

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

Update on activities relating to global biodiversity multilateral environmental agreements

February 2009

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Update Paper for GECC GBSC activities relating to global biodiversity Multilateral Environmental Agreements

1. Informing MEAs

At the September 2008 GBSC meeting the Secretariat provided a paper on the common agendas and key themes of the biodiversity multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) – GECC GBSC (08)07. It was agreed that the Secretariat should start to establish a relationship with the head of delegation or Defra (or other agency) lead for each of the MEAs, in order to ensure the GBSC receives adequate and timely feedback following the major MEA meetings and as an insight into likely future priorities for the MEA.

An initial approach has been made to the following MEAs:

- Ramsar Convention
- IUCN World Conservation Congress
- Convention on Migratory Species

The Defra lead for the Ramsar Convention sent a summary note of the Ramsar 10th Conference (see Appendix 1). Of most relevance to the GBSC were the adopted Resolutions on ‘Wetlands and Climate Change’, ‘Wetlands and Biofuels’ and ‘Small Island States and the Ramsar Convention’. References were made to DfID in regard to the dominant Ramsar theme that ‘wetland ecosystem services aid human development’. In the future a DfID representative may be required for the UK delegation. Also reference is made to UKOTs, specifically that there was fairly limited input from this group prior to the COP and it would be important to encourage them to engage further in future CoPs.

2. Proposed MEA feedback event

The year 2008 saw a concentration of meetings of MEA decisions making bodies including the CoPs and MoPs of CBD, Ramsar, CMS, AEW, the IUCN World Conservation Congress and related meetings of minor agreements. JNCC has been considering ways in which they could enhance the way they feedback the outcome of such events to their stakeholders in the country agencies and in the various UK administrations. Hosting an MEA ‘feedback’ event was seen as a means of more actively providing key bodies with the results of the various meetings. However, such an event could be more than just a feedback session. Rather the aim is to take a cross-cutting ‘thematic’ approach to the outcome of the various meetings. Moreover, rather than just look back at what had happened, JNCC wanted to use an event to provide a means of looking forward to future implementation of agreed decisions, to consider future trends in key areas and to consider the evidence needed to inform the UK position at the next round of MEA meetings (in c3 years time and post-2010).

The aim of an MEA feedback event would be:

- to provide relevant and thematic feedback from the recent range of MEA CoPs and MoPs and other international meetings (i.e. meetings during 2008);

- to identify key issues that have arisen which are relevant to the UK¹ and its domestic implementation of MEAs, especially cross-cutting themes that are being taken forward through more than one MEA;
- to identify work taking place in inter-sessional MEA technical committees and to identify cross-cutting issues on which the UK might wish to lead/take forward at future CoPs and where there might be relevant UK expertise that could be offered into inter-sessional processes;
- to identify our future needs for evidence and research in order to inform UK approaches to policy development and implementation;
- to consider future emerging issues and our approach to them.

It is likely that this will be held in May 2009 and will take the form of a one day meeting in central London. For more details about the event please contact the GBSC Secretariat:

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GBSC Secretariat
February 2009

¹ Reference to the UK should be taken to mean the UK, its devolved administrations and its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Appendix 1

RAMSAR COP10 (28 OCTOBER TO 4 NOVEMBER 2008) IN SOUTH KOREA

Outcomes

1. The 10th Conference of the Parties took place in Changwon, South Korea, between 28 October and 4 November 2008. 105 Contracting Parties were present with approximately 1,200 delegates registered, including observers. Martin Brasher led the UK delegation supported by Simon Hopkinson and Andy Tully (Defra), David Stroud and Jessica Magnus (JNCC).
2. EU coordination was carried out by the French Presidency, who struggled on occasions, primarily because they had a small core team and there were a number of controversial draft Resolutions on the agenda, including climate change, biofuels, the budget and the legal status of the Secretariat. However, there was sufficient expertise within the EU group and leads were agreed in advance of plenary, which included; Slovenia (Gordana Beltram) on Climate Change, Netherlands/UK on Biofuels (Jessica Magnus), UK on Budget (Martin Brasher) and on STRP related issues (David Stroud), and Germany on Extractive Industries.
3. The UK was able to meet all of the objectives as set out in the submission prior to COP (see Annex A) and we maintained a good informal relationship with the only major UK NGO – WWT – to travel to Changwon.
4. Overall, there were 33 resolutions agreed (including thanks to the host country and a ‘Changwon Declaration’ setting the scene for the future implementation of the Convention). All apart from one (frequency of COP, on which the UK and many other Parties had major reservations) were eventually acceptable and several potentially helpful either in policy or financial terms. Key adopted Resolutions included ‘Wetlands and Climate Change’, ‘Wetlands and Biofuels’, ‘Small Island States and the Ramsar Convention’ as well as the adoption of the Convention’s budget for 2009-2012 and Strategic Plan 2009-2014 (see Annex B).
5. The UK announced £15k from the International Subs budget to support a joint Ramsar STRP/AEWA Technical Committee project, which will (a) review the impacts of extractive industries on wetlands, and (b) scope and start to prepare best practice guidance for the extractive industries sector and for those involved in managing and regulating future developments. We also offered to consider providing support (from the International Biodiversity Research budget) for up to three STRP projects supporting Ramsar priorities. Korea offered \$100,000 to the Ramsar Small Grants fund (which is currently struggling due to lack of voluntary contributions) and Hungary offered an additional voluntary contribution of CHF 10k. The US agreed to continue to put in over £500k as their standing annual (voluntary) budget contribution, which dwarfs even the largest subscription (Japan).
6. In regard to our future engagement, it is clear that the current Secretary General (Anada Tiega; appointed in August 2007) is pushing to raise the Convention’s profile within the MEA arena. This is one of the reasons for pressing for a move from IUCN to UNEP, which hosts all of the other major MEAs (ie CBD, CITES, CMS).

Although this move was not agreed at COP, an open-ended ad hoc working group (AHWG) was set up and we will need to monitor its progress, as a change of legal status could have substantial financial implications for the Convention.

7. It is also clear that in the future the Convention will become more involved in controversial issues, insofar as these impact on wetlands, as was highlighted at this COP with long and difficult debates over wetlands and climate change/biofuels. Although there was sufficient expertise within our delegation and the other EU states to debate these issues effectively, we will need to keep a close eye on future developments in order to ensure that we have the appropriate level of expertise at future COPs, if we are to maintain our influence over the direction of the Convention. This may mean including a DfID representative on future delegations (other G8 countries already involve their equivalents). We should also explore with Dfid whether there is potential to tap into their funding given the dominant theme in Ramsar that 'wetland ecosystem services aid human development'.
8. Although we received some input from the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTCDs) prior to the COP, this was fairly limited. However, given their unique range of biodiversity and the threats from climate change and invasives (as highlighted in the Resolution on Small Island States), it will be important to continue to encourage them to engage in the delivery of the Convention's aims, including, where appropriate, further site designations (and subsequent management, given that designation is just the first step towards wise use).
9. Finally, in regard to future COPs, Resolution **VI.13 urges Contracting Parties to** revise Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) data at least every six years (i.e. every second Meeting of the Conference) for monitoring purposes. Since this was last completed at COP9 there will be a need to carry out a UK review, including OTCDs, before COP11 takes place in the spring of 2012 (thus activity will need to commence in 2010). Some of this work could be linked into the forthcoming SPA review in terms of the bird interest features. Having discussed this issue in the past with the Secretariat, it would be advantageous to submit RIS updates in tranches (e.g. by devolved administration). The scope and timetable will need to be coordinated through JNCC and agreed with the DAs, Country Agencies and OTCDs.

Andy Tully

Annex A**UK aims for Ramsar CoP10:**

- To secure outcomes which contribute to the conservation effort in the UK, including its overseas territories, and which complement and do not conflict with existing commitments made by the UK under other Conventions and agreements, or with its domestic and overseas conservation commitments.
- To seek to ensure that the outcomes of the CoP make clear the contribution the Ramsar Convention can make to the sustainable development agenda and relevant Millennium Development Goals.
- To seek to ensure that the Convention retains its ability to produce scientific guidance and advice on wetlands through an effective Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).
- To ensure that we seize any opportunities that Ramsar may offer to improve conservation efforts in UK Overseas Territories.
- To seek to ensure that agreement is reached at the CoP regarding the legal status of the Secretariat and on increasing efforts to harmonise reporting and increase co-operation between the different biodiversity Conventions, in the interests of making reporting more manageable and user friendly and reducing the reporting burden on Contracting Parties.
- To ensure the budget for the next triennium is kept to a reasonable level balancing the need for an effectively functioning Secretariat with the limited financial capabilities of Contracting Parties.

Annex B**Key issues**

COP10 DR X1 Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2014: some minor redrafting was needed and the UK managed to insert inclusive wording into the preamble to recognise delivery through broader strategic levels (rather than those which are wetland centred), and the need for this to be reflected in Ramsar reporting formats.

This is the third Ramsar Strategic Plan and outlines the general strategies (27 in total) for implementation of the Convention at Global, National and Regional levels. As the plan is non-prescriptive, a UK level agreement with clear and detailed interpretation on expected outcomes will be required and will need close working with the N2KR Forum and Steering Committee. It will be helpful in seeking closer engagement with the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies on wetland conservation issues.

COP10 DR X2 Budget: increase limited to 4% despite strong pressure from many delegations to support higher option (11%). This will result in an increase to the UK subscription from the current CHF 279,137 (£153k approx) to CHF 284,023 (£156k approx), an increase of around £3k, payable in January 2009. To note that (a) the UK payment will vary as exchange rates change, and (b) Contracting Parties are assessed in accordance with the UN scale. Annual contributions for the Triennium 2010 to 2012 will be based on the new

UN percentages to be approved by the General Assembly in Dec 2009 and again any changes here will be reflected in the size of our subscription.

It was also agreed to recruit a partnership post (contract initially, permanent later if successful and if finances permit) to increase the Conventions outreach and funding support, which could give significant gains if it is able to open up additional funding and delivery avenues.

African countries agreed to double level of minimum subscription although they requested that this be ring fenced for African Regional Initiatives. There was some concern that this would lead to a higher level of non-payment.

COP10 DR X3 Frequency of COPs: UK resisted, despite some EU states (notably Austria) being in favour of such a change, a Resolution to make COPs 4-yearly rather than 3 (the next gap is 3½ to get the budget back on the right cycle and avoid CPs in the Northern hemisphere having to coordinate briefing during the main holiday season). Our view was that a move to a 4 year cycle would be unlikely to result in significant cost savings, may reduce Ramsar visibility and runs the risk of the Convention losing momentum. There was strong resistance from other CPs too and this Resolution was the only one of the 33 not to be adopted.

The Resolution also requested the Secretariat together with interested Parties, to assess the possibility of selecting venues for future Standing Committee meetings in different regions so that Standing Committee meetings could rotate from region to region each year. Although the Resolution was not adopted, Parties agreed to consider hosting Standing Committee meetings (which are normally convened at the Ramsar headquarters in Gland, Switzerland) in their own country. At the meeting, Georgia offered to host the next Standing Committee in 2009.

COP10 DR X11 Harmonisation with other MEAs: UK strongly supported a proposal to streamline Ramsar reporting and to harmonise reporting requirements with those of other MEAs and were successful in including additional texts to support this.

COP10 DR X21 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: a roadmap to guidance on HP Avian Influenza which was tabled by the STRP and led by David Stroud with major input from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and other international organisations on the Scientific Task Force on AI and wild birds. Following substantial pre-COP consultations, this went through with only some minor redrafting (including some useful points made by USA) and should play a major role in informing future responses to this issue at global, national and site levels.

COP10 DR X24 Wetlands and Climate Change: a brilliant sustained piece of negotiation by Gordana Beltram (the EU lead on this item) led to agreement on a good Resolution, which should be helpful in other international fora, in the last half-hour of the COP plenary. Some countries (notably Argentina, China and Brazil) resisted references to maintaining wetland ecological character in climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and policies for reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries. EU pushed for agreed CBD references. The chair of the STRP helpfully suggested compromise language to accommodate reference to mitigation and adaptation, as part of the services provided by wetlands rather than stand-alone options.

COP10 DR X25 Biofuels: again, a long negotiation, with many working group sessions, led to a better Resolution than we had expected. Jessica Magnus led on this issue. Together with the Netherlands, we insisted successfully on including text which would safeguard wetlands against biofuel conversions and thus against exacerbating greenhouse gas emissions, water and food shortages and biodiversity loss. The EU position (supported *inter alia* by Switzerland, Costa Rica, and New Zealand) faced strong opposition from some countries, particularly Brazil, Australia and China. However, we succeeded in achieving a stronger resolution than the CBD Resolution on agriculture and biofuels. We also prevailed in mandating the STRP with additional actions on biofuels, in particular to co-operate with international processes and bodies in order to develop sustainability guidelines and appraisals for biofuels and where appropriate develop such guidelines and appraisals themselves.

COP10 DR X26 Wetlands and extractive industries: the UK succeeded in getting recognition in the Resolution of the need to consider, in the post-closure phase of extractive industrial activities, opportunities for the creation of new wetlands, or the improvement of existing wetlands through well-planned mining and quarrying activities and well-developed site restoration programmes.

COP10 DR X30 Overseas Territories: we resisted opposition from EU colleagues (mainly Sweden and Netherlands) to the proposal that Small Island States should be a priority for funding and technical support under Ramsar. This Resolution was adopted with only minor redrafting, and could be of use in supporting Ramsar work in UK OTCDs.

Other issues

Legal Status: despite some opposition, UK (and others – generally those for whom the financial implications of such a move would be more significant eg Japan, Canada, USA) resisted attempts to get the Conference to agree a move of the Ramsar Secretariat from IUCN to UNEP (Germany favoured UNEP, on the grounds that this would improve the visibility and political standing of the Convention). Our view was that the substantial increase in costs would have diverted funds away from practical implementation of the Convention. Nevertheless, following strong pressure from a number of delegations, a working group was set up to consider this further before the next COP, which is to be held in Romania in spring 2012. An open-ended ad hoc working group (AHWG) has been established to identify any immediate actions that could be taken to improve Secretariat operations (whilst remaining with IUCN) and to investigate further the real costs and benefits of moving the Secretariat to UNEP.

Falklands: we resisted an attempt by Argentina in plenary to introduce unacceptable wording on the Falklands, and even more unacceptable wording on South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands contained in a list of marine eco-regions. This included obtaining quick and helpful supplementary advice from Defra Legal and FCO at short notice, despite the 9-hour time difference.

Standing Committee: following the maximum two successive terms each, Austria and Slovenia stepped down from the Standing Committee. Georgia and the Czech Republic remain (both second term) and are joined by Croatia and Finland. Finland will also chair the sub group on finance which was previously chaired by the USA. Tentative dates for the next Standing Committee (SC40) are the 11 to 15 May 2009 in Georgia.

