

Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel on implementation of the STRP work plan

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. note the Report of the STRP Chair;
- ii. consider the recommendations presented by the STRP in paragraph 49 of this Report, in particular, regarding:
 - a. the 5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands,
 - b. the Ramsar wetland classification system,
 - c. a technical proposal with options for resourcing and implementation of timely and comprehensive global Waterbird Population Estimates updates,
 - d. emerging issues, and
 - e. guidelines for application of Criterion 6 and 9.

Introduction

1. The Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) has made considerable progress since the last report of the Chair of the STRP to the 62nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC62). This includes the approval of the [STRP Workplan 2023-2025](#) (Pre-SC62 Intersessional Decision 04), organisation of the first intersessional meeting of the STRP and the 26th meeting of the STRP, active involvement in diverse working groups established by the Standing Committee, and responding to ad-hoc requests. This report presents a comprehensive overview of the Panel's activities since SC62.

Intersessional online meetings of the STRP

2. With the support of the Secretariat, an intersessional online meeting for members of the STRP, including task leads and contributors, was held on 26 September 2023. A total of 23 participants attended the meeting.
3. The main objectives of the online meeting were to provide updates from the Chair and Secretariat to members of the STRP, allow for all the Thematic Work Area (TWA) leads to give an update on the state-of-play for each high-priority task set out in the STRP workplan, and discuss how to improve STRP communication and engagement. Furthermore, the meeting served to discuss preparations for the 26th meeting of the STRP.

STRP workspace

4. Following the [25th Meeting of the STRP](#) (STRP25), the Secretariat has successfully developed and launched a new STRP Workspace. This virtual platform provides Panel members, STRP Focal Points, Observers and International Organisation Partners (IOPs) access to essential information and resources that are not made publicly available. This includes additional information on the [STRP workplan 2023-2025](#), progress updates on tasks under the respective Thematic Work Areas (TWAs), access to first-order drafts and final versions of relevant outputs, meeting documents that are not uploaded on the meeting page (e.g., presentations) and other useful resources.

26th Meeting of the STRP

5. The [26th Meeting of the STRP](#) (STRP26) took place in Gland, Switzerland, from 5 to 8 February 2024. The meeting was attended by 97 participants, including 17 (of 18) appointed STRP members, representatives from STRP observer organisations, IOP representatives, representatives of Contracting Parties, and invited experts. 52 meeting participants took part online, including many experts involved in high-priority tasks and 24 representatives of Contracting Parties.
6. The main objective of the meeting was to progress the preparation of STRP outputs following the timeframes and milestones set out in the STRP workplan for the 2023-2025 triennium and reach an agreement on the next steps for the delivery of outputs under the STRP workplan leading up to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15).
7. During the meeting, 14 high priority tasks were progressed through working group sessions, with each group session reviewing draft documents and outlines for forthcoming submissions to the Standing Committee and publications of Briefing Notes, Policy Briefs, Technical Reports and the Global Wetland Outlook 2025.
8. STRP26 further served to:
 - a. Discuss the application of the current Ramsar wetland classification system and consider the need for a technical review, pursuant to Decision SC62-50.
 - b. Consider the development of targets and indicators for the 5th Strategic Plan (SP5) of the Convention on Wetlands and provide feedback to the SP5 Working Group, focusing on whether the proposed structure is fit for purpose and outlining a process for further inputs from the STRP.
 - c. Identify and examine emerging issues for potential consideration by STRP in the next triennium. The discussion was based on a draft document on emerging issues, prepared by the STRP Vice-Chair, which focused on collecting feedback to develop a revised summary of new and emerging issues for consideration by the Standing Committee.
 - d. Provide feedback on challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) in connection with document SC63 Doc.22 prepared by the Secretariat pursuant to Decision SC62-53.
9. During STRP26, guest lectures were also organised with invited speakers from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to explore the [Freshwater Ecosystem Explorer](#) used for reporting data on SDG indicator 6.6.1 and to introduce the [Global Wetlands Watch](#), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with regards to IUCN's work on 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs).

10. Feedback from the meeting survey was positive overall, with high satisfaction levels regarding the meeting content and objectives, the effectiveness of the Panel in addressing key issues, and constructive suggestions for future improvements.

5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands – targets and indicators

11. During STRP26, the consultant leading the development of the 5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands (SP5) presented the SP5 draft structure (v0.0) and the Phase 2: Document review and research report (PR162/R3.1 DRAFT) to the meeting participants. The consultant outlined several open questions for discussion in the STRP plenary, relating to the priorities set out in the draft structure for SP5, whether the outlined theory of change to achieve wetland conservation outcomes and the proposed structure were fit for purpose, and if the goals and targets were considered appropriate by the STRP.
12. The STRP considered the draft consultation report and proposed Structure of SP5 during a plenary session. STRP26 participants acknowledged the considerable efforts of the consultant team to develop SP5 and to enable discussion during the meeting.
13. STRP26 provided the following observations on the zero-draft SP5:
 - a. The draft SP5 structure, overall, is in a format and style similar to previous strategic plans. An alternative approach is recommended, which is more streamlined and presents aspirational targets to enhance the impact of SP5.
 - b. The role of the Convention in leading implementation of targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM GBF) relating to wetlands is not adequately emphasised. SP5 provides an important mechanism to detail how the Convention is responsible for implementing the KM GBF for inland waters and coastal wetlands. A review is recommended.
 - c. SP5 should be reframed to be more solution focused. For example, it highlights agriculture as a primary driver of the loss of wetlands, but with limited acknowledgement that agriculture is fundamental for human survival. Further, the draft SP5 does not propose activities that will deliver transformation of agriculture to achieve sustainable outcomes for wetlands. It is recommended to reconsider how strategic pathways to achieve the goals of the Convention are presented.
 - d. A critical target for the Convention is to halt the loss and degradation of wetlands; while necessary, the goal to 'reverse' wetland loss may not be achievable in the short-term in all regions of the world. It is proposed to establish clearer targets for wetland loss and degradation, on a regional basis where necessary, in SP5.
 - e. 'Wise use' is a concept and goal fundamental to the Convention. While noting some aspects of wise use may need reframing the current SP targets do not describe measurable targets for wise use.
 - f. Emphasising Wetlands of International Importance as a core 'goal' and pillar of the Convention is recommended.
 - g. The inclusion of targets relating to the conservation of wetland-dependent species would be recommended.
 - h. Overall, the current formulation of goals, targets, and activities in the draft SP5 structure is not presented in a manner to drive the transformative change needed to achieve wetland conservation and wise use. For example, Target 2.3 'restore wetlands' omits the element to protect existing wetlands and does not provide a measurable restoration target for the

Convention and Contracting Parties to aim for. More clarity on how the goals and targets may achieve transformative change is recommended.

- i. The development of quantitative targets for selected SP5 targets is proposed. The collation of baseline information to track progress against SP5 targets was also considered a high priority as a basis for effective monitoring and reporting.
14. The STRP Chair, on behalf of the STRP, will provide further detailed feedback on the draft structure v0.0 to the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG) by 12 March 2024, including feedback relating to the balance between outcome (results) and process-based indicators. The STRP feedback will elaborate further on the above points and other input during STRP26. The feedback will also consider synergies with the KM GBF indicator framework, based on the recent submission to the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Indicators by the Convention on Wetlands (STRP Task 5.2).
15. The STRP Chair notes the STRP's ongoing commitment and availability to help develop targets and indicators for SP5.

Ramsar wetland classification system

16. The Standing Committee requested the STRP to discuss the application of the Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type at STRP26 and to report back to SC63, including, if required, the outline of a proposed approach for a technical review in consultation with Contracting Parties, IOPs and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and requested the STRP to consider the use of a survey of STRP National Focal Points to collate technical feedback on the classification system from different regions (Decision SC62-50).
17. The STRP Chair presented a draft discussion document for consideration at STRP26, which was further developed based on feedback from STRP members, STRP NFPs and STRP Observers. The Panel's advice for the Standing Committee is presented in the report contained in Annex 1.
18. STRP recommends a two-phase review of the Ramsar wetland classification system as a high-priority STRP task, predominantly implemented in the 2026-2028 triennium and with preparatory work carried out in the current triennium, such as a cross-walk with the Global Ecosystem Typology (GET). Considering the opportunities and risks of proceeding with a technical review, the review process would include an initial assessment (phase 1) to determine whether a comprehensive assessment, including recommendations (phase 2), is considered necessary (Annex 1).

STRP discussion on emerging Issues

19. At SC62, the STRP Chair recommended that the STRP identify emerging challenges to present to the Standing Committee at its 63rd meeting (Report and Decisions of the 62nd Meeting of the Standing Committee). This supports consultation towards identification of future scientific and technical priorities and eventually development of the STRP work plan for 2026-2028.
20. Prof. Siobhan Fennessy, Vice-Chair of the STRP, introduced a draft discussion paper for STRP26 on emerging issues and challenges for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, their relevance, potential impact, and the need for STRP engagement. Feedback from Panel members, STRP National Focal Points, STRP Observers and IOPs was considered in a plenary session during STRP26. A summary is presented in Annex 2 to the present report.

21. Potential priority and emerging issues for consideration include:
 - a. Wetland mapping and inventory,
 - b. Adequate reporting on the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance in the RIS,
 - c. Transformative change assessment for wetland conservation and wise use,
 - d. Further advances in climate change and nature-based solutions,
 - e. Plastic pollution in wetlands and wetland species,
 - f. Improved global reporting: Synergies on development of indicators and methods,
 - g. Increasing frequency of harmful algal blooms (HABs).

Technical proposal with options for resourcing and implementation of timely and comprehensive updates of global Waterbird Population Estimates

22. Paragraph 16 of [Resolution XIV.18](#) requested the STRP to develop a technical proposal to enable the resourcing and implementation of future timely and comprehensive Waterbird Population Estimates updates in consultation with Contracting Parties, relevant flyway agreements and partnerships, Wetlands International and interested entities, including an outline of funding implications, to be presented to SC63 .
23. STRP Task 1.1. (c), as set out in the [STRP Workplan 2023-2025](#), has addressed this request and developed a technical proposal considering the resourcing and implementation of Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) updates. A summary of the technical proposal developed under Task 1.1. (c) is included in Annex 5 of the current STRP Chair's report.
24. The technical proposal highlights the critical need for updated waterbird population data to support the Convention's objectives and the application of Criterion 6 for Wetlands of International Importance. The technical proposal further emphasises the urgency of mobilising resources within the Convention and from potential partners to successfully deliver the Sixth edition of the Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE6). It also recommends developing an international partnership approach – the Waterbird Estimates Partnership – to guide future updates, enhancing the efficiency and coverage of waterbird population assessments.
25. The proposed approach addresses urgent update requirements. It establishes a sustainable framework for regular, comprehensive updates, reflecting a strategic response to the challenges of maintaining up-to-date, accurate waterbird data essential for effective wetland and biodiversity conservation.
26. The technical proposal is presented in document SC63 Doc.20. Interested parties are encouraged to review this document to grasp the full scope and details of the proposed recommendations for updating global Waterbird Population Estimates.

Challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets

27. In Decision SC62-53, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to report to SC63 on the challenges and opportunities related to submitting and updating Ramsar Information Sheets. In doing so, the Secretariat was further instructed to obtain and collate inputs in consultation with, among others, the STRP.
28. During STRP26, the Secretariat presented an overview of challenges identified and proposals made by Contracting Parties, as well as proposed actions. STRP members, Observers and IOPs

were asked to provide feedback to validate the proposed actions. It can be noted that inputs from the Panel are reflected in SC63 Doc.22 *Report on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets*.

Progress on the high-priority tasks outlined in the STRP Work Plan 2023-2025

Thematic Work Area 1: Wetlands of International Importance, development of the Site network and application of criteria.

29. *Task 1.1 (a). Guidance on the application of Ramsar Criterion 9 for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance:* The task involves updating Criterion 9 guidance for Wetlands of International Importance designation, enhancing collaboration with relevant actors, and identifying new data sources for site designation. Additionally, updates to the Strategic Framework are to be considered. The work plan includes refreshing 1% estimates from 2006 and detailing the updated guidance and Task 1.1(a) outcomes in a report to the Standing Committee.
 - An update relating to Task 1.1. (a) and the guidelines for the application of Criterion 9 are detailed in Annex 3.
30. *Task 1.1 (b). Guidance to facilitate the application of Criterion 6:* The task includes developing guidance with international partners to fill gaps in waterbird population data, engaging with relevant IOPs and flyway initiatives, and updating guidelines for assessing Criterion 6 in the Strategic Framework. There is also a focus on ensuring the guidelines (under Task 1.1b) are consistent with the technical proposal in Task 1.1. (c). The updated guidance (for the Strategic Framework) will be presented in a report to the Standing Committee.
 - An update relating to Task 1.1. (b) and the guidelines for the application of Criterion 6 are detailed in Annex 4.
31. *Task 1.1 (c). Technical proposal for resourcing and implementation of Waterbird Population Estimate updates:* The technical proposal outlines options for implementing and resourcing updates to WPEs. It explores synergies with related agreements, proposes institutional resourcing partnerships, identifies capacity-building priorities, and suggests cost-reduction measures for WPE production.
 - Document SC63 Doc.20 presents the Technical Proposal for WPEs. Additional information is provided earlier in this report, and a summary of the work is detailed in Annex 5.
32. *Task 1.2. Global assessment of gaps in the network of Wetlands of International Importance, and synergies with global climate and biodiversity goals:* The task involves conducting a global assessment to identify under-represented wetland types, species, and habitats across biogeographic areas, utilising the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) and other sources. It will utilise a standardised approach to provide technical information to support the future designation and prioritisation of Wetlands of International Importance across various wetland types and regions.
 - Work on Task 1.2 will be initiated in March 2024. The focus for TWA 1 to date has been on ensuring delivery of Tasks 1.1a, 1.1b and 1.1c.

Thematic Work Area 2: Tools for wetland assessment, mapping and monitoring, and development of inventories.

33. *Task 2.1. Wetland mapping and inventories to catalyse greater use of available methodologies for wetland carbon assessments:* The task will produce guidance to enhance the utility of national wetland inventories (NWIs) for national greenhouse gas (GHG) accounts and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The task is being implemented in coordination with the task team responsible for Task 3.2. The Technical Report will provide guidance on available methods for carbon GHG assessments and how these may draw on NWIs, including data and emission factors for various wetland types, other data sources, and technical constraints.
- The terms of reference (ToR) and scoping document for Task 2.1 have been completed, and steps have been taken to recruit a consultant who will help synthesise information to support the delivery of this task. The task is ongoing, and the Technical Report is expected to be finalised towards the end of 2024.
34. *Task 2.2. Prepare guidance on inventories and monitoring of small wetlands, and their multiple values for biodiversity conservation, especially in the contexts of landscape management and climate change:* The task will produce a Policy Brief to raise awareness of small wetlands' significance for biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and hydrological regulation, highlighting their vulnerability to climate change.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 2.2 have been completed. The work on the Policy Brief is ongoing and set to be finalised in November 2024.

Thematic Work Area 3: Direct and climate-change-related pressures on wetlands, their impacts and responses.

35. *Task 3.1. Climate change and wetlands – updated information on the current and projected impacts of climate change on the world's wetlands and responses:* This task involves synthesising technical information on wetlands from the IPCC 6th Assessment Report (AR6), focusing on climate change impacts and adaptation strategies. It is being developed alongside Task 2.1 and will result in a Briefing Note. The task will incorporate insights from various global reports.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 3.1 have been completed. The work on the Briefing Note is ongoing and set to be finalised in October/November 2024.
36. *Task 3.2 (a). Development of guidance on prioritising coastal blue carbon ecosystems for conservation and restoration:* The task focuses on coastal blue carbon ecosystems (BCEs) such as mangroves, seagrass beds and intertidal marshes/salt marshes. It involves a desktop study to evaluate existing methods and guidance for BCE conservation and restoration site prioritisation. The output from this task will be a Briefing Note that will consider conservation priorities and review and update BCE management guidance. It is being developed in close collaboration with Task 2.1.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 3.2. (a) have been completed. The work on the Briefing Note is ongoing. Consultants have been recruited to assist in the production of a desktop study, and good progress has been made in overall content. An outline for the briefing note has been prepared. The Briefing Note is set to be finalised in October/November 2024.

37. *Task 3.2 (b). Compiling and reviewing data and models on carbon stock and fluxes:* The task, examines carbon stocks, emissions, and dynamics in coastal BCEs, particularly focusing on mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass, with additional insights into other coastal BCEs such as mudflats. This work aims to contribute to possible future updates to the IPCC Wetlands Supplement, ensuring that global carbon models reflect the latest data and analyses from BCEs. It is being developed in close collaboration with Task 2.1.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 3.2. (b) have been completed. The work on this task is being carried out together with Task 3.2 (a), and the same consultants have been tasked with carrying out work on this task. The Technical Report and Policy Brief are set to be finalised for October/November 2024.
38. *Task 3.3. Agriculture and wetlands: maintaining and restoring the ecological character of wetlands in agricultural settings:* The task is focused on developing guidelines to enhance wetland ecosystem services within agricultural landscapes. It includes engaging National Focal Points and the STRP network for information on specific agro-ecosystems and wetland types and improving RSIS reporting on agro-wetland dynamics. A technical workshop will be organising in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The output from this task will be a Technical Report and a Policy Brief that address ecosystem service maintenance, restoration, and creation, addressing agricultural impacts and reporting enhancements.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 3.3 have been completed. The work on this task is ongoing, and a workshop is planned for June 2024 in Rome, Italy, hosted by FAO, with a focus on compiling case studies. In addition, an open-access online training module will be prepared and made available on the [FAO eLearning Academy](#) with funding from the Convention's partnership with Danone. The first-order draft of the Technical Report and Policy Brief are expected to be available in June 2024.
39. *Task 3.4. The protection, conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management of wetland ecosystems in addressing climate change:* The task involves compiling a synthesis of successful nature-based solutions (NBS) for wetland ecosystem management. It aims to showcase applications of NBS in wetland conservation, restoration, and sustainable management to address climate change and other benefits.
- The STRP is prioritising delivery of other high-priority tasks and will address this task, if possible, in the future. The estimated funding requirements of the task is 11,400 CHF.

Thematic Work Area 4: Wise use, sustainable management and restoration of wetlands in the wider landscape/seascape.

40. *Task 4.1. OECMs as an opportunity in promoting wetland conservation and wise use:* The task focuses on developing guidance for wetlands as 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs). It includes methodologies for identifying, recognising, and managing wetlands, including Wetlands of International Importance, as OECMs to deliver against the goals and targets of the KM GBF. The guidance cover wetlands' relevance to OECMs, recognition processes, existing guidelines, management practices, technical amendments for Wetlands of International Importance, and required updates to the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS).

- The ToR and scoping document for Task 4.1 have been completed, and a draft Briefing Note on OECMs for wetlands wise use was prepared for STRP26. The final version of the Briefing Note will be available in June 2024. The Briefing Note has been developed in partnership with other relevant organisations, such as the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas' Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Specialist Group.
41. *Task 4.2: Develop guidance on the conservation, wise use and management of 'working coastal habitats', including synthesising the global pressures on coastal wetlands.* The task sets out to develop guidance for the conservation, wise use, and management of 'working coastal habitats'. It includes updating the wise-use Handbook 12 and synthesising approaches for effective coastal habitat management. The framework will consider social-ecological systems, marine spatial planning, and economic influences, addressing climate vulnerabilities.
- The STRP is prioritising delivery of other high-priority tasks and will address this task, if possible, in the future. The estimated funding requirement of the task is 55,600 CHF.
42. *Task 4.3: Integrating wetland protection, conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management into national sustainable development strategies:* The task centres around compiling and synthesising case studies and tools for integrating wetland conservation and restoration into national sustainable development strategies. It includes developing an electronic database for case studies, to be hosted on the Convention on Wetlands website or WWT Learning Hub. Technical guidance will be presented in a Briefing Note.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 4.3 has been completed, including an outlined structure for the Briefing Note. The task lead has also identified potential contributors and is exploring options to co-publish the Briefing Note with other organisations, such as relevant IOPs, to increase the visibility and uptake of the final STRP output associated with this task. The Briefing Note is expected to be finalised towards the end of 2024.

Thematic Work Area 5: Cross-cutting issues, supporting functions, and synergies with other MEAs.

43. *Task 5.1. Financial costs of wetland loss and degradation, and investment required to maintain and restore wetlands (GWO 2025):* The Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) 2025 will analyse the economic impacts of wetland loss, assess required financing for wetland conservation, and explore synergies with global environmental commitments. It aims to offer investment insights for wetland management, emphasising NBS and integrating indigenous and local community perspectives.
- The ToR and scoping document for Task 5.1 has been completed, and steps have been taken to recruit a consultant who will assist in the work for this task, focusing on synthesising and collating financial information on wetland loss and degradation. It is planned that the GWO 2025 will be launched shortly before the 15th Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP15) and that a GWO side event will be organised during the COP.
44. *Task 5.2. Guidance to support the global implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) for wetlands:* This task focuses on providing support for the global implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM GBF). The task will synthesise actions related to National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) needed to meet the KM GBF targets from a wetland perspective and identify wetland-focused reporting mechanisms that can feed into the reporting towards the KM GBF goals and targets. Additionally, the task will review the KM GBF indicator framework to ensure that wetland

measures are effectively incorporated. Findings from the review will be submitted to the AHTEG on Indicators.¹ The main outputs will be a Briefing Note and the submission to AHTEG.

- The ToR and scoping document for Task 5.2 has been completed. Work has advanced significantly, with an initial briefing paper on [Upscaling wetland conservation, restoration, and wise use through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans \(NBSAPs\)](#) published on 23 November 2023. The review of indicators and reporting mechanisms relevant to the KM GBF indicator framework was completed, with additional financial support provided by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The submission to the 6th meeting of the AHTEG on Indicators of the effective consideration of wetlands in the KM GBF Monitoring Framework was submitted on 29 February 2024. The submission will be shared as a communication to the Contracting Parties. It is expected that the final Briefing Note, covering all the work under this task, will be finalised by June 2024.
45. *Task 5.3. Develop an approach to deliver future Global Wetland Outlooks (GWOs):* The task involves forming a working group with diverse stakeholders to refine the Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) as a Convention flagship product, aligning it with strategic goals and other global processes. The group will develop a comprehensive plan for future GWOs, considering methodologies, timelines, and resources, informed by previous editions and global assessments. The task will develop a conceptual approach for SC64, outlining production frequency and content, including thematic sub-assessments.
- Work on Task 5.3 will be initiated in April 2024. The proposed approach for future GWO will be presented to SC64.
46. *Task 5.4. Review of policy and legal frameworks for wetland conservation and wise use: scoping study:* This task will produce a technical scoping report to assess various policy and legal frameworks regarding wetland conservation, restoration, and use, proposing forward-looking policy options and integrative approaches. It will build upon the insights from Handbook 3 and include recommendations for future strategies. The main output will be a report for SC64.
- A small team was formed during STRP26 to consider who would contribute to the technical scoping report. The ToR for Task 5.4 is pending; however, subject to time availability, the scoping study report for SC64 is expected to be finalised by September 2024. The scoping study will provide a recommended approach for the next triennium.

Other ongoing work and ad-hoc requests

47. Besides the highest priority STRP tasks, the Panel's work includes several ongoing and ad-hoc advisory functions. These include, among other things, responding to requests for advice or input from the Secretariat and Standing Committee, for example, about the CEPA Programme; participating in Ramsar Advisory Missions when requested; advising on requests to remove Wetlands of International Importance from the Montreux Record; and providing guidance on emerging issues.
48. The STRP contributes to the following groups and fora:
- a. The Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG): pursuant to Resolution XIV.4, paragraph 23, Dr Hugh Robertson, STRP Chair, participates in the SPWG representing the STRP. Prof. Siobhan

¹ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc63-inf3-submission-convention-wetlands-6th-meeting-ad-hoc-technical-expert-group>.

Fennessy, STRP Vice-Chair, has also participated in the SPWG on behalf of the STRP, providing technical advice. During STRP26, STRP provided feedback on the draft structure and policy and consultation review prepared for the SPWG.

- b. The CEPA Oversight Panel: Resolution XIV.8, Annex 3 called upon the STRP to designate a representative to serve on the CEPA Oversight Panel. Dr Ritesh Kumar, STRP Technical Expert, has been nominated as the STRP representative and actively participates in the CEPA Oversight Panel meetings.
- c. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): Based on the recommendation of the STRP Chair and Vice-Chair, the Secretariat nominated Matthew Simpson, STRP Observer, as an expert to participate in the Scoping Meeting for the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities.
- d. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP): the Chair of the STRP is an ex-officio member of the MEP. From 11 to 14 December 2023, Dr Hugh Robertson, Chair of the STRP, attended the 21st Meetings of the IPBES MEP and Bureau and submitted a brief presentation on the high-priority STRP tasks aligned with the IPBES work programme. Several synergies between the IPBES and STRP technical work were identified to enhance the Panel's work during the 2023-2025 period. In addition, based on the recommendation of the STRP Chair, the Secretariat nominated Prof. Siobhan Fennessy, Vice-Chair of the STRP, as an expert in the scoping process for a second global IPBES assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- e. The Advisory Board of the Ukraine Ramsar Assessment: Based on the recommendation of the STRP Chair, the STRP nominated Dr Laurent Durieux, STRP Scientific Expert, for the Advisory Board.

Recommendations arising from STRP26

49. The Standing Committee is invited to consider the following recommendations arising from STRP26:
 - a. Note the preliminary comments in this report relating to the 5th Strategic Plan, and also, note that the STRP Chair will provide detailed feedback on the SP5 draft structure (v0.0) to the Strategic Plan Working Group in accordance with the consultation process.
 - b. Consider and endorse the proposal for a two-phase review of the Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type as a high-priority STRP task, predominantly in the 2026-2028 triennium (Annex 1), including preparatory work in the current triennium.
 - c. Consider and endorse the recommendations outlined in the *Technical Proposal by the STRP on Resourcing and Implementing Waterbird Population Estimates*, as detailed in Annex 5 and document SC63 Doc.20. This will facilitate the necessary actions to update and maintain vital waterbird population data, supporting informed conservation and management decisions.
 - d. Consider the emerging issues detailed in Annex 2 and provide feedback to support timely identification of future scientific and technical priorities and preparation of the STRP 2026-

2028 work plan, and where appropriate, consider the emerging issues in preparing other draft resolutions to enhance the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

- e. Note that the STRP proposes updated guidance for applying Criterion 9 within the Strategic framework, including guidelines to be submitted in a draft resolution to COP15 for consideration at SC64, as detailed in Annex 3.
- f. Note that the STRP proposes updated guidance for applying Criterion 6 within the Strategic framework and that guidelines will be submitted in a draft resolution to COP15 for consideration at SC64, as detailed in Annex 4.
- g. Acknowledge the work carried out by STRP Task 5.2, in particular, the submission to the 6th meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Indicators on the effective consideration of wetlands in the KM GBF Monitoring Framework and the interim briefing paper on [Upscaling wetland conservation, restoration and wise use through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans \(NBSAPs\)](#).
- h. Request the STRP to organize a consultation with the earth observation community, as an ad-hoc STRP task, on development of an initiative to foster dialogue, knowledge exchange and guidance for earth observation in support of wetland inventory, assessment, monitoring, and conservation, e.g., by further developing the [GEO-Wetlands](#) initiative, drawing on models provided by GEO Flagships, such as the GEO Land Degradation Neutrality Flagship (GEO-LDN).
- i. Note the importance of global reporting on wetland extent and degradation, including for SDG 6.6.1 and the forthcoming [Global Wetlands Watch](#) led by UNEP, and support a request from the STRP to the Secretariat to further streamline reporting requirements between UNEP and the Convention on Wetlands and other relevant global initiatives, such as the [System of Environmental-Economic Accounting](#) (SEEA) work on the natural capital of wetlands.

Future STRP meetings

- 50. It is anticipated that STRP27 will be held as an in-person meeting from 2 to 5 December 2024, with the possibility of participating virtually. The meeting will be focused on progressing, reviewing, and finalizing highest-priority tasks.
- 51. In addition, an intersessional online meeting of the STRP will be organised in collaboration with the Secretariat. The online meeting will be held from 3 to 4 September 2024 and will be organised to address any STRP contributions to draft resolutions for consideration at the 64th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC64).

Acknowledging the work of the Secretariat, STRP Observers, IOPs and other contributors

- 52. The Chair would like to express appreciation to the Secretariat for their support in the efficient implementation of the STRP work plan, underlining the high quality of work and commitment demonstrated throughout the process. This collaboration has been crucial in advancing our objectives.

53. The Chair would further like to express appreciation for the invaluable support and high-quality contributions made by STRP Observers, IOPs, and other contributors. Their expertise has been essential in ensuring that the work of the STRP maintains a high quality.

Annex 1

Ramsar wetland classification system

Request from Standing Committee 62

1. The Standing Committee requested the Scientific and Technical Review Panel to discuss the application of the current Ramsar wetland classification system at its 26th meeting and to report back to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee, including, if required, the outline of a proposed approach for a technical review in consultation with Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners and other multilateral environmental agreements and requested the STRP to consider the use of a survey of STRP National Focal Points to collate technical feedback on the classification system from different regions (Decision SC62-50).

STRP26 process

2. A discussion document relating to SC62-50 was presented for consideration at STRP26. Feedback from STRP members, STRP NFPs and STRP Observers was consolidated and informed the advice from STRP presented in this report.

Context

3. The Convention defines wetlands as “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed 6 m”.
4. Finlayson (2018) provides a summary of the Ramsar wetland typology, and notes:
 - a. it was adopted in c.1990 and is based, generally, on the classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States;
 - b. there are three broad groups of wetlands: marine and coastal, inland, and human-made; and 42 wetland ‘types’ overall;
 - c. wetland types have been determined based on settings (e.g., palustrine or riverine), water permanence (e.g., permanent, seasonal or intermittent), soils, substrates and vegetation. The typology contains 12 marine and coastal, 20 inland, and 10 human-made wetland types; and
 - d. it provides a broad framework to identify/describe wetland habitats.
5. The current Ramsar wetland typology is detailed in the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List. Refer to [Appendix B of the Framework](#).
6. Finlayson (2018) observed:
 - a. The Ramsar typology was purposefully broad to embrace all the ‘wetland’ habitats of migratory water birds given the emphasis on such species in the negotiations.
 - b. Hence, it includes marine water less than 6 m deep at low tide, which, in northern latitudes, are often important wintering habitats for loons (divers), grebes, and sea ducks. It also includes artificial wetlands, such as reservoirs and seasonally flooded agricultural land, which are often important habitats for ducks, geese, cranes, and shorebirds. Similarly, many of the world’s coral reefs and seagrass meadows qualify as wetlands.
 - c. On several subsequent occasions, the coverage of wetland types was extended, for example, to incorporate karst wetlands and caves.

- d. Semeniuk and Semeniuk (1997), in a review of the inland wetland component of the typology, noted that mixed criteria were used to separate the wetlands and that not all natural inland wetlands had been unambiguously addressed. For instance, there was a repetition of types named 'marshes', and some types were ill-defined in that they encompassed several types (e.g., Alpine/tundra wetlands encompass bogs, meadows, and other mires).
 - e. "Despite the inconsistencies, the typology has served the purpose it was designed for – to provide a simple listing of the wetland types that the Convention considered."
7. Gerbeaux et al. (2018) in an overview of wetland classification systems noted that:
- a. A key issue when choosing or developing a classification is clearly identifying the purpose for classifying the wetlands and ensuring the chosen approach can be readily used with available information.
 - b. Also, future classifications will likely be influenced by the technology available, such as ready access to remotely sensed images, which may affect how the classification is constructed.
 - c. The number of classification schemes has increased over the past decades with the hierarchical, hydrological, and geomorphic approaches being widely used, often linked with information about the land cover or vegetation.
 - d. At the same time, simpler typologies, such as that used by the Ramsar Convention, serve a useful and ongoing purpose.
8. Gerbeaux et al. (2018) commented on the Ramsar typology and observed that:
- a. attempts to replace the Ramsar typology with a more systematic classification have failed, given a reluctance to move away from the current listing of wetland types and the protracted nature of discussions about a replacement; and
 - b. at the national and international levels, it can be extremely difficult to develop a classification acceptable to all wetland scientists and experts, even with the advantages of reducing the confusion with commonly used terms, such as swamps, marshes, or lagoons.

Expectations and view of Contracting Parties and practitioners

9. Contracting Parties have been applying the current Ramsar wetland typology since the 1990s and are familiar with its use in various wetland environments. The typology has been applied to Ramsar Site designation, although specific data on the extent of different wetland types across the Ramsar Site network is limited.
10. Standing Committee members at SC62 commented that:
- a. there are some inconsistencies in wetland typology, which can be difficult to apply to Wetlands of International Importance. Further guidance on the interpretation of the wetland-type definitions may be useful;
 - b. establishing a working group to explore difficulties that Contracting Parties experience with the current wetland classification system should be considered; others suggested consultation with STRP NFPs; and
 - c. some SC members offered to share national experiences from preparing wetland inventories and encouraged considering national inventories in other fora, including ensuring consistent use of wetland typology.
11. Given the historical application of the Ramsar wetland typology, it is anticipated that many Contracting Parties would require a clear justification to introduce an alternative classification of wetland types.

12. There may be opportunities for hierarchical elements to be introduced to Ramsar Wetland typology that may enable 1) improved reporting on the extent of broad, functional wetland types, 2) alignment with other global ecosystem systems, and 3) retaining the integrity and application of the 42 wetland types. This may be of interest to Contracting Parties if it is technically feasible.

Current application of the Ramsar wetland typology

13. The current Ramsar wetland typology has a broad range of applications, including:
 - a. Ramsar Site designation.
 - b. Ramsar Site ecological character assessment and reporting (RISs).
 - c. Some national inventories.
 - d. SDG reporting under 6.6.1 – marine/coastal, inland, human-made.
 - e. Reporting on state/trend of wetlands at global (e.g. GWO 2018), regional and national scales.
14. Given the use of the Ramsar wetland typology for many decades by all regions and globally, carefully considering the risks and opportunities of recommending potential amendments to the typology is necessary.

Future application

15. The primary future application of the Convention on Wetlands wetland typology will continue to be for the designation and monitoring of Wetlands of International Importance.
16. However, applications in other global processes are becoming increasingly important. The KM GBF was recently adopted with the corresponding development of the indicator framework specifying Headline, Component and Complementary indicators. Contracting Parties to CBD will be requested to report on the extent of natural ecosystems as part of national reporting and continue to report on the extent of wetlands under SDG 6.6.1. Further, the STRP submission to AHTEG (February 2024) on the KM GBF indicator framework noted the opportunity for the alignment of the Ramsar wetland typology to other global ecosystem typologies to promote the consistent use of ecosystem typologies for reporting.
17. In essence, any review of the Ramsar wetland typology needs to determine whether the classification system is generally fit for purpose while recognising there are always some adjustments that can be proposed. Alternatively, determine that the classification is no longer suitable in its current formats because of the broad range of applications and uses for which the Convention on Wetlands wetland typologies are inadequate.
18. Gerbeaux et al. (2018) noted that types of applications of a wetland classification might include:
 - a. inventory, mapping, evaluating, and ranking sites consistently (whether at a national, regional, or local scale);
 - b. conservation or restoration planning (e.g., producing broad-/fine-scale sets of representative areas upon which to focus protection or restoration efforts);
 - c. providing a framework that can easily describe the natural values, functions, and ecosystem services attached to the different categories and tailor management needs and practices;
 - d. assessing and monitoring environmental trends (health) with indicators adapted to each type (or all types);

- e. fulfilling National and International State of the Environment reporting requirements consistently;
 - f. enhancing and simplifying information contained in geospatial databases and frameworks used in water resource planning and management, thus aiding decisions about resource/catchment management;
 - g. raising public awareness of diversity, value uses, and anthropogenic effects on wetland types; and
 - h. providing uniformity in concepts and terminology.
19. An STRP review may consider which of these applications is adequately served by the current Ramsar wetland typology and which may be enhanced or reduced if amendments were proposed.

Other wetland and ecosystem typologies

20. Several other global ecosystem classification systems have been developed to encapsulate wetlands. For example, the Global Ecosystem Typology (GET) has introduced a classification system encompassing the world's marine, coastal, freshwater and terrestrial biomes and defining transitional systems.
21. The GET has developed a hierarchical classification framework.
22. The GET has also developed a [web-based map app](#) (2020) with peer-reviewed published maps for all 110 Level 3 units (functional types). Data is open access, with a data archive and spatial metadata). Following an online call in January 2024, the Secretariat and STRP Chair requested a cross-walk between the Ramsar Wetland Typology and GET. A preliminary assessment highlighted a relatively good alignment although some Ramsar wetland types went across multiple functional types. It would be advised to undertake similar cross-walk exercises with other global classification frameworks.
23. Gaining the perspective of STRP Observers, including UNEP-WCMC, on the suitability of the Convention on Wetlands wetland typology and other systems for reporting on the state and trend of wetlands is also recommended.

Potential opportunities and risks of proceeding with a technical review

24. To inform the STRP recommendation on whether or not to propose a technical review to SC63, an initial assessment of the opportunities and risks of reviewing the Ramsar wetland typology was shared with STRP26 participants, taking into account Contracting Party expectations.

Strengths of Ramsar wetland typology

- Covers a wide variety of wetland types and is the system applied to Wetlands of International Importance globally.
- Provides a unified framework for wetland assessment and management, across marine and coastal, inland, and human-made wetlands.
- Alignment with national wetland inventories (NWIs) can aid in comprehensive wetland mapping and data collection.
- Convention on Wetlands system could be leveraged against other less known systems.

Weaknesses of Ramsar wetland typology

- Some categories may be too broad or overlapping, leading to classification challenges.

- It does not apply a hierarchical framework to enable mapping, reporting and assessment at different spatial scales.
- May not adequately address local/national or rapidly changing wetland conditions and reporting requirements, e.g., due to climate change or human activities.
- Lack detailed mechanisms for integrating carbon sequestration data.
- Varied standards and approaches in NWIs across countries lead to inconsistencies in wetland data interpretation and classification.
- Compared to some other global classifications, the Convention on Wetlands might not integrate as seamlessly with certain specific ecological or geographical criteria.
- Weak linkage at present to KM GBF indicator framework.

Opportunities

- Using advanced mapping and monitoring technologies (e.g., GEO spatial monitoring) for more accurate classification.
- Recognising wetlands as critical carbon sinks could strengthen the system's role in climate change mitigation strategies. A review of the 'types' is needed to ensure they are readily translated into different IPCC emissions factors.
- Enhanced global collaboration for shared knowledge and conservation strategies.
- Integrating more focused carbon accounting could position the system as a key tool in climate change research.
- Collaborating more closely with NWIs can lead to a more standardised approach to global wetland data collection and analysis.
- Opportunity to align more closely with other global systems, leading to a more unified approach to wetland classification.

Risks

- Review of Ramsar wetland typology will increase burden on STRP, Secretariat, and Parties to transition to a modified system. Noting any amendments may be minor.
- The increased workload on STRP may come at expense of other urgent tasks.
- Limited resources and capacity in some regions could prevent the implementation of a new classification system effectively.

STRP26 key messages

25. Participants at STRP26 supported a review of the Ramsar wetland typology as outlined in paragraph 28 below.
26. Feedback from STRP members, STRP NFPs and STRP Observers included:
 - Opportunity to harmonise the Ramsar wetland typology with systems and reporting streams used by other MEAs and international processes.
 - Need to be aware of consequences of revising the wetland typology on users, e.g. national applications.
 - Review of the typology may enable a hierarchical approach to be incorporated that can be applied at different geographical scales and may support alignment with the Global Ecosystem Typology (GET).
 - An opportunity to review the function of the typology in supporting enhanced inventory, including for NWIs, and for assessment of new mapping tools, including AI methodologies.
 - Important to clearly outline the purpose of current and future wetland typology, and its suitability for wetland conservation, restoration, accounting, and other uses.

- The existing wetland typology was not developed in an ecosystem framework and may benefit from refinement; further consideration of the landscape context may also enhance integrated catchment management.
 - There is movement in other international processes, and review may be useful to ensure the Ramsar wetland typology remains current and enhances synergies.
 - Important to liaise with Contracting Parties, users of the wetland typology, other MEAs involved in reporting on wetland extent.
27. While some risks were identified if deciding to undertake a review of the Ramsar wetland typology, including the potential for reduced STRP capacity in 2026-2028 to deliver other high-priority work and the potential consequences for implementation by Contracting Parties, the benefits of the review outweighed these concerns. In particular, STRP26 concluded that there was a significant potential for the classification of wetlands to be improved, potentially via minor amendments, to enhance 1) harmonisation with other MEAs, 2) global and national reporting on wetland extent and condition, 3) assessment of carbon emissions from wetlands, and 4) application of remote sensing technologies.

STRP recommendation for Standing Committee

28. The STRP propose a 2-stage review of the Ramsar wetland type classification system (typology) be undertaken as a high-priority STRP task, predominantly in the 2026-2028 triennium, as outlined below:

Scoping [2024-25]

- a. Form a STRP sub-group to develop a Terms of Reference to outline the purpose and proposed approach for the review, considering advice received during STRP26 and SC63.
- b. Complete a cross-walk of the Ramsar wetland typology with the GET (Global Ecosystem Typology).

Phase 1. Initial assessment

- a. Establish a working group, including STRP panel members, STRP NFPs, and STRP Observers.
- b. Request the Secretariat to provide a summary of feedback on the Ramsar Classification from a recent review of NWI.
- c. Survey Contracting Parties and practitioners on the application of the Ramsar classification.
- d. Liaise with other MEAs, including AHTEG and the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBBSTA).
- e. Review recent scientific literature and assessment reports.
- f. Synthesise findings from steps ii to v and determine whether there is sufficient evidence to justify a comprehensive review.
- g. Submit a Phase 1 report to the Standing Committee.

Phase 2. Comprehensive assessment/recommendations

- a. Prepare terms of reference outlining an approach for a comprehensive assessment.
- b. Undertake a comprehensive assessment to address the issues and opportunities detailed in Phase 1.
- c. If necessary, prepare a report with recommended amendments to the Ramsar wetland typology to the Standing Committee for consideration.

Annex 2

STRP discussion on emerging issues

1. *Objective:* To initiate a focused discussion during STRP26 on emerging issues relating to the conservation and wise use of wetlands, concentrating on the relevance, potential impact, and necessity for STRP attention, to integrate insights and recommendations into the next STRP workplan 2026-2028.
2. *Background and context:* The modus operandi for the STRP identifies that:
 - a. “STRP should provide in an efficient, timely and effective manner, global, regional and where possible national specific scientific and technical advice, guidance and tools to enable these audiences to respond to the opportunities, challenges and emerging issues of wetland conservation and wise use”.
 - b. Further, the STRP Chair must “lead the STRP’s work and coordinate the Panel’s advice to the next COP concerning new and emerging priorities the Parties may wish to consider for the Panel’s work in the next triennium”.
 - c. Additionally: “the STRP will meet face-to-face annually to review progress on identified tasks, to consider urgent emerging issues and, in the year leading up to the COP, to discuss the areas of work to recommend to the Conference of Parties for its consideration for the next triennium.”

Potential emerging issues for consideration

3. Wetland mapping and inventory:
 - a. Wetland data, including mapping and inventory, is critical for a broad range of actions to achieve wetland conservation and wise use and to deliver the STRP workplan. However, the development of NWIs is progressing slowly and is geographically uneven. Global wetland inventory is patchy and almost absent for some wetland types.
 - b. A review of the mechanisms to support and advance NWIs is proposed, including responding to the needs of Contracting Parties to progress wetland inventory, reporting and RIS updates. The review may consider the policy, institutional, technical, and financial barriers to wetland inventory, particularly technological advances in wetland mapping and assessment and applying global ecosystem typologies.
 - c. Further emphasis on developing a comprehensive global wetland inventory is strongly encouraged through strategic partnerships, including developing a forum with the GEO community (e.g. GEO-Wetlands) to facilitate discussions and innovation.
 - d. A revised framework for the Convention and other MEAs to coordinate global reporting on wetland extent and degradation may be necessary, including streamlining reporting requirements between UNEP and the Convention on Wetlands concerning SDG 6.6.1, the forthcoming Global Wetlands Watch for the assessment of the Strategic Plan indicators, and to align with the KM GBF. Space agencies have dedicated programmes to support nature monitoring that could benefit these efforts; this is an opportunity to introduce concrete requirements or requests.
 - e. Other items to address include wetland mapping and inventory in a peri-urban context, identifying, classifying, and recording wetland areas within or adjacent to suburban regions and the need for integrated wetland assessments to address threats at the river basin scale.

4. Adequate reporting on the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance in the RIS:
 - a. RISs for many Wetlands of International Importance need to be updated, and site boundaries need to be added for many sites. These fundamental issues limit reporting on the implementation of the Convention, the delivery of the STRP work plan, and reporting on SDG indicator 6.6.1. It is also an impediment to delivering on the KM GBF.
 - b. Consider a programme of regular capacity-building activities (updates, training) to ensure Contracting Party staff are trained and can keep RIS sheets updated. This is particularly important where staff turnover is high and would help parties understand the significance and use of RIS.

5. Transformative change assessment for wetland conservation and wise use:
 - a. Wetland loss and degradation continue to occur globally and regionally, and it has been recognised that transformative change is necessary to address the biodiversity, climate and human health challenges. Transformative change reflects the need to reframe people’s connection to wetlands and nature. There is a need to assess what type of transformative change is needed to reverse wetland loss and degradation, including the impact of negative investments and further work on ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’ (OECMs).
 - b. A review and assessment of models for making transformative change is required to achieve the Strategic Goals of the Convention on Wetlands. This could greatly impact efforts to address diverse values and incorporate differing world views and indigenous and traditional knowledge.
 - c. Transformative change assessment led by the Convention, including via the STRP workplan, would build synergies with other MEAs, promote resource mobilisation to address the direct and indirect drivers of wetland loss, and align with global conservation efforts calling for transformative change, and in so doing, keep the Convention on Wetlands as a lead partner in addressing how this might be accomplished. For example:
 - i. IPBES: states that transformative change is a fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic, and social factors. It implies a shift in paradigms, values, and practices, aiming to address the root causes of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.
 - ii. KM GBF: calls for [“transformative change if life on Earth is to be safeguarded and people are to continue to receive the services and benefits that nature provides”](#).
 - iii. Rights of wetlands: there is increasing recognition that nature, including wetlands, has intrinsic rights. This approach has gained much support and was recently endorsed by a specially constituted [section of the Society of Wetland Scientists](#). There is a need to address the policy and legal implications.

6. Further advances in climate change and nature-based solutions:
 - a. The 2023-2025 triennium will produce several reports on climate change and wetlands, including about blue carbon ecosystems (Tasks 3.1-3.3), leaving Task 3.4, currently on hold, entitled: The protection, conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management of wetland ecosystems in addressing climate change.
 - b. There is a need to synthesise information on the most current and successful nature-based solutions (or ecosystem-based approaches) designed to protect, conserve, restore, and manage wetland ecosystems to address climate change and achieve other co-benefits.
 - c. In addition to peatlands and blue carbon ecosystems, a synthesis of information is needed on the role of freshwater wetlands, which can serve as large carbon sinks and are part of the portfolio of nature-based solutions (for example, blue carbon ecosystems) to address climate change.

- d. Other items to address include changes in hydrological cycles and how to manage drying cycles, carbon capture potential for mineral wetlands, implications from peatland fires, opportunities and challenges associated with biodiversity and carbon credits, and the potential impact on wetlands from the shift to electric energy sources and mineral use.
7. Plastic pollution in wetlands and wetland species:
 - a. The Convention’s website states that wetlands are ‘grievously affected by plastic pollution, with more than 800 marine and coastal species affected by this pollution through ingestion, entanglement, and other dangers. Solutions to plastic pollution are needed, including support for international efforts to end plastic pollution’.
 - b. While this issue is not new, there is an urgent need to address plastic pollution in wetlands, such as in terms of food security, and there is now much data available on different types of plastics in other parts of the world.
 8. Improved global reporting: Synergies on development of indicators and methods:
 - a. The increasing work by partner MEAs on issues of biodiversity and climate change (among others) presents opportunities for collaborative work and synergies on shared goals and leverages the work of the STRP.
 - b. A key opportunity is to continue working with the Global Biodiversity Framework to promote the development of ambitious wetland targets and monitoring indicators, for example, as part of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
 9. Increasing frequency of harmful algal blooms (HABs):
 - a. Harmful algal blooms are an ongoing pressure on wetlands that result from elevated nutrient loading. In some cases, blooms produce toxins that kill fish and other wildlife, threaten drinking water supplies, and cause human illness or death. Other non-toxic blooms threaten wetland biodiversity, water quality and supplies, and livelihoods. HABs are particularly concerning in coastal wetlands and lowland freshwater lakes.
 - b. There is a need for information on how to prevent and manage blooms when they occur to protect human and wetland health.
 - c. A focused assessment of HABs will further enhance the work of the STRP on agriculture and wetlands.

Prioritising emerging issues based on urgency, impact, and the STRP’s capacity.

10. Formalising recommendations and integrating them into the next workplan:

	Topic	Priority	Short-term and long-term impacts	Potential STRP output
1	Promote tools for wetland mapping and inventory	High	Could substantially improve Convention goals related to the conservation and wise use of wetlands, tracking the status and trends of wetlands, and implementation of the GBF 30x30 and SDG 6.6.1.	Technical Report
2	Adequate reporting on the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance in the RIS.	High	Adequate reporting is a fundamental issue that limits reporting on implementation of the Convention, including the GBF 30x30 and SDG 6.6.1.	Briefing Notes, online tutorials, annual workshops

	Topic	Priority	Short-term and long-term impacts	Potential STRP output
3	An assessment of transformative change assessment for wetland conservation and wise use.	High	This could greatly impact conservation and wise use, create synergies with other MEAs, international targets, and wetland conservation efforts to address diverse values and incorporate differing world views and Indigenous knowledge.	Briefing Note Policy Brief
4	Increasing frequency of harmful algal blooms (HABs)	High	It could help address the effects of chronic eutrophication and the loss of water quality and biodiversity.	Technical Report or Briefing Note
5	Improved global reporting: Synergies on development of indicators and methods Source: [CBD, Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIV.6 Inputs to the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework	High	This would continue to work with KM GBF on Indicators, methods and reporting	Briefing Note and other short reports
6	Further advances in climate change & nature-based solutions	Medium-High	Distill information needed to conserve and restore wetlands for climate change adaptation and mitigation. This is Task 3.4, which is currently on hold.	Briefing Note
7	Plastic pollution in wetlands and wetland species.	Medium-High	Provide information to address plastic pollution in wetlands, including up-to-date data on plastics and their effects.	Briefing Note Policy Brief

Annex 3

Task 1.1. (a) Guidance on application of Ramsar Criterion 9 for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance

Summary of STRP work

1. Task 1.1a of the STRP Work Plan for 2023-25 aims to:
 - Prepare updated guidance on the application of Ramsar Criterion 9 for the designation of Wetlands of International Importance, including advice on sources of technical information and their use and identification of information gaps that limit the designation of Sites.
 - Develop and implement an engagement plan with key actors (especially IUCN/SSC SGs, CITES, and KM GBF) concerning sources of population estimates, including Red List assessment data.
 - Identify additional and potential data sources and provide details on a mechanism for future updates, including evaluating the financial implications.
 - Propose updates to the Strategic Framework (for consideration in COP15 resolution, as appropriate).
 - Update the existing 1% estimates from 2006.
 - Develop an online training module for Administrative Authorities and RIS compilers.
2. This note provides an update on the progress of Task 1.1a. As of the end of February 2024, many elements of Task 1.1 have been completed or are no longer required, and the remainder is in progress for completion later this summer. Key aspects of the work are summarised below.
3. Preparation of a background briefing paper (for the task group) that collates past STRP documentation about Criterion 9, including relevant information submitted by STRP to COP9.
4. A list of the Wetlands of International Importance designated using Criterion 9 since COP9, together with information on the multiple species for which the Criterion has been applied, drawn respectively from the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) and the Wetlands of International Importance Database.
5. Updating the information (summary tables) of [population estimates and 1% thresholds for wetland-dependent non-avian animal species to apply Criterion 9](#), which was prepared in 2006. This work is ongoing and involves extraction of relevant data, among other things, from the Wetlands of International Importance Database (for those species where Criterion 9 has been applied), IUCN Species Survival Commission data; relevant IUCN Specialist Group databases, and published sources of information (especially taxa reviews). The information on population estimates will be subject to peer review by relevant IUCN experts later in the year. Together with background information, the summary tables will contain the following fields:

Order

Family

Species

Synonyms – where known

Common name

Alternative common names – where known

Population name (includes sub-species)

Population estimate

Units of estimate

Date of estimate/assessment
1% threshold
IUCN status
CMS status
CITES status
Source
Notes

6. The revision of the 1% population thresholds for Criterion 9 work is being undertaken *pro bono* in the current triennium. In the long term, sustainable resourcing arrangements will be required to ensure information remains current for implementation and use by Contracting Parties. Financial costs are being assessed but will likely be three months of consultant time per triennium. The implications of IUCN engagement to peer review the 1% population thresholds are being explored.
7. Guidance is being prepared to outline the future requirements for revising the population estimates and 1% thresholds for Criterion 9 (noting, in particular, that such listings cannot aspire to be completed in the same way that *Waterbird Population Estimates* support Criterion 6, due to the large number of wetland animal species potentially to which Criterion 9 could apply).
8. Task 1.1a is also reviewing and updating the guidance for applying Criterion 9 within the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for developing the List of Wetlands of International Importance*. This aspect of Task 1.1a is ongoing (as of the end of February 2024) and will be completed in 2024 for submission to SC64. The Strategic Framework and guidelines review has identified that only a small number of issues require updates or limited revision. These are as follows:
 - Updated advice on online data and information availability, especially the IUCN Red List website, since the guidance was drafted in 2005, including guidance on using these sources and revision of relevant websites and information sources.
 - Guidance on terminology used to describe the 'population' units of different non-avian wetland taxa.
 - Guidance relating to applying Criterion 9 information and data for Criteria 3 and 4 in relevant situations.
 - Updating information about relevant processes following advice from previous COP decisions.
9. The STRP proposes that the updated guidance for applying Criterion 9 within the *Strategic framework and guidelines* be formally submitted as a draft resolution to COP15. Specifically, it proposes limited guidance amendments for Criterion 9 (and 6), which will be submitted by STRP to SC64 later this year.

Annex 4

Task 1.1. (b) Guidance to facilitate the application of Criterion 6

1. Task 1.1b of the STRP Work Plan for 2023-25 aims to:
 - Prepare guidance with relevant international partners on addressing identified waterbird population data and estimates gaps.
 - Engage with relevant IOPs, flyway initiatives and CITES.
 - Ensure that any relevant findings support the development of the technical proposal in task 1.1 (c).
 - Prepare a report to SC63 that provides scientific and technical advice concerning global Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) regarding the application of Ramsar Criterion 6.
2. Task 1.1b is being concurrently implemented with Task 1.1c (developing a technical proposal for Waterbird Population Estimates).
3. This note provides an update on the progress of Task 1.1b. As of the end of February 2024, the STRP consider many elements of Task 1.1b to be appropriately addressed under Task 1.1c, particularly for items relating to addressing information gaps in waterbird population estimates and engagement with relevant IOPs and flyway initiatives.
4. The task requested ‘a report to SC63 that provides scientific and technical advice about global Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) regarding the application of Ramsar Criterion 6’. This has been interpreted as reviewing and updating the adopted guidance for applying Criteria within the Strategic framework and guidelines for developing the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
5. The STRP has reviewed the updated guidance for applying Criterion 6 including the amendments made by the Secretariat following Resolution XIV.18.
6. We note that additional guidance on alternative population estimates adopted by Resolution XIV.18 is already fully included in the Strategic framework and guidelines.
7. The STRP’s view is that the existing guidance remains essentially ‘fit for purpose’ and can be applied by the Secretariat and Contracting Parties for Ramsar Site assessment and nomination. However, several amendments and updates have been proposed to the Strategic framework and guidelines. The specific amendments proposed are:
 - Further acknowledgement of definitions of terms used in the Criterion guidance is further explained in Appendix G of the Framework (Glossary of terms).
 - Further information to support paragraph 211 on contemporary sources of information on the distribution and range of waterbird populations.
 - Clarifying the terms ‘seasons’ and ‘regularly occurring’ in the Glossary.
 - Updating paragraph 206 to reflect the existence of the Waterbirds Populations Portal (www.wpp.wetlands.org) that will provide the latest applicable 1% thresholds.
8. The STRP proposes that minor revisions to the guidance for Criterion 6 within the Strategic framework and guidelines are formally submitted as a draft resolution to COP15. Specifically, it is proposed that a limited number of guidance amendments for Criterion 6 (and 9) will be prepared by June 2024 and submitted by STRP to SC64.

Annex 5

Task 1.1. (c) Recommendations (a 'Technical Proposal') from the STRP on resourcing and implementation of Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) updates

Mandate

1. Task 1.1c of the STRP Work Plan for 2023-25 aims to prepare a technical proposal for resourcing and implementation of Waterbird Population Estimate updates.
2. The preparation of a Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) Technical Proposal was requested by Contracting Parties through the Convention on Wetlands' COP Resolution XIV.18 (operative paragraphs 15-16), which:

15. REQUESTS the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to include in its work plan for the next triennium the preparation of guidance to facilitate appropriate application of this Resolution by Contracting Parties in liaison with the technical and scientific subsidiary bodies of other relevant treaties, such as the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), as well as the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) and other flyway initiatives;

16. ALSO REQUESTS the STRP to develop a technical proposal to enable the resourcing and implementing of future timely and comprehensive Waterbird Population Estimates updates, in consultation with Contracting Parties, relevant flyway agreements and partnerships, Wetlands International and interested entities; and that this technical proposal, including, with advice from the Secretariat, an outline of funding implications, be presented to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee, ahead of a draft resolution for the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties, concerning the arrangements for future regular updates of the Waterbird Populations Portal;

Summary recommendations to the Standing Committee from STRP

3. This note provides an update on the progress of Task 1.1c and provides specific recommendations for consideration at SC63 in June 2024. Specifically, the STRP recommends the Standing Committee:
 - a. Notes that STRP has reviewed various options and produced a Technical Proposal as requested by Resolution XIV.18; see document **SC63 Doc.20**.
 - b. Seek a decision from SC63 to mobilise resources within the Convention and potentially from partners to deliver a WPE6 (hereinafter referred to as WPE2027) within the next triennium to address urgent and short-term (more immediate) update requirements.
 - c. Recommends the development of an international partnership approach ("Waterbird Estimates Partnership") as a mechanism to guide periodic (regular) and fully resourced future updates of the WPE (WPE2027 onwards) for the benefit of the Convention on Wetlands and all other users of waterbird population estimates. Such a partnership would benefit from coordination support offered by Wetlands International.
4. The rationale considered by the STRP for the recommendations outlined above is summarised below. Specifically, the STRP noted the following:

- the urgent need to update the global WPE as a fundamental information source to deliver the Convention on Wetlands; and also noting that the 1% thresholds for about 35% of waterbird populations are now more than 12 (up to 35) years old and that a lack of up to date information, which has serious implications for the correct application of Criterion 6 (of the Wetlands of International Importance Criteria) and the conservation of the world's waterbirds;
 - the importance of the WPE process for establishing waterbird population status and trends, including for use as anticipated outcome indicators of the 5th Strategic Plan for the Convention on Wetlands;
 - the necessity and value of up-to-date waterbird population information for other international and national waterbird and wetland conservation processes².
 - the current lack of timely, adequate and sustained funding to review and update the WPE every COP as required by Resolution VIII.38.
 - the expanding opportunities for bringing new data sources from different monitoring efforts for different flyways and regions to be incorporated into the WPE updates.
5. The STRP's recommended proposal is for an immediate short-term process to produce a sixth edition of Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE2027) and, in parallel, develop a longer-term solution through the establishment of a global 'Waterbird Estimates Partnership' in collaboration with other actors to strengthen synergies³, and as a cost-effective mechanism to collate and assess new data sources to reduce the resourcing burden.
 6. The technical proposal also supports the request in Resolution XIV.18 for STRP to provide a draft resolution for the Standing Committee for transmittal to COP15 concerning the arrangements for future regular updates of the WPE that will be delivered through the online Waterbirds Populations Portal.
 7. Initial best estimates of resourcing implications are outlined in Table 6 of the Technical Proposal; see document **SC63 Doc.20**. The resourcing implications address short-term requirements (WPE2027). For the longer term, scheduled updates and costs for reviews will be informed by the WPE2027 process and elaborated in a work plan of the proposed Partnership.

Outline of the status quo

8. The global WPE delivered through the Waterbirds Populations Portal represents a fundamental information source to provide robust and authoritative information required to assess changes in waterbird populations (numbers and trends) over time as well as establishing the 1% thresholds as are necessary for the application of Criterion 6 (of the Wetlands of International Importance Criteria) under the Convention on Wetlands. The Portal provides the Convention on Wetlands' acknowledged source of information for the derived 1% thresholds for 2,340 populations of 899 species (1,836 endemic, resident or short-distance migrants and 504 long-distance migrants).
9. While the Convention on Wetlands, through Resolutions X.22 and XIV.18, has urged its Contracting Parties to provide the necessary financial support to enable the production of such international assessments and updates, there has been no source of funding allocated to WPE updates since 2012. Accordingly, there is currently no mechanism to ensure that the essential

² Including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species, Convention on Wetlands, African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) and IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

³ As called for by Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIV.6.

updates on waterbird population numbers are collated and disseminated in a timely manner. As a consequence, over 37% of the population information is now more than 12 (and up to 35) years old, and the lack of current data has serious implications for the correct application of Criterion 6 and the conservation of the world's waterbirds and wetlands, being recognised as a matter of concern by Resolution XIV.18.

Uses and utility of data

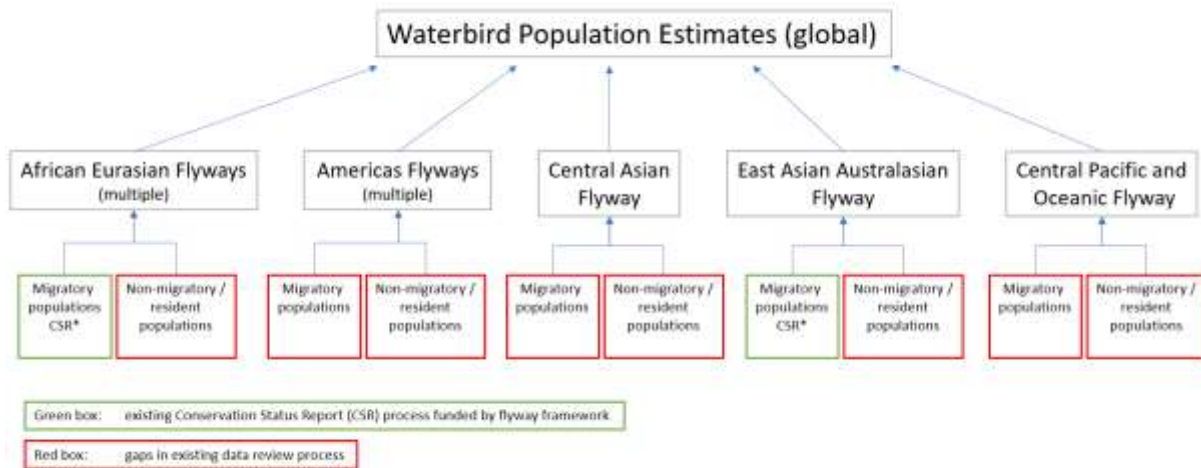
10. The 1% thresholds and the population estimates from which they derive are critically important to national policies and the prioritisation of sites of international importance for wetlands for designation under the Convention on Wetlands, i.e. for selection of Wetlands of International Importance. The global ecological significance of the large numbers of waterbirds protected under the Convention on Wetlands, including many threatened species and populations, and the importance of their associated cultural values to many communities also serves as an important outreach tool to engage the broader public in the conservation of wetlands and their biodiversity. Such important considerations (which can have direct policy implications), amongst others, are recognised through multiple past resolutions of the Convention on Wetlands.
11. Up-to-date waterbird population information is also important to support Contracting Parties in developing and implementing management responses and evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of actions. In addition, the WPE process of waterbird population status and trends can help inform the development of, and be used in, anticipated outcome indicators of the forthcoming 5th Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands.
12. Besides, up-to-date waterbird population information for the Convention on Wetlands is highly relevant for many other international and national waterbird and wetland conservation processes. Additional processes include global frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Global Biodiversity Framework (in particular Targets 3, 4, 5 and 9), the Convention on Migratory Species, and its new Strategic Plan for Migratory Species. Data on population sizes and trends also provides core information to the EAAFP (a Regional Initiative of the Convention on Wetlands) and its Flyway Site Network, as well as regional agreements and frameworks such as the AEWA and the WHSRN. WPE are also an important source of information for updating the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Implications/risks of no action

13. Globally there is increasing uncertainty for Contracting Parties regarding which information sources to use for waterbirds. The Convention on Wetlands still relies primarily on WPE5 (2012) as the most up to date population estimates and 1% thresholds. However, in the absence of regular WPE updates since 2012, the AEWA Conservation Status Report (CSR) process has continued funding a three-yearly review, which has updated relevant 1% thresholds for populations in its agreement area where estimates have changed significantly, for use in their flyway processes. The CSR updates have led to uncertainty within the African-Eurasian region regarding which process holds the current definitive source of 1% thresholds.
14. Additionally, in 2022, EAAFP Partners established a new process such that its CSR provides new estimates and 1% thresholds for over 111 populations compared to those published in WPE5 (2012). For North American species, the Partners in Flight Avian Conservation Assessment Database has updated some population estimates several times since 2012. At the national level, some Contracting Parties, including Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the United

Kingdom and the United States of America, have been producing national assessments with newer and different estimates for resident and migratory populations.

Figure 1: Summary of existing dataflows (not necessarily complete for all populations) and remaining dataflow gaps within the Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) 'process' as per the five major global flyways



Proposed solutions

15. The immediate steps required in the short term (by COP16) are to resource the production of WPE2027 by collating and incorporating existing and available priority information.
16. Additionally, a robust framework to maintain, review, and update this information regularly will be required in the longer term. Such a new framework could be progressed by establishing a collective approach that establishes new synergies between partners/data suppliers/data users to ensure maximum benefit to the Convention on Wetlands and other major data providers and users.
17. Establishing such a cooperative mechanism will require consultation, considering possible trade-offs and the preparation of agreements, and there is a need to start this task in parallel to the short-term step, such that a new framework could be set up in the medium term (beyond COP15) for future WPE updates. Bringing together data from different sources recognises that there are multiple interacting elements, including:
 - frequency and timing of updates and linkages to other processes (elements of which are outlined in the technical proposal);
 - how updates are communicated (batch update vs. rolling publication);
 - alignment with other (flyway-scale) processes;
 - migratory vs. non-migratory populations and coverage by different partners;
 - population estimates vs. 1% thresholds;
 - taxonomic scope of the Waterbird Populations Portal to respond to the current and future needs of the Convention on Wetlands and other partners.
18. Such a long-term framework would benefit from creating an international partnership with multiple actors that will have a role in finding a workable solution and ensuring global guidance, ownership, synergy and resources. A “waterbird estimates partnership” is proposed as a mechanism that additionally considers the needs and frameworks of other initiatives that are

independent (of the Convention on Wetlands) and in different stages of development around the world, as well as reflecting the needs of Regional Economic Integration Organisations.

19. Ultimately, an 'ideal' model for ongoing collaboration for WPE updates will need to be implemented (i.e. through a proposed partnership), reflecting the resources and requirements of key data providers.

Funding implications

20. For the next triennium (2025-2028), it is recommended to focus on completing a WPE2027 and scoping the proposed partnership.
21. Development of WPE2027 is estimated to require resource mobilisation of 366,000 CHF. The WPE2027 will involve a review and update of about 1,600 selected priority populations (including migratory and resident populations in America's flyways, migratory and resident populations in the Central Asian Flyway, migratory populations in the Central Pacific Flyway and resident populations in Africa and Asia, and resident populations in Europe) that the latest AEWA and EAAFP CSRs do not cover. WPE2027 may be undertaken between 2025 and 2027 and delivered in 2027.
22. Maintenance/enhancement of the Waterbirds Populations Portal, undertaken between 2025 and 2028, is estimated to require resource mobilisation of 61,000 CHF. This is necessary to improve the Portal's functionality and ease of use by Parties.
23. Establishment of a long-term global waterbird estimates partnership is estimated to require resource mobilisation of 38,000 CHF. This is necessary to initiate consultation with potential partners to establish a partnership and develop a multiyear work plan and provisional budget, including options for co-funding, with work to be undertaken in 2026-2027. If successful, the partnership may be launched at COP16.
24. For the longer term, scheduled updates and costs for reviews will be informed by the WPE 2027 process and elaborated in a work plan of the proposed partnership.