



RAMSAR COP9 HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2005

Delegates to the Ninth Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP9) to the Ramsar Convention met in a morning Plenary session to consider administrative and implementation matters, including the Convention's Strategic Plan 2003-2008 and its Work Plan for 2006-2008, finance and budget issues as well as draft resolutions and recommendations. In the afternoon, Parties convened in regional meetings to review positions on draft resolutions and caucus views for the upcoming sessions on administration, implementation and technical issues. The Finance Committee also met to address finance and budget issues.

PLENARY

REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLAN 2003-2008 AND WORK PLAN FOR 2006-2008: Ramsar Secretary General Peter Bridgewater introduced the agenda item on the Convention's Strategic Plan 2003-2008: a review of progress (COP9 Doc. 5 and Docs. 9-13), and drew attention to lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan, which he said was too ambitious. He noted effective implementation of the Convention at both regional and national levels, and the GEF's involvement in Ramsar activities. Delegates agreed to defer discussion on this agenda item to the one on the Convention's Work Plan for 2006-2008.

Bridgewater introduced the document on streamlining the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention (COP9 DR9), noting that the draft resolution is meant to be a trial exercise in setting up priorities and result areas for the Work Plan for the 2006-2008 triennium.

Delegates welcomed streamlining the Strategic Plan, stressing that its targets should be realistic and recognize Parties' abilities and limited resources. They highlighted: the need to simplify the Plan for better monitoring at regional and national levels; setting of clear directions for all organizations working on wetland conservation; new ways to develop future strategic plans; and use of the Plan as guidance for prioritizing implementation at the national level. Delegates agreed to establish a drafting group to incorporate suggestions into the draft resolution.

FINANCIAL REPORT AND PROPOSED BUDGET: Subgroup on Finance of the Standing Committee Chair Trevor Swerdfager (Canada) introduced the financial report and proposed budget for the 2006-2008 triennium (COP9 DR13). He highlighted issues confronted during the 2003-2005 triennium, including: balancing the budget deficit; improving budget tracking and reporting; and identifying means for establishing the Ramsar Endowment Fund, which was so far unsuccessful.

On issues for the 2006-2008 triennium, he underscored the need to further discuss budget allocations, including the proposed four percent increase, and drew attention to the significant financial challenge posed by current and projected outstanding dues. Swerdfager stressed that budget priority setting is critical as the funds to accomplish all tasks currently assigned to the Secretariat and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) are insufficient.

He also honored the memory of Robert Martel (Canada), recently deceased Subgroup Chair, highlighting his contribution to its work.

The US, supported by ARGENTINA, MEXICO and BRAZIL, requested the budget be maintained without the four percent increase in the next triennium. JAPAN and the EU also requested zero increase in the budget, but noted that if this went against consensus, they would be flexible. AUSTRALIA, supported by PAPUA NEW GUINEA and SAMOA, favored marginal increases. NICARAGUA said the Subgroup's priority should be allocating funds across priorities. ECUADOR noted that COP10 is not reflected in the proposed budget.

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
Additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept: The Secretariat announced establishment of a contact group to consider the draft resolution (COP9 DR1 Annexes A and B), to be co-led by Norway and Trinidad and Tobago.

Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention: Bridgewater introduced the draft resolution on the future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention (COP9 DR2), saying the STRP has identified the tasks it considers as immediate and high priority in Annex 1. He explained that all tasks would be consolidated with those agreed under COP9 DR9 into the Work Plan for 2006-2008.

The EU welcomed the resolution and requested consideration of inland waterways. Regarding Annex 2, paragraph 124 concerning issues/sectors for future work, ARGENTINA requested removing reference to the defense and military sector.

The NETHERLANDS, supported by SOUTH AFRICA and the UK and opposed by ARGENTINA, urged that Annex 2, Task 111 (wetlands and agriculture) be made an immediate priority, pledging its support to fulfilling this priority under COP8 Resolution VIII.34 (Agriculture, wetlands and water resources management). The Secretariat suggested delegates discuss this in regional groups. AUSTRIA emphasized the need for two-way communication between the STRP and its focal points.

Engagement of the Convention in the ongoing multilateral processes dealing with water: Bridgewater introduced the draft resolution (COP9 DR3), stressing that it does not seek to transform



Ramsar into a Convention on water but rather a Convention that understands its role in addressing water issues. He also noted the relevance of Ramsar's work to the ongoing implementation cycle on water, sanitation and human settlements under the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and the upcoming Fourth World Water Forum.

The EU, AUSTRALIA and JAPAN supported the draft resolution, with AUSTRALIA requesting a reference to the Global Water Partnership and JAPAN cautioning against exceeding the scope of the Convention. EL SALVADOR drew attention to the lack of data on wetland ecosystems' demand for water.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chaired by Trevor Swerdfager (Canada), the Finance Committee held a brief session in the afternoon for an exchange of views on finance and budgetary issues in the 2003-2005 triennium. The Committee focused on the following elements in relation to the expenditure under the current budget: payment for IUCN services as an overhead cost; salary increases and travel costs; and non-payment of annual dues by Parties. CANADA proposed, and delegates agreed to, reallocating funds to support the STRP's work.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

AFRICA: Chaired by Fanuel A. Demas (Namibia) and attended by Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs), the Africa Regional Group engaged in discussions with the emphasis on making the most of the first Ramsar COP held in Africa. GHANA urged strengthening the region's position and representation by: fulfilling Parties' credential requirements and paying their dues, as the region has the largest outstanding portion; and participating in the STRP and other Committees.

Delegates discussed all 24 draft resolutions and established working and drafting groups to further consider them. Delegates called for inclusion of Africa-focused proposals in several draft resolutions, including: engagement in multilateral processes on water (COP9 DR3); natural disaster prevention (COP9 DR10); and the Ramsar Endowment Fund (COP9 DR14).

Regarding cultural values (COP9 DR1 and its Annexes and COP9 DR22 Rev. 1), SOUTH AFRICA emphasized the importance of clarifying the cultural criterion and whether it was applicable regardless of ecological factors. Regarding Ramsar sites no longer meeting criteria for listing (COP9 DR7), the Secretariat noted that, as drafted, more than half of the African Ramsar sites may be removed from the List with possible contractual ramifications for Parties. Parties acknowledged the importance of wetlands for poverty reduction (COP9 DR15) and welcomed Nigeria's proposal for creating synergies with IUCN protected areas categories (COP9 DR24).

AMERICAS: The Americas Regional Group, chaired by John Bowleg (Bahamas), reviewed regional positions on several draft resolutions. On scientific and technical aspects (COP9 DR2), PERU, supported by CANADA, opposed language on water rights. Following comments on sustainable use of fish resources (COP9 DR4), the group established an informal group to redraft the resolution. EL SALVADOR, BRAZIL, NICARAGUA and others expressed concern with the draft resolution on [transboundary] [transnational] Ramsar sites (COP9 DR6), citing, *inter alia*, sovereignty issues. On natural disaster prevention (COP9 DR10), CUBA suggested language referring to the impact of extreme climatic events, the US emphasized pre-disaster management and prevention, and the group agreed to consult informally. The group opposed the draft resolution on wetlands of the Antarctic (COP9 DR23), calling on Switzerland to withdraw its proposal. On the revised Strategic Framework and guidelines (COP9 DR1 Annex B), BRAZIL, with others, submitted proposed revisions for the group's consideration.

ASIA: The meeting was co-chaired by Yasaman Rajabkhah Shalmany (Iran) and Syamsuar Effendy (Indonesia). Participants expressed views on various draft resolutions.

On the revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (COP9 DR1), one delegate noted that guidelines should not deviate from national laws. The group considered and accepted the suggested amendments concerning ecological indicators (COP9 DR1 Annex D). On designation and management of [transboundary] [transnational] Ramsar sites (COP9 DR6), delegates could not form a common position on the use of terms "transboundary" or "transnational".

On streamlining the implementation of the Strategic Plan (COP9 DR9), many countries noted concerns about unrealistic targets in the Plan. Regarding revised *modus operandi* of the STRP (COP9 DR12), several Parties suggested country rotation in selecting experts. Many countries supported the Convention's work on wetlands and poverty reduction and natural disaster prevention.

Regarding an information text on managing wetlands and waterbirds in response to avian flu, some countries said the focus should be on waterbirds only, while others noted that some of the recommendations in the text are beyond the scope of the Convention.

EUROPE: Europe Regional Group Chair Gordana Beltram (Slovenia) opened discussions on draft resolutions. On cultural values of wetlands (COP9 DR1 and its Annexes and COP9 DR22 Rev. 1), delegates favored recognizing cultural values in addition to the already established ecological character in identifying Wetlands of International Importance. The group supported the draft resolution on natural disaster prevention (COP9 DR10) and supported Wetlands International's proposal to recognize the role of wetlands in flood prevention and mitigation, and their contribution to combating desertification. Delegates also discussed priorities for the STRP's programme of work 2006-2008 (COP9 DR2 Annex 1), noting that immediate priority tasks should be covered by the STRP's core budget. The group also supported the revised draft resolution proposed by Switzerland on synergies between the Convention and the Antarctic Treaty (COP9 DR23 Rev. 2), welcoming its extension to address the Arctic region.

OCEANIA: The Oceania Regional Group meeting was chaired by Navu Kwapena (Papua New Guinea) and attended by Australia, New Zealand, Samoa and Papua New Guinea. Fiji and WWF were present as observers. Discussions included an overview of the Subgroup on Finance, a brief report on the Credentials Committee and specific wording for COP9 DR 22 Rev. 1 on cultural values. The group supported inclusion of the International Water Management Institute in the list of IOPs. The group highlighted: the need to protect wetlands against avian flu; financial implications of the draft resolution on the Antarctic; and Fiji's forthcoming accession to the Convention.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

Although most COP9 participants have by now arrived in Kampala, some countries are still failing to show up on the map, owing to what some delegates referred to as the ongoing "regional reshuffle." Perhaps it is true, but some were left wondering what happened to Israel. According to a pamphlet by the Ramsar Regional Center for Central and West Asia, color map included, Israel is not located in the region. Yet this wasn't the only region being "reshuffled" on Thursday.

The hottest topic of the discussions was in fact the coldest, as regional meetings considered a draft resolution on developing synergies between the Ramsar Convention and the Antarctic Treaty. After Switzerland, the proponent of the resolution, revised the text to include the Arctic region, some participants questioned whether the ongoing climate change could make the Poles switch places.

But indeed geography can be restored: in the first instance, by simply handing the map to the Israeli delegation. As for the switching Poles, it seems like the draft resolution has been met with a lot of opposition, so Antarctica might be jettisoned out of the reshuffle anyway.