

## Update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20

### Action requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20 on *The Ramsar Convention's response to environmental emergency in Ukraine relating to the damage of its Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) stemming from the Russian Federation's aggression*.

### Background

1. This report provides an update on actions from June 2023 to February 2024 by the Secretariat pursuant to paragraph 18 of Resolution XIV.20 on *The Ramsar Convention's response to environmental emergency in Ukraine relating to the damage of its Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) stemming from the Russian Federation's aggression*, which:

*“REQUESTS the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands to coordinate actions with the Contracting Parties and relevant national and international organizations to conduct assessments of the Ramsar Sites in Ukraine affected by aggression of the Russian Federation, and advise on appropriate mitigation and restoration measures; and FURTHER REQUESTS the Secretariat to provide a report on the assessed damage and mitigation measures to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, in addition to providing an update on the implementation of this Resolution to all intervening meetings of the Standing Committee”.*

2. The previous update pursuant to Resolution XIV.20 was presented to Standing Committee at its 62nd meeting (SC62) in September 2023.<sup>1</sup>

### Coordination and consultation

3. The Secretariat has pursued coordination and consultation efforts as a member of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Environmental Assessments for Ukraine. The membership of this informal group includes the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Group directly and continuously engages with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine. Through engagement in the Group

<sup>1</sup> See document SC62 Doc.24 Rev.1 *Update of the Secretariat on the implementation of Resolution XIV.20*, <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc62-doc24-rev1-update-secretariat-implementation-resolution-xiv20>.

and with individual members, the Secretariat shares information on work under the Convention and Resolution XIV.20, and on how consideration of wetlands may be best addressed in the context of current or planned environmental assessments.

4. In this capacity, the Secretariat contributed to the preparation of a report entitled *Rapid Environmental Assessment of Kakhovka Dam Breach*. Following the breaching on 6 June 2023 of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant on the Dnipro River in Ukraine's Kherson Oblast, a team of 20 experts representing 13 institutions was mobilized under the leadership of UNEP to assess the environmental impacts of the dam breach, including hydrological and geomorphological impacts, chemical contamination, disaster waste and impacts on biodiversity and protected areas. The Secretariat joined the team as a contributing author to provide wetland expertise within the report and participated in the desk review of the assessment.
5. The report was published in October 2023. It showed that the dam breach resulted in hundreds of square kilometres being flooded, with up to thousands of square kilometres of reservoir and wetlands desiccated. The breach impacted areas beyond the boundaries of the five directly-affected administrative regions, and affected the coherence and ecological connectivity of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN). It directly affected as many as 59 nationally designated protected areas and areas with different categories of legal protection, as well as five Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Sites") designated under the Convention on Wetlands, one Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and ten Areas of Special Conservation Interest (Emerald Network sites) established under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention). The rapid assessment relied on existing baseline data and will need verification on the ground, as *in situ* data collection was not possible due to the conflict. Groundwork will be particularly useful to assess which of the damage is irreversible, and which can possibly be mitigated through future remediation activities.
6. As a member of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group, the Secretariat contributed to a UNEP assessment mapping exercise that provided a comprehensive overview of environmental assessments in Ukraine. The *Ukraine Environmental Damage Assessments* report, published in December 2023, identified gaps and overlaps in the assessments and recommended means to support coordination between actors and recovery and remediation measures, and guide future multi-stakeholder efforts to address environmental damage caused by the war in Ukraine. The report provided some useful information for planning and implementing the assessment conducted pursuant to Resolution XIV.20 (see next section).
7. Another contribution of the Secretariat to the Inter-Agency Coordination Group is the organization of a seminar on use of Earth observation and remote sensing for assessing damage to ecosystems. The seminar will take place in March 2024, with the participation of global experts and the support of other members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group. The seminar aims to share information on the available Earth observation approaches, tools and products for detecting impacts of armed conflict on ecosystems, as well as quantifying impacts on ecosystem extent and condition, while also identifying some of the potential constraints and limitations of the tools.

#### **Assessment of environmental damage to Ukraine's Ramsar Sites resulting from the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine**

8. The Secretariat hired a team of three international consultants to conduct the assessment of environmental damage on Ukraine's Ramsar Sites, pursuant to paragraph 18 of Resolution

XIV.20. The contracts were signed in December 2023 and January 2024. The team is composed of a team lead, a lead wetland expert and an Earth observation and GIS expert.

9. Under the supervision of the team lead, the consultancy team is responsible for:
  - a. developing assessment methodology for evaluating the ecological character changes of Ramsar Sites as the result of the war;
  - b. conducting the assessments of the Ramsar Sites in Ukraine that are affected or potentially affected; and
  - c. developing proposed mitigation and restoration measures for these Sites, considering immediate, mid-term and long-term approaches.
10. The consultancy work consists of three phases. The preparation phase conducted from January to February 2024 led to the production of a report on assessment strategy and methodology. The implementation phase from February to August 2024 will include a literature review, remote sensing analysis, consultation with local stakeholders and ten days of fieldwork in Ukraine if security conditions allow. For security reasons, the travel plan will be carefully elaborated in close liaison with the Secretariat, and subject to the Secretariat's approval. A national consultant will be hired to support the team by organizing and conducting fieldwork in Ukraine. During this phase, the consultants will collect fieldwork and Earth observation data, and will produce relevant analyses for each of the Ukrainian Ramsar Sites. The conclusion and recommendation phase will be conducted from September to December 2024.
11. The Secretariat set up an advisory board to provide methodological, scientific and technical guidance, and review assessment outputs at the end of each phase. The four members of the board were selected in December 2023, further to their acceptance of that voluntary role. To select the members, bilateral consultations were conducted by the Secretariat with the relevant UN bodies, as well as in consultation with the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). The STRP Chair nominated Dr Laurent Durieux, a scientific expert member of the STRP, to the board. Three other global experts were selected: Dr Gordana Beltram, former Chair of the Convention's Standing Committee and former National Focal Point for Slovenia; Dr Hassan Partow, Programme Manager, Response and Recovery Unit Disasters and Conflicts Branch, UNEP; and Dr Muralee Thummarukudy, Director of the Coordination Office of the G20 Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat. A first meeting of the board took place on 30 January 2024, at which the draft assessment strategy and methodology report was reviewed.
12. Once finalized, the assessment report will be presented to Contracting Parties to the Convention as an annex of the report on implementation of Resolution XIV.20 to COP15. The report will summarize the assessment results and will advise on appropriate mitigation and restoration measures.
13. Pursuant to paragraph 19 of Resolution XIV.20, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America provided voluntary contributions towards the Secretariat's work in implementing the actions requested in Resolution XIV.20. These non-core contributions allowed the Secretariat to hire consultants to conduct the assessment.
14. A further update on progress in implementation of the assessment will be provided at SC64.