



RAMSAR COP9 HIGHLIGHTS FRIDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2005

Delegates to Ramsar COP9 convened in the Plenary throughout the day to consider draft resolutions and recommendations. The Committee on Finance and a contact group on the Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands convened in the afternoon. The Asia regional meeting resumed discussions in the morning, and informal consultations on conservation and sustainable use of fish resources took place in the evening.

PLENARY

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Regional initiatives: Ramsar Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson introduced COP9 DR8 Rev.1. CANADA supported heavy reliance on regional initiatives. INDIA called for additional financial and budgetary support. NEW ZEALAND advocated continuing support for the outposted regional support officer in the Oceania region. On reference to MedWet in the resolution, IRAN asked that other regional initiatives and their coordination units be highlighted. FRANCE asked about potential financial costs to the Secretariat in supporting initiatives. Responding to a query from the floor, the Secretariat clarified that initiatives under development could be brought to the Standing Committee intersessionally, not only to COPs. BRAZIL called for including the Plata Basin initiative in Annex 1 Section B. COLOMBIA, with ARGENTINA, proposed adding the High Andean Initiative, and SUDAN, with KENYA, the Nile Basin Initiative. ISRAEL supported the Central and Western Asia Regional Center based in Iran and partnerships across the entire region. JAPAN called for careful consideration of the MedWet budget. NEPAL asked the Secretariat to further develop the Himalayan Initiative for COP10. PAPUA NEW GUINEA called attention to special circumstances and needs of small island developing States. The EU called for clarifying the purpose of funding. ROMANIA cited potential cooperation in the Black Sea region. Ramsar Secretary General Peter Bridgewater expressed concern over lack of resources for new initiatives, noted core budget funds could “kick start” some initiatives, and said a revised draft resolution would include proposed amendments.

Conservation and sustainable use of fish resources: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR4. The EU, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, NORWAY and NEW ZEALAND supported the resolution but requested several amendments, particularly concerning references to ecologically damaging fishing gear and practices. BRAZIL, supported by ECUADOR, requested deleting references to the upcoming World Bank report on management and sustainable use of mangroves. EGYPT and EL SALVADOR pointed to lack of accurate data on fisheries in wetland ecosystems, with THAILAND calling for greater involvement of International Organization Partners in collecting such data. UGANDA

highlighted the role of rice fish systems, and SAINT LUCIA urged addressing chemical pollution in Ramsar sites. Delegates agreed to engage in informal consultations to consolidate regional views.

Synergies with other international biodiversity-related processes: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR5. The US, NEW ZEALAND and ARGENTINA expressed concerns about costs, but the Secretariat said the resolution’s intent is to increase efficiency, not costs. Many delegates welcomed national reporting synergies, some proposing common modules and formats, and LESOTHO urging synergies for indicators, data collection and information sharing. The US opposed references to UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre’s consultative workshop on the issue of Harmonized National Reporting.

The EU suggested reference to the Global Biodiversity Partnership proposed by the Biodiversity Liaison Group established under the aegis of the CBD. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, supported by EL SALVADOR and UGANDA, proposed broadening the resolution to include the UNFCCC and CCD, while CANADA proposed noting the intention to do so in the future. The Secretariat noted the Convention’s observer status with the UNFCCC. The CBD welcomed progress made in CBD/Ramsar collaboration and urged a renewal of the joint work programme. An informal group, with the US as facilitator, was established to consolidate amendments.

Designation and management of [transnational]

[transboundary] Ramsar sites: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR6, noting that historically it has been the Parties’ prerogative to designate Wetlands of International Importance in their territories only. The EU supported the resolution. SWITZERLAND, ARGENTINA and IRAN noted their preference to use the term “transboundary.” BRAZIL, supported by EL SALVADOR and CHILE, noted the resolution did not take into account political sensitivities and suggested deferring the decision to COP10. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION supported the resolution with the wording “internationally managed sites.” Delegates agreed to resolve the issue in informal consultations.

In the afternoon, BRAZIL read a consensus text requesting the Secretariat to consult with IUCN to prepare a list of existing models of cooperation between countries with adjacent wetlands, to be presented to interested Parties and the Standing Committee meeting in 2007, for further consideration of the issue at COP10.

Ramsar’s role in natural disaster prevention, mitigation and adaptation: Bridgewater noted the emergence of the draft resolution (COP9 DR10) following the Asian tsunami. CUBA proposed paragraphs on impacts of extreme climatic events and mobilizing resources to restore affected wetlands. MALI proposed text on inland flooding, severe drought and invasive alien species. INDONESIA called for assistance in monitoring long term impacts on wetlands. The US, on behalf of an informal



group in the Americas region, proposed, *inter alia*: renaming the resolution to reflect the role of Ramsar in mitigating impacts associated with natural phenomena; and a reference to “affected people” instead of “local communities and indigenous people.” She also proposed paragraphs emphasizing pre-disaster planning, including appropriate contingency planning, and development of materials highlighting lessons learned on pre-disaster measures. BANGLADESH proposed reference to tidal surges, cyclones and earthquakes. THAILAND supported a global programme on wetlands and natural disasters in collaboration with UN organizations in order to mobilize additional funding. Citing drought, ISRAEL opposed “scaling up” of types of disasters, and suggested a separate resolution addressing coastal areas. PAKISTAN proposed a reference to the recent South Asian earthquake to assess its impacts on biodiversity.

Use of the term “Ramsar Secretariat”: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR11, acknowledging the IUCN Environmental Law Centre’s help in producing an information paper on the issue (COP9 Doc. 19). The EU and JAPAN supported the draft resolution, noting that this would align the terminology with similar multilateral environmental agreements. MALI called for maintaining administrative ties with IUCN and with Switzerland as Ramsar’s host country.

Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the criteria for designation: Regarding COP9 DR7, MALAWI called for assistance and measures to rehabilitate sites, rather than simply deleting them.

Ramsar Endowment Fund: Bridgewater introduced the draft resolution on evaluation of the Ramsar Endowment Fund as a mechanism to resource the Small Grants Fund (SGF) (COP9 DR14). GHANA urged focusing on developing countries in allocating SGF resources. INDIA expressed concern about rescission of COP8’s decision to establish the Fund and urged the Secretariat to pursue other mechanisms to support the SGF. IRAN and MALAYSIA stressed the need to pursue other financial options for Asia. The EU sought clarification on the nature of the funding operation. ARMENIA underscored the importance of the SGF mechanism and cautioned against losing time in mobilizing resources to support SGF before COP10. Bridgewater stressed the need for greater clarity in the Convention’s financial direction in the next triennium.

Wetlands and poverty reduction: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR15, which was met with strong support by Parties. JAPAN and ARGENTINA requested striking references to ecosystem services. EL SALVADOR highlighted private sector involvement.

Revised *modus operandi* of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel: STRP Chair Max Finlayson (Australia) introduced COP9 DR12, which received general support, with the EU, NEW ZEALAND and AUSTRIA stressing stronger national focal point engagement. Bridgewater gave his personal commitment to ensure this in the next triennium. Regarding appointment of experts, ARGENTINA, with COSTA RICA and the US, said nominees should not be limited to “globally-recognized” experts and, opposed by the US, urged equitable regional representation. GABON urged allowing Parties to propose high priority thematic work areas. GHANA, on behalf of the Africa region, with ECUADOR, urged consultation with national authorities on nominating experts, and between focal points and Parties to ensure continuing national and regional applicability of the STRP’s work. INDONESIA suggested the Panel identify capacity needs for the 2006-2008 triennium, and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION stressed preservation of the STRP’s “institutional memory.” SWITZERLAND requested the Panel and Standing Committee Chairs to provide advice on a future STRP spokesperson.

The status of sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance: Bridgewater introduced COP9 DR16, noting a considerable increase in the quality and number of sites

and highlighting a greater diversity in the types of designated wetlands. Parties provided updated information concerning Ramsar site designations since COP8, planned extensions to existing Ramsar sites, and future designations of new or extended sites. Supporting the resolution, the Africa region and WWF requested the Secretary General to consider options for assisting and encouraging Parties in their actions in response to threatened changes in the ecological character of Ramsar sites. Supported by SWITZERLAND, SWEDEN, HUNGARY, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the UK and BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, WWF suggested inclusion of a request to Greece to provide information on its efforts to restore the ecological character of seven Ramsar sites included in the Montreux Record, with a view to removing these sites from the Record. He also welcomed steps taken by Spain to revise its National Hydrological Plan. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL, opposed by AUSTRALIA, proposed a new paragraph on STRP’s role in assessing wetland management effectiveness.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Finance Committee, chaired by Trevor Swerdfager (Canada), met in the afternoon to consider the budget for 2006-2008 (COP9 DR13). JAPAN and the US proposed zero increase in the budget. The EU supported the increase, but proposed balancing budget lines, particularly between regional initiatives and the STRP, stressing the need for more scientific and technical services to the Convention. Several Parties expressed flexibility with a budget increase of less than four percent. ARMENIA, COLOMBIA and GHANA supported an increase but, with the US, opposed shifting budget lines between regional initiatives and the STRP. The US noted funds could be saved by restructuring the Panel’s work methodology. It was proposed that a breakdown on budgets for regional initiatives and the STRP be produced for further consideration.

ASIA REGIONAL GROUP MEETING

The meeting considered financial and budgetary matters (COP9 DR13 and 14). Parties highlighted: SGF’s importance, the need for mechanisms to fund regional projects, and attracting outside funding sources to address lack of SGF. On the budget, several Parties underscored the need for a strong Secretariat and adequate budget to implement the Strategic Plan.

CONTACT GROUP

The contact group on the conceptual framework for the wise use of wetlands (COP9 DR1 Annexes A and B), chaired by Gunn Paulsen (Norway) and Nadra Nathai-Gyann (Trinidad and Tobago), met to discuss points of contention in the Annexes, including ecosystem services and Criterion 1 for designating Wetlands of International Importance. There were also proposals to add more criteria, including one on cultural values.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

On the fourth day of COP9, both delegates and the Secretariat were keen to shift the draft resolution process into high gear, but protracted discussions on most issues meant that Saturday’s agenda had to be modified to accommodate an extra Plenary session to consider the remaining seven draft resolutions. Some delegates commented on the Secretariat’s pronounced guidance on several draft resolutions, with one joking that it had begun “cracking the whip.” But Parties themselves opted for sticks instead of carrots. Unlike at COP8, where a well-known international NGO struggled to find a surrogate Party to carry its proposal for a resolution chastising the host country for its planned large-scale hydro project, this time several Parties were quick to help deliver a new rebuke from the same NGO to another European government for its poor management of Ramsar sites. It remains to be seen though, whether it would be sticks, carrots or translators working overtime that will keep the COP on track.