: +27-21-424-5544; fax: +27-21-424-5588; e-mail: agorgens@ing.sun.ac.za; Internet: <http://www.civeng.sun.ac.za/images/ICWRS-SYMP-announcement.doc>

UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL: The 22nd Session of the UNEP Governing Council will meet from 3-7 February 2003, in Nairobi, Kenya. For more information, contact: Beverly Miller, UNEP; tel: +254-2-623411; fax: +254-2-623748; e-mail: millerb@unep.org; Internet: <http://www.unep.org>



CBD SBSTTA-8: The eighth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity will take place from 10-14 March 2003, in Montreal, Canada. For more information, contact: CBD Secretariat; tel: +1-514-288-2220; fax: +1-514-288-6588; e-mail: secretariat@biodiv.org; Internet: <http://www.biodiv.org>

HYDROLOGY AND WATER RESOURCES CONFERENCE (APHW 2003): The first International Conference on Hydrology and Water Resources in the Asia-Pacific Region will take place from 13-15 March 2003, in Kyoto, Japan. Topics on the agenda include regional characteristics and water problems, wise management, water resources development, and sound utilization of water resources. For more information, contact: Takara Kaoru, Secretary-General, APHW 2003 Conf., Kyoto University; tel: +81-774-38-4131; fax: +81-774-38-4130; e-mail: APHW2003@rdp.dpri.kyoto-u.ac.jp; Internet: <http://www.wrrc.dpri.kyoto-u.ac.jp/~aphw/APHW2003/WWW/>

THIRD WORLD WATER FORUM: The third World Water Forum will take place from 16-23 March 2003, in Kyoto, Japan. For more information, contact: Secretariat of the Third World Water Forum; tel: +81-3-5212-1645; fax: +81-3-5212-1649; e-mail: office@water-forum3.com; Internet: <http://www.worldwaterforum.org>

H2O AMERICAS CONFERENCE: The first Conference of the Institute of the Americas' Water Programme will take place from 24-26 April 2003, in San Diego, California. Emphasis will be given to conservation, water reuse, and better integration and utilization between agriculture and urban areas in Latin America. For more information, contact: Isabel Alvarez, Director, Health and Water Program, Institute of the Americas; tel: +1-858-453-5560 ext. 122; fax: +1-858-453-2165; e-mail: isabel@iamericas.org; Internet: <http://www.iamericas.org/events/event.html?isnw=1&eid=286>

RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE: The second International Conference on River Basin Management will take place from 28-30 April 2003, in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Spain. It will focus on overall management of riverine systems. For more information, contact: Stacey Hobbs, Conference Secretariat, River Basin Management 2003; Wessex Institute of Technology; tel: +44-238-029-3223; fax: +44-238-029-2853; e-mail: shobbs@wessex.ac.uk; Internet: <http://www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2003/riverbasin03/>

MANGROVE 2003: The 2003 Mangrove Conference will convene from 20-24 May 2003, in Salvador, Brazil. The Conference will focus on "Connecting research and participative management of estuaries and mangroves." For more information, contact: Antonio Fernando Queiroz; tel: +55-71-203-8561; fax: +55-71-332-4085; e-mail: mangrove2003@ufba.br; Internet: <http://www.mangrove2003.ufba.br>

THIRD SYMPOSIUM FOR EUROPEAN FRESHWATER SCIENCES: The third Symposium for European Freshwater Sciences will take place from 13-18 July 2003, in Edinburgh, United Kingdom. It will focus on conservation and management of freshwater in Europe. For more information, contact: SEFS Office, European Freshwater Biological Association; tel: +44-15394-42468; fax: +44-15394-46914; e-mail: sefs3@fba.org.uk; Internet: <http://www.sefs.info>

ENVIROWATER 2003: The sixth Inter-Regional Conference on Environment will convene under the theme "Water: Land and Water Use Planning and Management" from 3-5 September 2003, in Albacete, Spain. For more information, contact: Antonio Brasa,

University of Castilla-La Mancha; tel: +34-967-599-200; fax: +34-967-599-238; e-mail: envirowater2003@uclm.es; Internet: <http://crea.uclm.es/envirowater2003.php>

FIFTH WORLD PARKS CONGRESS: The Fifth World Parks Congress will be held in Durban, South Africa, from 8-17 September 2003. The Congress meets every ten years, and is a major global forum for protected areas. For more information, contact: Peter Shadie, Executive Officer, World Parks Congress; tel: +41-22-999-0159; e-mail: pds@hq.iucn.org; Internet: <http://iucn.org/themes/wcpa/>

CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION COP6: The sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-6) for the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is scheduled to meet in September 2003 in Havana, Cuba. For more information, contact: UNCCD Secretariat; tel: +49-228-815-2800; fax: +49-228-815-2899; e-mail: secretariat@unccd.int; Internet: <http://www.unccd.int>

ELEVENTH WORLD WATER CONGRESS: The eleventh World Water Congress will meet from 5-9 October 2003, under the theme "Water Resources Management in the 21st Century," in Madrid, Spain. Major themes will include: relevance and sustainability of intensive groundwater developments influence of socio-economic, cultural and religious factors in water resources policies, and funding and participation in water management. For more information, contact: Conference Secretariat, International Water Resources Association; fax: +1-618-453-2671; e-mail: wwater2003@cedex.es; Internet: <http://www.cedex.es/iwracongress2003>

CONVENTION ON BIODIVERSITY COP-7: The seventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is tentatively scheduled to meet from 15-26 March 2004, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. For more information, contact: CBD Secretariat; tel: +1-514-288-2220; fax: +1-514-288-6588; e-mail: secretariat@biodiv.org; Internet: <http://www.biodiv.org>

WATERBIRDS CONFERENCE: The International Conference on "Waterbirds around the World" will take place from 3-8 April 2004, in Edinburgh, Scotland. For more information, contact: Gerard C. Boere, Wetlands International; tel: +31-317-478887; fax: +31-317-478850; e-mail: boere@wetlands.agro.nl; Internet: <http://www.wetlands.org>

CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES COP-8: The eighth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals is scheduled to take place in 2005 at a venue to be determined. For more information, contact: CMS Secretariat; tel: +49-228-815-2402; fax: +49-228-815-2449; e-mail: cms@unep.de; Internet: <http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms>

AGREEMENT ON CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS MOP3: The third Meeting of the Parties (MOP) of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is scheduled to take place before the end of 2005 or early 2006. For more information, contact: AEWA Secretariat; tel: +49-228-815-2413; fax: +49-228-815-2450; e-mail: aewa@unep.de; Internet: <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/AEWA>

RAMSAR CONVENTION COP9: the ninth Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention (COP9) is scheduled to convene in Uganda in 2005. For more information, contact: the Ramsar Secretariat; tel: +41-22-999-0170; fax: +41-22-999-0169; e-mail: ramsar@ramsar.org; Internet: <http://www.ramsar.org>