



RAMSAR COP9 HIGHLIGHTS SATURDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2005

Ramsar COP9 delegates met in two Plenary sessions to consider remaining draft resolutions and hear a presentation on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA). Technical sessions on applying the wise use principle in integrated water management and on culture and knowledge in wetland management were held in the afternoon. An informal Ministerial Dialogue took place throughout the day. Parties also convened in contact groups on the wise use concept and cultural values, fish resources, protected areas, and avian flu.

PLENARY

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

International Organization Partners (IOPs): Secretary General Peter Bridgewater introduced COP9 DR17. Many Parties welcomed inclusion of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) as a new IOP, and encouraged extending the listing to other organizations, especially those specializing in water management. The draft resolution was adopted without amendment.

Review of COP decisions: On COP9 DR18, AUSTRALIA stressed the review should be restricted to COP decisions only, not to Convention text, and urged terms of reference be developed and a timetable set to complete the review before COP10. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL suggested STRP participate in the review, with the EU saying it should be reflected in the budget.

CEPA Oversight Panel: On establishing an oversight panel for communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities of the Convention (COP9 DR19), IRAN, supported by many, proposed setting CEPA priorities, and adding to the terms of reference language on identifying gaps between capacity building opportunities and needs for wetland professionals and stakeholders. He also proposed each region select a focal point. SPAIN said the Standing Committee should send an expert to the COP to define how the COP can contribute to the STRP's work. CANADA expressed concern over budget implications and JAPAN requested clarification from the Finance Committee. ARGENTINA said national CEPA coordinators and one representative from each region should be formally linked to the panel. SOUTH AFRICA said the panel should clarify the CEPA focal point's role, and the Secretariat should develop a procedure for identifying and appointing the two national focal points. THAILAND stressed Party input to CEPA representatives and consolidating CEPA data with national reports.

Regional wetland symposia: JAPAN introduced its proposed resolution on the importance of regional wetland symposia (COP9

DR20), highlighting meetings of the Asian Wetland Symposia and advocating its use as a model for other regions. THAILAND proposed organizing subregional meetings to prepare for regional fora. The EU supported the resolution provided there were no financial implications.

Integrated, cross-biome planning and management of wetlands, especially in small island developing States (SIDS): SAMOA introduced COP9 DR21 Rev.1, noting it would assist SIDS in fulfilling obligations under various agreements. AUSTRALIA and WWF welcomed the draft resolution. CUBA noted reservations regarding use of the term "cross-biome." Further discussions on the resolution were deferred pending the outcome of informal consultations.

Wetlands of the Antarctic: SWITZERLAND withdrew its proposed resolution (COP9 DR23), but called for information exchange with the Arctic Council and the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat on polar wetlands conservation. She said the 2007-2008 International Polar Year is an opportunity to further discuss the issue before COP10.

Ramsar sites and national systems of protected areas: On COP9 DR24, the resolution's proponent NIGERIA said it represents an example of harmonization between Ramsar and CBD reporting requirements. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SUDAN, MALI and WWF supported the resolution. The US, NEW ZEALAND, CHILE and ECUADOR opposed references to IUCN protected area categories, while BRAZIL proposed a compromise text making use of the categories optional. An informal contact group was established.

Managing wetlands and waterbirds in response to highly pathogenic avian influenza: The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR25, noting many Parties were still seeking instructions from their governments. The US suggested several amendments to ensure the resolution stays within the scope of the Convention. AUSTRALIA questioned whether the STRP is qualified to develop guidelines for landscape planning around wetlands, with CHINA and SURINAM opposing them. NEW ZEALAND noted the absence of information on cost implications. SENEGAL and KENYA highlighted the importance of the draft resolution to Africa, while SAMOA underlined vulnerability of SIDS. EGYPT called for an integrated approach, and FRANCE highlighted Ramsar's early warning role. Delegates agreed to establish a contact group, chaired by the UK, to produce a revised text.

Additional scientific and technical guidance on the wise use concept: Delegates resumed discussions of COP9 DR1 and its Annexes, agreeing to an amendment in Annex C proposed by EL SALVADOR concerning further research on wetland ecological functions.



Concerning Annex D on ecological “outcome-oriented” indicators for assessing the implementation effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention, the Secretariat noted that a revised text had been prepared.

Annex E on an integrated framework for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring was adopted as part of COP9 DR1.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON THE MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT: Rebecca D’Cruz, Synthesis Team Co-Chair, presented the MA synthesis report on “Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Wetlands and Water.” She said the report reviewed the global extent of wetland ecosystems, noting underrepresented wetland types such as peatlands. She stressed that ecosystem services are vital to human well-being, lamenting that many of these services are overused, mismanaged or degraded, and highlighted policy choices available to reduce wetland degradation while maintaining benefits. Distinguishing between free and economically valued services, she said many of the social and economic benefits have not been taken into account by decision makers. She said economic instruments promote conservation and wise use, and noted difficulties in valuation due to differing cultural values. Noting accelerated wetland degradation, she highlighted a reduction of human well-being, especially in developing countries, coupled with an increased demand for wetland services. She said policy decisions must address trade offs between current and future use, and emphasized cross sectoral and ecosystem approaches. She noted the report would help set the future agenda for Ramsar, and could be used to raise awareness on wetlands.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS: Applying the wise use principle in integrated water management: Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson briefed participants on Ramsar-related outcomes of the 13th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-13).

Steve Mitchell, South Africa, presented Southern and Eastern Africa’s experience in integrated water resources management (IWRM). He underscored the role of wetlands in maintaining the hydrological cycle and ecological functions, and called for their explicit recognition in IWRM and adaptive management.

Mamoru Shigemoto, Japan, described actions to rehabilitate wetlands in the Tokyo Bay through application of IWRM and integrated coastal zone management approaches.

On the EU Water Framework Directive, Bart Fokkens, the Netherlands, highlighted its complementarity and mutual supportiveness with Ramsar, while Gerhard Sigmund, Austria, lamented its lack of consideration for Austria’s wetlands and supported establishing national coordination points for IWRM.

On managing water for wetlands and agriculture, David Molden, IWMI, highlighted food security and water resources linkages and the challenges faced in achieving poverty alleviation targets. Ger Bergkamp, IUCN, outlined research on determining values of wetland ecosystems and how to incorporate these values into decision making.

Culture and knowledge in wetland management: Secretary General Bridgewater stressed the importance of culture in management and wise use of wetlands, above using it as an aid in determining site designation. Thymio Papayannis, Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos, reviewed activities of the MedWet Cultural Working Group and, discussing changing cultural landscapes, noted loss of traditional activities. He emphasized incorporating cultural aspects into wetland management while respecting social specificity of culture. Traditional elders from the Paroo River area in Australia highlighted aboriginal values identified in a cultural mapping project and the importance of building relationships among relevant stakeholders. Sansanee Choowaew, Thailand, emphasized a culture-based approach to managing wetlands, and highlighted, *inter alia*, joint efforts between temples and local communities,

and marking temples as wildlife refuges. Mónica Herzig, Mexico, highlighted local community involvement in the planning process, and said culture is a broad term and a systematic approach has yet to be developed. Maria José Viñals, Spain, discussed progress made in the Mediterranean region for incorporating cultural values in wetland management through: restoring cultural heritage; increasing wetland awareness; conserving cultural landscapes; and valuing cultural tradition.

MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE

Kahinda Otafiire, Minister for Water, Lands and the Environment, Uganda, chaired an informal Ministerial Dialogue, attended by Ministers and high-level representatives from over fifteen countries. The meeting: endorsed the outcomes of CSD-13 and the 2005-2015 ‘Water for Life’ Decade; focused on Convention implementation; urged support of regional initiatives; and supported the Kampala Declaration.

CONTACT GROUPS

DR1 ANNEX A AND B AND DR 22: Co-chaired by Gunn Paulsen (Norway) and Nadra Nathai-Gyan (Trinidad and Tobago), the Contact Group on additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept (DR1 Annex A, Rev.1 and COP9 DR1 Annex B, Rev.1) and cultural values (COP9 DR22 Rev.1) met throughout the day. In the morning session, delegates reached consensus on the definition of “ecological character” and “change in ecological character,” in Annex A, and agreed to include footnoted text, supported by the STRP, as part of the resolution. Delegates agreed to change ecological “services” to “benefits.” Parties agreed to delete a table on ecosystem services. However, DR22 dominated the discussions. While the Group agreed that cultural values should be considered when designating Ramsar sites, there was disagreement whether cultural values should be added as a criterion for designating Wetlands of International Importance. Opponents cited conflict with national legislation. Informals continued into the evening.

AVIAN FLU: The Contact Group, chaired by David Stroud (UK), met in the afternoon to consider COP9 DR25. Participants agreed to insert a new preambular paragraph on strengthening research and monitoring related to migration of and trade in waterbirds, and disease processes in wild bird populations. An additional preambular paragraph refers to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement’s request for support from the Convention and others to establish a funding regime to develop long-term monitoring of waterbird populations.

A new operative paragraph underlining the importance of developing and implementing national contingency or action plans was added. The paragraph on developing guidelines for landscape planning was deleted. Instead, the group agreed to add paragraphs requesting STRP to provide relevant input related to practical measures to reduce the risk of disease transmission between wild and domesticated birds to agencies developing contingency and wetland management plans and to assist in sharing information.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

As COP9 delegates juggled Plenary and technical sessions with contact groups, their attention was captured by a fledgling draft resolution on avian flu. While many were optimistic that the resolution could at least address the risk of avian flu outbreaks, agreement is unlikely to be reached on who in the resolution’s text will be made responsible for the risk: wild birds, waterbirds, domesticated birds, or just birds. In response to some weak language, one observer hoped that after Sunday’s field trips, those who are still unsure about Ramsar’s role in addressing the issue will develop some sense of urgency. Another delegate quipped that a decision will have to be reached before delegates migrate to next week’s Convention on Migratory Species COP8 in Nairobi, where discussions on the topic will take flight again.