

RAMSAR COP 10 HIGHLIGHTS

THURSDAY 30, OCTOBER 2008

Ramsar COP 10 delegates met in morning and afternoon plenary sessions to hear a special presentation on the Lake Natron wetlands, Tanzania and address issues and recommendations arising from previous COPs, the strategic plan, and financing and the budget. In the afternoon, regional groups convened to coordinate their positions and views on upcoming agenda items. Contact groups on the budget and the legal status of the Ramsar Secretariat met in lunchtime and evening sessions.

PLENARY

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: Delegates viewed a trailer for “The Crimson Wing,” a film about Flamingos in the Lake Natron wetlands in Tanzania. Following this, Batilda Burian, Minister of State for Environment, Tanzania, described efforts to conserve the Lake Natron wetlands and reported on the establishment of the Lake Natron Trust Fund in cooperation between the Ramsar Convention and Disney Nature.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS COPs: Transboundary Ramsar Sites and their Management: The Secretariat introduced COP 10 Doc.38 on progress made and proposals for further work on the management of transboundary Ramsar sites, which was outstanding from COP 9 due to lack of agreement. He noted that the document contains a recommendation by the Standing Committee not to reopen the item at this COP and to first review existing experiences in transboundary wetlands management and the adequacy of current guidance for designation and management of transboundary Ramsar sites in the Strategic Framework. BRAZIL supported the Secretariat’s approach but requested that references to “international river basin management” be replaced since the concept is not sufficiently defined.

Legal Status of the Ramsar Secretariat: Regarding the legal status of the Ramsar Secretariat, currently hosted by IUCN, Secretary-General Anada Tiéga outlined activities conducted by the Secretariat on the options for the future, as laid out in a study commissioned by the Secretariat (COP 10 Doc.20, 20 Add.1 and 35 and COP 10 DR 5). He noted that the study considers three options: one, maintaining the current arrangement with IUCN; two, becoming an independent entity; and three, seeking UN integration and administration by UNEP. Tiéga also pointed to the long-term implications on the Convention and its operation, highlighting, in particular, the need for a partnership approach

that takes Ramsar’s unique structure into account, improves its image and enhances implementation.

CHINA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, TUNISIA, MALAYSIA and others supported option three, with SURINAME and MALAYSIA noting that the option needs further elaboration to fully understand its implications. Noting the Convention is gaining global significance, KENYA supported improving its image, and enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness by joining the UN.

JAPAN and NEW ZEALAND said positive and negative impacts of each option on parties should be analyzed, including financial implications, with JAPAN stressing that the options on the Secretariat becoming an independent entity and seeking UN integration are not feasible as they would result in budgetary increases of 25 percent. Morocco, speaking for Arab parties, advocated that Arabic be an official Ramsar language and that the Credentials Committee include an Arabic speaker. A contact group, co-chaired by Australia and Ecuador, was established to address the Secretariat’s legal status and the draft decision on facilitating the work of the Secretariat on the international level.

RAMSAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2014: The Secretariat introduced the item (COP 10 Doc.8 and DR 1), requesting the COP to review the draft strategic plan as the basis for future implementation. Pointing to the increase in global demand for food commodities, THAILAND recommended integrating national wetland policies and instruments with those on agriculture. He also proposed a subtarget on listing of under-represented wetlands as Ramsar sites and the possible identification by STRP of appropriate targets for listing specific under-represented wetlands, such as river estuaries, mangrove forests and freshwater swamps. NEW ZEALAND noted potential difficulties in achieving some of the strategic plan’s objectives given the time frame. INDONESIA expressed support for the strategic plan, noting its incorporation into his country’s national wetland action plan. CHILE stressed the need to involve all productive sectors, and cautioned against holding the COP every four years.

INDIA, KENYA and TANZANIA called for developing quantifiable parameters for monitoring and evaluation of wetland interventions, adequate scientific databases, guidelines on science-based wetland development, and freshwater and risk management. SWITZERLAND suggested that a mid-term review on the strategic plan’s progress could be held at COP 11. SUDAN welcomed the establishment of National Focal Points for CEPA to strengthen implementation. GUATEMALA

emphasized the need to involve indigenous and local communities in dispute settlements.

WWF, on behalf of IOPs, noted that IOPs are committed to mobilizing resources and partnerships for priority issues under the Convention. The KOREAN WETLAND INSTITUTE welcomed the inclusion of NGOs in Ramsar Committees, but noted that their role is not clearly specified.

FINANCIAL REPORT AND BUDGET: Herb Raffaele, Chair of the Standing Committee's Subgroup on Finance, presented the documentation on financial and budgetary matters (COP 10 Doc.17 and 18) and budget options for the 2009-2012 (COP 10 DR 2 Rev.1). The draft resolution's annex contains four options: zero nominal growth; three percent increase or zero real growth; four percent increase; and 11.75 percent increase, which would include funding for an additional Secretariat staff member to work on partnerships and fundraising, as well as for increasing capacity for regional initiatives. Raffaele then outlined details of the four options and their implications with respect to regional initiatives, the STRP, CEPA, partnerships and Secretariat staffing. He also noted challenges facing the Convention such as support for NFPs.

NORWAY identified Secretariat staffing levels as a key constraint in effective implementation in light of an increase in the number of parties, Convention work and wetland sites. IRAN, PANAMA and IRAQ supported the four percent growth option, with IRAN stressing the need for additional regional technical staff, PANAMA advocating expansion of regional initiatives, and IRAQ calling for technical support for the regional center in Iran.

REGIONAL GROUPS

AFRICA: This Group was chaired by Batilda Burian, Tanzania. Musonda Mumba, UNEP, outlined issues relating to climate change adaptation in Africa and UNEP's intention to mobilize African governments and scientists to establish a network aimed at increasing understanding of climate change impacts.

Herb Raffaele, Finance and Budget Committee Chair, said the option providing for an 11.75 percent increase would probably not be approved and encouraged parties to express their willingness to increase individual contributions. The majority of parties supported a four percent budget increase, which several parties observed would not have a significant impact on their individual contributions.

ASIA: This group was chaired by Guo Shueng, China, who invited comments on the budget options and other draft resolutions of interest to parties. Delegates discussed the implications of the proposed budget options and assistance for implementation. Many countries supported the four percent growth option, while JAPAN supported a zero percent increase. The group also discussed other draft resolutions, including the Secretariat's legal status and regional initiatives.

AMERICAS: This group was chaired by John Bowleg, the Bahamas. The US preferred the zero nominal growth option, while many others favored either the real growth or the four percent budget growth option. There was consensus for maintaining the current COP three year cycle. Some delegates proposed increasing the number of regional meetings if the interval between COPs was extended to four years.

On the Secretariat's legal status, delegates preferred focusing on, either maintaining the status quo or seeking UN integration. Delegates emphasized the need to provide support to ongoing regional initiatives during the new triennium and supported the establishment of the Regional Centre in Panama.

EUROPE: Chaired by Gordana Beltram, Slovenia, this group discussed budgetary implications of changing the Secretariat's

legal status and the implications of a zero growth budget on funding available for regional coordination. On changing the frequency of COP meetings, some emphasized cost savings, while others cautioned against the Convention losing momentum. However, most delegates supported the Standing Committee's proposal to convene COP 11 in 3 1/2 years time.

SWITZERLAND reported on a side event on wetlands and biofuels, during which participants raised concerns about impacts of other forms of energy production, such as hydropower and wind energy. On wetlands and climate change, AUSTRIA called for more attention to mountain and Arctic wetlands, and GERMANY, to linear water structures as flyways.

OCEANIA: This group was chaired by Perina Sila, Samoa. On the budget, some delegates opposed reducing funds available for regional initiatives to fund a proposed partnerships staff position, if the 11.75 percent increase was not approved. Many delegates felt that contact groups should be established on draft resolutions related to climate change, biofuels, extractive industries, and timing and frequency of future COPs, and the group discussed how to participate effectively and reflect their views in the respective contact groups. AUSTRALIA noted benefits of expressing common regional positions on issues. On frequency and timing of COPs, delegates expressed concern with extending the cycle to four years, noting possible budgetary increase implications and loss of momentum. The group also discussed the Oceania Regional Initiative and problems related to STRP NFPs.

CONTACT GROUPS

BUDGET: The Financing and Budget Committee, chaired by Herb Raffaele, US, convened in the evening. Regional group representatives reported on discussions held on the budget options issued by the Standing Committee. Most delegates agreed that a consensus was emerging on the four percent budget growth option, despite concerns expressed by some donor countries. Regional groups are expected to meet on Friday morning to further discuss their positions on this issue.

SECRETARIAT LEGAL STATUS: This contact group met during lunchtime and briefly in the evening. Delegates heard presentations on the legal and operational implications of the three options under consideration. The Secretariat outlined constraints under the current arrangement, including lack of recognition as an intergovernmental organization by other processes. Many delegates acknowledged that a final decision would probably not be reached at COP 10, and the group discussed, among other things, establishing a task force to make progress intersessionally on financial and legal implications of the various options, and impacts on parties.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Budget discussions permeated all issues on Thursday as delegates in regional and contact groups explored the financial implications of other agenda items such as the Secretariat's legal status or changing the COP cycle from three to four years. While Europe had to acknowledge that a zero growth budget would not allow for continued support of their treasured regional initiatives, Africans accepted that a 11.75 percent increase would be out of reach. As the evening beckoned some expressed optimism that the converging views on a four percent increase in the African Group indicated the dawning of a compromise, while others, looking at some donor countries' preference for a zero growth budget smirked that "the battle has yet to begin." Revisiting the complex linkages between budget and administrative issues, another delegate sighed heavily when explaining that whatever the compromise today, we'll have to start over again once we have agreement on the legal status and the COP cycle.