STRP Task 4.2
Comprehensive review and analysis of Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) reports

FINAL Consultancy report

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Executive Summary

The Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) is one of the most valuable tools available to Contracting Parties to assist with implementation of the Convention. The RAM has its origins in Recommendation 4.7, adopted by COP4 (Montreux, Switzerland) in 1990 and remains the principal formal means by which Parties may receive support from the Convention for addressing actual and potential change in ecological character at Ramsar Sites. Among the key attributes of the RAM are that it:

- provides a flexible and cost-effective mechanism for addressing such change in ecological character;
- carries the endorsement and authority of a global intergovernmental treaty;
- may be accompanied by (limited) financial resources to support implementation, particularly in developing countries
- provides access to international technical and policy expertise;
- helps to increase familiarity with aspects of implementation of the Convention in countries that need capacity support;
- convenes stakeholders;
- results in a publicly available report, building buy-in and transparency but also enabling sharing of experience and lessons learned between Parties and other stakeholders.

The RAM mechanism now has a long track record, and a rich body of experience in its use has built up, as summarised in this report. It has undoubtedly been instrumental in helping Contracting Parties in a positive way to address key instances of challenges affecting the conservation of some of the world's most important wetlands. This review however also identifies some weaknesses and missed opportunities, suggesting useful areas for renewed action in future.

Recommendation 4.7 incorporated an Annex containing extremely brief guidelines on operation of the (then) 'Monitoring Procedure'. These continue to apply, unchanged, to the RAM, since only the name of the mechanism has ever been amended. The findings of the present review suggest that after more than a quarter of a century, both the Recommendation itself, and, in particular the accompanying guidelines, would benefit from comprehensive revision and updating.

In addition to such revision of the underlying COP decision on which the RAM is based, there is also a need to improve the quality and availability of basic communication products concerning the RAM.

The combination of these two measures would help to ensure that Contracting Parties and other stakeholders are better informed about the ways in which the RAM can help them and that any misperceptions or misrepresentations of the RAM as a negative procedure are dispelled.

The treatment of the RAM within the four successive Ramsar Strategic Plans since COP6, and within the 12 triennial budgets since the adoption of Recommendation 4.7, has been inconsistent. For example, the RAM formerly received funding from the core budget, but now is covered, if resources permit, through the 'non core' budget (there is a zero-rated core budget line). This inconsistency may also be contributing to misconceptions about the mechanism.

These high-level findings are informed by a review of 82 applications of the RAM (including under its former incarnations of 'Monitoring Procedure' and 'Management Guidance Procedure') completed to the end of 2016, including a detailed analysis of the 76 corresponding reports published on the Ramsar website as of December 2017. Reports for the five most recent RAMs conducted at the very end of 2016 or in 2017, alongside six reports earlier missions, have yet to be published on the Ramsar website.

Data contained in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet is presented in the 15 sub-sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.15 of the report, accompanied by a discussion of issues under the following headings:

- RAMs that are principally focused on single issues, versus RAMs addressing multiple issues
- The significance of a specific development proposal as a trigger for RAMs
- RAMs relating to transboundary sites/issues
- RAMs relating to Article 2.5 and Article 4.2 boundary restriction/ compensation cases
- RAMs and the Montreux Record
- Duration of RAM missions
- Terms of Reference for RAMs
- Size and composition of RAM mission teams
- Joint missions with other MEAs
- Cost of missions
- Language of RAM reports
- Length of reports
- Structure of reports
- Number and structure of Recommendations
- Follow up to RAM reports

Overall, we conclude that the potential offered by the RAM is only being partially realised and that this could be rectified in large part through the provision of enhanced guidance to Parties, the Secretariat and other stakeholders in the form of a revision to Recommendation 4.7. In particular, a lack of consistency over time and between regions in the way in which missions have been prepared and conducted and RAM reports finalised, combined with very weak attention to follow-up, means that it is often difficult or impossible to assess the impact of a RAM or to ensure that experience and lessons learned are available for sharing

within and beyond the Convention. Key opportunities for optimising Convention effectiveness are being missed.

Consolidated list of recommendations

This review makes 15 recommendations, which are integrated into the body of the report alongside the relevant analysis, findings and conclusions. A consolidated list is provided here for ease of reference.

Recommendation 1

Recommendation 4.7 should be reviewed and the range of circumstances in which a RAM may be requested by Contracting Parties expanded.

Recommendation 2

The Convention should ensure that Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders are aware that the RAM is just one of a range of responses and tools available under the Convention, whether in relation to specific instances of actual or potential change in ecological character at a Ramsar Site, or wider aspects of implementation. The information and communication products suggested in part a. of Recommendation 14 below should include guidelines for Parties and other stakeholders on selection of the appropriate response or tool for a given situation.

Recommendation 3

The potential of the RAM as an independent, internationally recognised means of addressing issues relating to the conservation and wise use of transboundary wetlands and wetland systems should be further explored, particularly with regard to the possible inclusion of representatives of neighbouring countries as observers and/or participating stakeholders during RAM field missions.

Recommendation 4

Where a RAM is associated with Article 2.5/4.2 issues, the RAM report should contain a specific section offering information on experience and lessons learned that might assist with other Article 2.5/4.2 cases, even when these are not the subject of a RAM.

Recommendation 5

The operative paragraphs of COP Recommendation 4.8 that relate to the RAM should also be addressed as part of the proposed process to review and amend Recommendation 4.7 and its Annex (see Recommendations 1 & 14 of this report). It is suggested that application at Montreux Record sites might be <u>among</u> a

number of priorities for the RAM in future, but not the sole or most important priority.

Recommendation 6

A concise Terms of Reference document should be agreed by the Contracting Party and the Secretariat ahead of each RAM mission and included as an Annex to the RAM report. Whilst there should be flexibility in format and length to take account of the unique circumstances of each RAM, it is suggested that the ToR should always include:

- A brief statement of the background to the RAM;
- The objectives of the RAM and the issues it is requested to address;
- Identification of key stakeholders;
- The composition of the RAM mission team;
- The expected process and timeframe, including planned follow-up to the mission.

Recommendation 7

Greater use of IOP expertise should be made in future, where this is appropriate to the circumstances of individual missions and acceptable to the Contracting Party concerned. Such an approach could help to ensure the most effective use of the limited financial resources and Secretariat capacity available for application of the RAM.

Recommendation 8

Consideration should be given to the opportunities for enhancing the contribution of the STRP to application of the RAM, including (but not limited to) ensuring the involvement of STRP National Focal Points in RAMs.

Recommendation 9

When planning future RAMs, consideration should be given to the opportunities for, and benefits of, inclusion of a representative of another Contracting Party, as a RAM team member or observer.

Recommendation 10

The reports of missions conducted jointly with other MEAs should always make clear which Findings and Recommendations relate to obligations under both MEAs and which relate specifically to obligations under one MEA or the other.

Recommendation 11

RAM reports should always contain an Executive Summary. The Contracting Party concerned should have an opportunity to study and comment on a draft Executive Summary, in line with the provisions of Recommendation 4.7.

The final Executive Summary should be translated into the other official languages of the Convention (and wherever possible also into the official language/s of the country concerned, if different) and posted on the news pages of the Ramsar website.

It is suggested that all Executive Summaries should, as a minimum, contain:
- A brief overview of the main technical issue(s) being addressed, with tagging of keywords to facilitate online searching and a link to the relevant RIS(s) and any previous RAM report covering the same site(s);
- The date and duration of the mission and the date that the report was finalised;
- A statement of the composition of the mission team, ensuring that the broad affiliation of each team member is readily apparent (e.g. Contracting Party, Secretariat, STRP, IOP, independent technical expert);
- A link to the Terms of Reference of the mission;
- The principal conclusions arising from the RAM;
- The recommendations of the RAM;
- A statement about how the conclusions and recommendations of the mission are to be followed up.

Recommendation 12

It is important that flexibility is retained and that there is no attempt to impose a uniform structure for RAM reports. However, it is recommended that the following elements should always be included and readily identifiable from the headings and sub-headings used in the report:

- Executive Summary.
- Background to the mission (brief summary of consultations that resulted in initiation of the RAM, and its main objectives).
- A brief description of the site, including a location map (country scale) and a site map (showing the Ramsar Site boundaries) and links to the Ramsar Information Sheet, but avoiding lengthy technical description where this has no direct relevance to the specific issues being addressed by the RAM.
- A summary of the current situation, as assessed by the RAM team, focusing on findings and conclusions that apply to the core issues for the mission.
- A stand-alone list of all Recommendations.
- A section on follow-up to the mission's recommendations.
- Terms of Reference for the mission (probably as an Annex).

- Composition of the RAM team (Annex – if not already included in the ToR)
- Programme of the field mission (Annex).
- List of stakeholders consulted and other contributors (Annex).

Recommendation 13

It is recommended that future RAMs should address the following points:

- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly linked to findings and conclusions and that these, in turn, are clearly linked to the Terms of Reference for the mission;
- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly identified as such in the RAM report;
- Ensuring that recommendations are numbered to make follow-up cross-referencing as simple as possible;
- Grouping related recommendations under corresponding sub-headings;
- Distinguishing between short-term, medium-term and long-term actions;
- Testing whether each recommendation:
    - Identifies clearly what action should be taken?
    - By whom? (being as specific as possible, and considering actions required by government, public-sector bodies, private sector, civil society)
    - By when?
    - Subject to which enabling conditions?
    - With which measurable indicators of (a) implementation and (b) success?
- Supporting text recommendations with a <u>simple</u> table of suggested actions, timeframes (perhaps related to Ramsar triennia), key stakeholder groups and practical indicators of successful implementation; How (and by whom) will progress with follow-up to RAM recommendations be monitored? How, by whom and to whom should progress be reported? And what measures will be taken if progress is assessed as insufficient by time x, y or z?

Recommendation 14

The minimal guidance provided to the Parties, Secretariat and other stakeholders through Annex 1 to Recommendation 4.7 (COP4, Montreux, 1990) should be revised, expanded and brought up-to-date through:

   a. Development of information and communication products that:
      i. Briefly explain what the RAM is;
      ii. Describe and illustrate (with examples) how it can assist Parties with implementing the Convention.

b. Development of practical and technical guidance for Parties, Secretariat and other stakeholders in the form of a simple 'how to' step-by-step manual covering *inter alia* the following topics:
   iii. The process for initiating a RAM;
   iv. Preparation of a RAM (e.g. development of Terms of Reference, composition of the Mission team, engendering national-level ownership and stakeholder engagement);
   v. Structure and content of RAM reports (including crafting of effective recommendations);
   vi. The process for following up a RAM report.

Recommendation 15

A draft COP Resolution should be prepared by the STRP (with input from Parties, IOPs and Secretariat) to supersede Recommendation 4.7 and its Annex, taking into account the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this review.

1. The Ramsar Advisory Mission mechanism

1.1 Background

It is important to underline from the very beginning of this report that the Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) is precisely what its name implies: an <u>advisory</u> mechanism, implemented at the invitation of the Contracting Party concerned. Although sometimes misperceived or misrepresented as such, it is <u>not</u> a compliance mechanism or in any sense a 'negative', or disciplinary procedure. On the contrary, the RAM offers significant opportunities and advantages, as indicated by the continuing demand from Parties for the help that can be provided in this way, and the fact that a number of Parties have chosen to request multiple RAMs. Among the strengths of the RAM mechanism are that it:

- Provides an independent mechanism for addressing actual and potential change in ecological character at Ramsar Sites;
- Carries the endorsement and authority of a global intergovernmental treaty;
- May be accompanied by (limited) financial resources to support implementation, particularly in developing countries;
- Provides access to international technical and policy expertise;
- Helps to increase familiarity with aspects of implementation of the Convention in countries that need capacity support;
- Convenes stakeholders;
- Results in a publicly available report, building buy-in and transparency but also enabling sharing of experience and lessons learned between Parties and other stakeholders.

It is equally important to acknowledge that in many cases the RAM will not necessarily discover or say anything that has not been discovered or said about an issue already at national level. However, the essential benefit may be in having these same points articulated with a different 'voice' (i.e. from an international perspective that is potentially perceived as more authoritative, or more independent), or by switching the tone of debate, or by taking the debate to a different place/higher level, politically.

The present Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) mechanism has evolved from the 'Monitoring Procedure', originally established by decision of the Standing Committee in 1988 and endorsed by the Conference of Parties through Recommendation 4.7 (COP4, Montreux 1990), the first two operative paragraphs of which read:

> "*ENDORSES the measure taken by the Standing Committee to establish a Ramsar Monitoring Procedure (the revised text of which is appended as Annex 1 to the present Recommendation), and instructs the Bureau to*

continue to operate this procedure when it receives information on adverse, or likely adverse changes in ecological character at Ramsar sites;

DETERMINES that Monitoring Procedure reports shall be public documents once the Contracting Party concerned has had an opportunity to study the reports and comment on them;"

The public nature of finalised reports is a fundamental principle and strength of the RAM (Monitoring Procedure) mechanism. It helps to ensure not only transparency and building of trust among stakeholders, but also sharing of experience and expertise with the Convention and more widely.

Annex 1 to Recommendation 4.7 (see box below) consists of six short paragraphs, which, to this day, constitute the only formal guidance available to Parties. Although the 'Monitoring Procedure' was renamed by successive Meetings of the Conference of Parties during the 1990s: first as the 'Management Guidance Procedure' (Resolution VI.14, COP6, Brisbane, 1996) and then as the 'Ramsar Advisory Mission' (Resolution VII.12, COP7, San José, 1999), Annex 1 to Recommendation 4.7 has never been expanded or brought up-to-date. The COP7 decision that led to the current title of the RAM followed a discussion during the 21st meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee in 1998 – see the Minutes of that meeting for further details.

REC. C.4.7 (Rev.)
Annex 1

MONITORING PROCEDURE

1. It comes to the attention of the Bureau* that the ecological character of a listed wetland is changing or is likely to change as a result of technological development, pollution or other human interference.

2. Where appropriate, the Bureau shall propose to the Contracting Party or Parties concerned to apply the Monitoring Procedure, requesting, at the same time, additional information on the status of the wetland concerned.

3. Where, as a result of this procedure and other information available to the Bureau, the Bureau is of the opinion that there is evidence of significant change or likely change in the ecological character of a listed wetland, the Bureau shall collaborate with the Contracting Party or Parties concerned to arrive at an acceptable solution and the Bureau may offer advice and assistance to that Party or those Parties, if required. The Bureau shall inform the Standing Committee of any action it has taken in this connection.

4. If it does not appear that an acceptable solution can be readily achieved, the Bureau shall immediately bring the matter to the attention of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee, acting through the Chairman and Secretary, provided by the Bureau, may pursue the matter, in direct contact with the Contracting Party or Parties concerned and, where appropriate, with other responsible agencies or bodies, with a view to helping to find a solution.

5. In the event of alterations to the List or changes in ecological character in wetlands included therein, the Standing Committee shall arrange for the information to be circulated for discussion at the next Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in accordance with Article 8 paragraph 2 (d) of the Convention.

6. The Bureau shall periodically review and report progress on the conservation status of sites to which its attention has been drawn under this procedure. To facilitate follow-up, the Bureau shall maintain a register of activities undertaken in this connection

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Box: The Monitoring Procedure as endorsed by COP4
*The Ramsar Secretariat was formerly known as the Ramsar Bureau.

Currently, to comply with the first operative paragraph of Recommendation 4.7, a RAM application <u>must</u> involve a Ramsar Site. However, associated wetlands that are not themselves Ramsar-designated, but form part of a complex or system of wetlands including one or more Ramsar Sites, can legitimately be included. A RAM must also relate to actual or potential change in ecological character, in line with the provisions of Article 3.2 of the Convention. A linkage to the Montreux Record mechanism is contained in the third operative paragraph of Recommendation 4.8, which instructs the Secretariat to give <u>priority</u> to applying the RAM at Montreux Record sites, but does not limit the application of the RAM to such sites.

Recommendation 4.7 does not contemplate the application of the RAM to provide Contracting Parties with advice on issues unconnected with change in ecological character at a listed site, or to provide advice on the conservation and wise use of a potential Ramsar Site. Wider but potentially associated issues of this kind might include, *inter alia*, issues relating to wise use of wetlands in general within the territory of a Contracting Party (Article 3.1), international cooperation (Article 5), or sites that meet the Ramsar criteria for international importance but which have not yet been designated.

It is beyond the mandate of the present review to consider this point in further detail, but it is noted that Recommendation 4.7 is now more than 25 years old and that an examination of the scope of the RAM is perhaps overdue.

Recommendation 1

Recommendation 4.7 should be reviewed and the range of circumstances in which a RAM may be requested by Contracting Parties expanded.

1.2 Inclusion of the RAM in Ramsar Strategic Plans and triennial budgets

The Monitoring Procedure received a core budget allocation of CHF 30K per year for 1991–1993 triennium (with an asterisk against the budget line in the attachment to the relevant Resolution stating "*To be augmented by substantial voluntary contributions*").

In 1991 and 1992 voluntary contributions brought total income for the Monitoring Procedure budget line to CHF 80K and CHF 82K, respectively.
At COP5 (Kushiro, 1993) the core budget allocation for the Monitoring Procedure was increased to CHF 80K per year for the 1994–1996 triennium

The first Ramsar Strategic Plan (1997–2002) included the following actions:
> "5.1.4 Increase application of the Management Guidance Procedure (Recommendation 4.7) to provide advice on future management of Ramsar sites. [CPs, SC, Bureau]
> 5.1.5 Improve implementation of the recommendations made in reports of Management Guidance Procedure missions. [CPs]"

However, the Management Guidance Procedure received a zero core budget allocation for the 1997–1999 triennium.

At COP7 (San José, 1999) the newly renamed Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) was included as a budget line for the 2000–2002 triennium, but received a zero core budget allocation.

The core budget for 2003–2005 adopted at COP8 (Valencia, 2002) did not mention the RAM. However the second Ramsar Strategic Plan, for 2003–2008, included the following ambitious actions:

> "11.2.5 For sites included in the Montreux Record, request a Ramsar Advisory Mission of independent experts, where appropriate, to review the problems affecting the site and offer recommendations for remedial actions. GO 2{CPs, Bureau}
> 2003-2005 global implementation target:
> For all sites on the Montreux Record, and which have not been subject to a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM), CPs to request such a Mission prior to COP9.
> 11.2.6 Where a Ramsar Advisory Mission has been completed for a Montreux Record site, take all necessary steps to implement the recommendations, and report at regular intervals to the Bureau on the results of these actions. At the appropriate time, seek the removal of the site from the Montreux Record, having provided the Bureau and STRP with details of the site condition using the approved questionnaire (Ramsar Handbook 7). GO 2 {CPs, STRP, Bureau}"

The exclusion of the RAM from the core budget was repeated in the 2006–2009 budget adopted by COP9 (Kampala, 2005), and the 2009–2012 budget adopted by COP10 (Changwon, 2008). The Third Strategic Plan, for 2009–2015 included limited reference to the RAM:

> "Strategy 2.6 Ramsar site status: Monitor the condition of Ramsar sites and address negative changes in their ecological character, notify the Ramsar Secretariat of changes affecting Ramsar sites, and apply the Montreux Record, if appropriate, and Ramsar Advisory Mission as tools to address problems. (CPs, Secretariat, IOPs)"
> "Key Result Area 2.6.ii: For all sites on the Montreux Record that have not been the subject of a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM), intended to provide advice on the steps needed to remove those sites from the Record, Parties to request such a Mission. (National: CPs)"

The RAM made a reappearance in the triennial budget for 2013–2015 (annex to Resolution XI.2 *Financial and budgetary matters* adopted at COP11, Bucharest, 2012), for the first time since 2002. There was a zero allocation in the core budget, but a 'non-core' allocation of CHF 150K per year, meaning that RAMs could only take place if sufficient voluntary contributions were received (whether from Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners, or others) and expenditure approved by the Finance Sub-group of the Standing Committee.

In the current Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan (2016–2024) adopted by COP12 (Punta del Este, 2015) the RAM receives one brief mention as a tool for delivery of Target 7 "Sites that are at risk of change of ecological character have threats addressed", under Goal 2 "Effectively conserving and managing the Ramsar Site network". The current triennial budget, adopted by COP12 and covering the period 2016–2018 again includes a zero allocation for the RAM in the core budget, but an increased no-core allocation of CHF 200K per annum.

Although this consultancy is focused primarily on technical matters, we note that lack of consistency in treatment of the RAM within successive Ramsar Strategic Plans, as well as within the budget of the Convention (particularly its 'demotion' from the core budget), may have contributed to some of the challenges identified in section two of this report. The value of the RAM depends at least in part on the mechanism being widely perceived as a high priority for the Convention; something that in turn is influenced significantly by its place within the Strategic Plan and triennial budget.

We do not make a recommendation on this important aspect, since budgetary matters are the responsibility of the Standing Committee and Conference of Parties rather than the STRP. However, we do underline the importance of the strategic and financial context for maximising the potential of the RAM.

1.3 The RAM as part of a spectrum of responses to requests from Contracting Parties

The RAM forms part of a broader toolkit that is available to Contracting Parties under the Convention and is only one of a possible spectrum of responses that may be triggered when a Contracting Party seeks technical advice through the Secretariat.

As described in section 2 below, the RAM implies significant deployment of resources and usually takes a considerable period of planning prior to implementation and is therefore most suitable for addressing more complex, long-term issues. It is unlikely to be an appropriate response to an emergency situation that requires rapid remedial action (e.g. an acute pollution incident).

In some cases, the Secretariat may suggest arranging a 'lighter-touch' *ad hoc* mission; outside the formal remit of the RAM. The Secretariat's Regional Teams are in frequent contact with the Administrative Authorities and the Senior Regional Advisors regularly undertake short visits to Ramsar Sites, potential Ramsar Sites, and other important wetlands when visiting a Contracting Party primarily for other reasons.

Additional responses from the Secretariat might also include:

- Providing direct advice by email, voice or video call, drawing on the extensive experience of the Regional Teams and the large body of technical and policy guidance available in all Convention languages through the Ramsar Handbook series;
- Putting Administrative Authorities and/or Ramsar Site managers in contact with appropriate sources of expertise (potentially including, independent external experts; STRP members; IOP experts).

Recommendation 2

The Convention should ensure that Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders are aware that the RAM is just one of a range of responses and tools available under the Convention, whether in relation to specific instances of actual or potential change in ecological character at a Ramsar Site, or wider aspects of implementation. The information and communication products suggested in part a. of Recommendation 14 below should include guidelines for Parties and other stakeholders on selection of the appropriate response or tool for a given situation.

## 2. Analysis of RAMs 1988 to 2016

2.1 Number of RAM applications

As of December 2017 the Ramsar website listed 88 applications of the RAM. A preparatory visit for RAM34 is listed in error as a full application of the RAM and allocated the mission/report number RAM31. The placeholder for the report of 'RAM31' has now been removed from the website, but subsequent missions and reports have (rightly) not been renumbered. The actual number of RAM applications is therefore 87, rather than the apparent total of 88. The five most recent applications of the RAM were not finalised in time to be taken into account in the review, which consequently covers 82 RAMs (for which 76 reports had been published on the Ramasar website as of December 2017 – see section 2.3).

These 82 applications comprise:

- 34 applications of the Monitoring Procedure 1988–1995 (RAM01–RAM35, excluding RAM31 for the reason given above) under the provisions of the Standing Committee decision of 1988 and COP Recommendation 4.7 of 1990;
- 4 applications of the Management Guidance Procedure 1996–1998 (RAM36–RAM39) under the new name decided by Resolution VI.14 in 1996, but otherwise under the continued provisions of Recommendation 4.7; and

- 45 applications of the Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM40–RAM83) under the further renaming decided through Resolution VII.12 in 1999, but otherwise under the continued provisions of Recommendation 4.7.

The graphic below shows the cumulative total of RAMs conducted from 1988 to 2016. It is noticeable that there was a rapid rate of increase until 1993 followed a period of much slower growth until 2000. Since then there have been years of significant increase (e.g. 2001, 2005, 2010) interspersed by periods of lower or no growth.
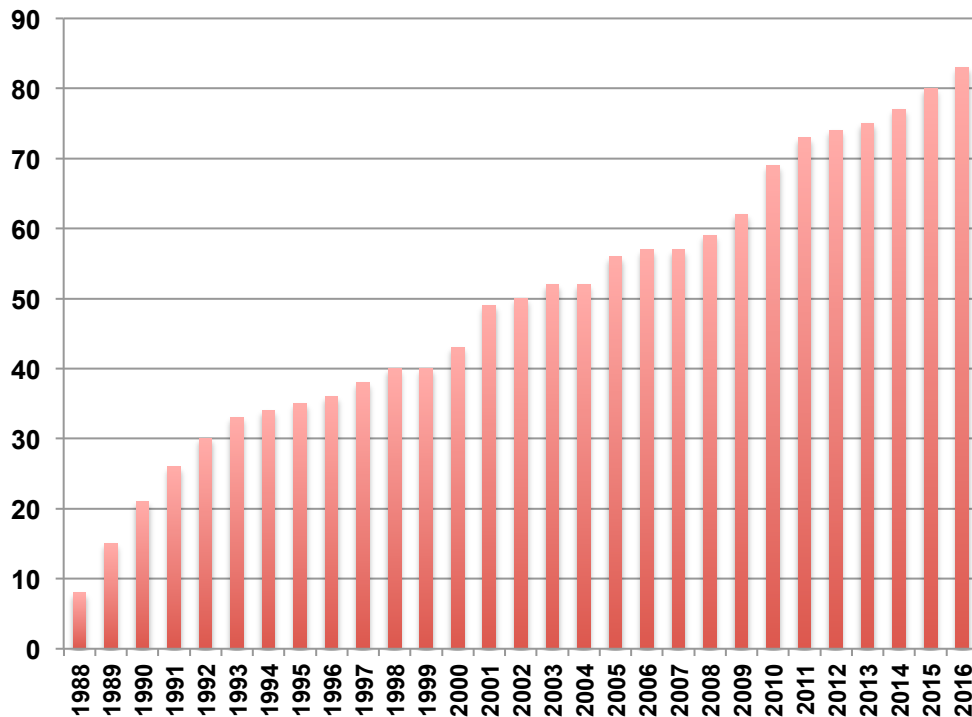
At the end of 1995 there were 91 Contracting Parties and 771 Ramsar Sites, whilst by December 1998 these numbers had risen to 114 Parties and 958 Sites (source: Frazier, S. 1999. Ramsar Sites Overview. Wetlands International). Almost two decades later, as of 1 December 2017, they stand at 169 Contracting Parties and 2,267 Ramsar Sites.

The substantial growth of the Convention itself, along with inexorably rising pressures on wetland ecosystems resulting from the direct and indirect impacts of human activities, make it highly likely that overall need for technical and policy advice of the kind provided through RAMs has also increased over time. Although it is not possible to provide conclusive objective evidence, we speculate that the relatively modest rate of increase in the number of RAM applications lags behind the need that Parties have for advice concerning the management of Ramsar Sites.

The Excel spreadsheet accompanying this report summarises the 82 applications of the RAM (as of 1 Dec 2017), giving for each mission data for a range of parameters. The 'RAM Summary' tab includes:

- Name of Contracting Party (former name added in brackets where relevant)
- Year of mission
- Number of Ramsar Sites covered by the mission
- Site name(s) as per the current Ramsar List (with former name(s) added in brackets where relevant)
- Ramsar region
- Whether or not the report of the mission is available from the Ramsar website
- The language(s) the report is written in
- The report length
- Whether or not the mission was conducted jointly with another institution
- Whether or not more than one RAM has been conducted for the same Site(s)

The 'RAM Details' tab includes:

- Mission duration (number of days)
- Size of mission team (number of persons)
- Whether or not there was participation in the mission team from Secretariat staff, STRP members, representatives of other Contracting Parties, representatives of IOPs
- Whether the mission addressed primarily a single site issue, or multiple wider issues
- Whether the mission concerned a formally recognised transboundary Ramsar Site
- Whether the mission concerned a shared water system
- Whether the mission concerned Article 4.2 Ramsar Site boundary restriction and/or compensation issues
- Whether the mission concerned a Montreux Record site and/or addition to/removal from the Montreux Record
- Key technical issues involved
- Number of concrete recommendations
- Additional mission-specific notes, including composition of the mission team

2.2 Regional distribution of RAM applications

A region-by-region summary of the 82 RAMs is given in the table below

Region	Number of RAM applications* 1988–	Number of Parties receiving RAMs*	Number of Ramsar Sites covered

	2016		
Africa	17	13	16
Americas	20	10	14
Asia	10	5	25
Europe	35	18	43
Oceania	0	0	0
Global totals	82	46 (27.2% of Parties at 1 Dec 2017)	98 (4.3% of Sites at 1 Dec 2017)

The RAM and its predecessor mechanisms have been applied most frequently in Europe (about 43% of all cases). There are several explanations for this. First and most obvious is that the European Region contains a large number of Parties (48 at 1 December 2017) and Sites (1,091 at 1 December 2017, approximately half of the global total). Many European Ramsar Sites have been listed for several decades and are located within very intensively managed landscapes, where they face multiple pressures. Other factors that are likely to play a role, though it is difficult to assess objectively the relative importance of each, are:

- The presence of many well-organised and relatively well-resourced NGOs and other civil society groups in European countries, meaning that site-based management challenges are more likely to be drawn to the attention of Administrative Authorities and/or the Ramsar Secretariat;
- The tendency for European Ramsar Sites <u>on average</u> to be relatively small and easily accessible (though these are by no means characteristics that apply to <u>all</u> European Ramsar Sites), perhaps making it easier to initiate and implement RAMs that can be undertaken through short and logistically straightforward field missions;
- The greater capacity of most European Contracting Parties to allocate the human resources required for preparing, implementing and following up a RAM, meaning that they are better placed to take advantage of the opportunities that the mechanism offers;
- The closely related ability of most European Contracting Parties to cover the costs of RAMs, meaning that cost implications are less likely to be a limiting factor in Europe than in other Ramsar Regions;
- The more recent growth of the Convention in much of Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania means that there were rather few Ramsar Sites in developing countries until comparatively recently.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that implementation of the RAM in European Contracting Parties is always more straightforward than in other regions. Highly complex legal and regulatory systems (for example, in relation to land-use/territorial planning), multiple layers of governance (including at supra-national level in the case of EU Member States), a high degree of organisation

among stakeholder groups in multiple sectors (public, private, NGO/civil society) and sophisticated use of the media to promote specific viewpoints, present challenges that are largely independent of practical considerations such as areal extent or ease of access. RAM46 (Germany, 2001) is a good example of this.

The Americas account for the second highest number of RAMs, with 20 applications covering 10 Contracting Parties and 14 Sites. Breaking these numbers down further into the two official Ramsar Regions, there have been 16 RAMs in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and 4 in North America, the latter all in Mexico. The 11 Ramsar Sites covered in the LAC Region represent just over 5% of the regional Site total at 1 December 2017 (194).

In Africa, the 17 RAM applications to date cover 13 Parties and 16 Ramsar Sites (approximately 4% of the regional Site total at 1 December 2017). Well over half (59%) of these have taken place since 2000 and the Secretariat's Senior Regional Advisor for Africa has reported (October 2017, pers. comm.) rising demand in the region for RAMs.

Uptake of the RAM has been low in the Asia region and there has not yet been an example of RAM implementation in Oceania. The latter is perhaps unsurprising given that for many years Australia and New Zealand were the sole Contracting Parties in that region and that even nowadays, when there are eight Contracting Parties in Oceania, only 10% of the 80 Ramsar Sites in the region are located in the six Small Island Developing State Contracting Parties that have joined the Convention since 1998.

The RAM has been implemented on 10 occasions in the Asia Region, and though covering just 5 of the Region's Contracting Parties, missions covering multiple sites in both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan mean that 25 sites in total have been included (just under 8% of the regional Site total of 319 at 1 December 2017. Only three RAMs have been implemented since 2000, though the Senior Regional Advisor for Asia has underlined (September 2017, pers. comm.) that there is no backlog of Contracting Parties requesting RAMs that have yet to be implemented. It seems highly improbable that there are fewer challenges confronting the conservation and wise use of Ramsar Sites in Asia than elsewhere, meaning that the evidence points towards disproportionately low take-up of this component of the 'Ramsar toolkit' by Contracting Parties in the region. Possible reasons (none of them by any means exclusive to Asia) include:

- Limited awareness about the availability of the RAM and the opportunities that it offers;
- A low degree of confidence that the RAM is able to meet the needs of Parties in the region;
- A perception that the RAM is more of a negative 'enforcement' mechanism that points up weaknesses in implementation, potentially embarrassing the Contracting Party concerned, rather than a positive

advisory mechanism aimed at assisting the Contracting Party and other stakeholders;

- A preference for addressing site-based management challenges through other components of the Ramsar toolkit (e.g. informal site visits by Secretariat staff, consultations by email and telecom); and
- Concerns about the possible resource implications (i.e. the costs in terms of time and money).

2.3 Number of RAM reports

As of 1 December 2017, reports for 76 of these missions had been published on the Ramsar website in at least one of the Convention's official languages. Those missions with no report available from the website are as follows:

RAM no.	Party	Year
RAM24	Mexico	1991*
RAM25	Venezuela	1991*
RAM72	Nicaragua	2011
RAM73	Costa Rica	2011
RAM77	Costa Rica	2014
RAM81	Nicaragua	2015

*In an email dated 12 December 2016, the Secretariat's Documentation Officer noted: "*For RAM24, a report was completed but according to an internal note in the hard-copy file, the Party reported that it had never requested a RAM. The hard copy is in the file, but I presume we cannot include it in a report of RAM findings.*" and furthermore that: "*For RAM 25, a partial first draft is in the file, and a note to the effect that a full report was not drafted.*" We have reviewed the report of RAM24, but considering that it should be treated as confidential, or at least 'unpublished', have excluded it from the analysis.

In addition, the RAM section of the Ramsar website was updated during 2017 to include the 'Report on a Ramsar Team Visit to the Hawizeh Marsh Ramsar Site'. This visit was made in 2014 but is not regarded by either the Party concerned (Iraq) or by the Secretariat as an application of the RAM and is not numbered as such. This report has therefore been excluded from the detailed analysis, but has relevance in terms of the spectrum of responses mentioned in section 1.2.

Therefore, for the purposes of this report, the number of RAM reports contained in the analysis was 76.

2.4 Findings from the overall 'library' of 76 publicly available RAM reports

2.4.1 RAMs that are principally focused on single issues, versus RAMs addressing multiple issues

One of the attributes assigned to each RAM in the Excel spreadsheet that accompanies this report is based on an assessment (by the lead consultant) of

whether the mission focused primarily on a single issue, or, conversely if it addressed multiple issues. This was to some extent a subjective assessment, involving interpretation of information contained in the reports and making a judgement about the <u>primary</u> focus of each RAM, something that was evident in many cases but less straightforward in others. Keeping these caveats in mind, for the 76 publicly available RAM reports, 27 (i.e. just over one-third) are assessed as mainly addressing a single issue, meaning that the great majority (49 = almost two-thirds of the total) address multiple issues.

'Single-issue' RAMs have occurred most frequently in Europe (about half of all RAM applications) and least frequently in Latin America and the Caribbean (less than one-in-five of the RAM applications). The full regional breakdown is:

Africa: 4
Asia: 3
Europe: 17
Latin America: 2
North America: 1

The primary issues addressed in the 27 single-issue RAM applications have included:

<u>Impact of proposed economic development</u> (14)
- Impact of proposed industrial development
  - Mining (3)
  - Sodium carbonate (soda ash) dredging (1)
  - Power station expansion (1)
- Impact of proposed transport infrastructure development
  - Port development (1)
  - Road/railways construction (3)
  - Shipping canal construction (1)
  - Dredging of waterways for shipping (1)
- Impact of proposed urban residential development (1)
- Impact of proposed tourism/recreational development (2)

<u>Water management</u> (7)
- Water management at river-basin scale (2)
- Changed hydrological regime
  - Aquifer over-exploitation (2)
  - Impact of drainage (2)
- Change in water quality
  - Eutrophication from agricultural sources (1)

<u>Impact of invasive alien species</u> (1)

<u>Implementation of Convention provisions and mechanisms</u> (5)
- Ramsar Site boundary restriction and compensation under Articles 2.5 and 4.2 (3*)
- Potential removal of site(s) from the Montreux Record (2)
  *These three sites could also be included under the heading 'Impact of proposed economic development'.

2.4.2 The significance of a specific development proposal as a trigger for RAMs

It is not always easy to assess from the library of RAM reports whether or not a RAM that addressed multiple issues in practice was triggered <u>initially</u> by concerns about the potential impact of a specific development proposal. For example, consultations in response to such a concern might have revealed other significant pressures on the site, and/or determine that it would be helpful to address the specific development in a wider context.

Depending on how individual RAMs are categorised, it is assessed that there are up to 17 examples of RAMs that were triggered by and primarily address the impact of a specific development proposal (mainly the construction of industrial and transportation infrastructure).

The findings in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 show that RAMs are not always about 'balancing' development and conservation, in the sense that not all are to do with proposed infrastructure development etc. Some may be due to other less direct anthropogenic causes, such as invasive species or climate change-related impacts (e.g. increased coastal erosion, changes to land- and/or water-use).

2.4.3 RAMs relating to transboundary sites/issues

The RAM provides an independent process through which potentially sensitive transboundary issues can be addressed by the countries concerned.

As of December 2017, there had been 21 RAM missions involving wetlands straddling or adjacent to international boundaries and/or transboundary water systems. Four of these concern sites that were subsequently included as components of formally recognised transboundary Ramsar Sites:

| RAM19 | 1990 | Germany | Wattenmeer, Ostfriesisches Wattenmeer & Dollart (part of the transboundary Wadden Sea recognised by Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands in 2015) |
| RAM22 | 1991 | Austria | Donau-March-Thaya-Auen (part of the transboundary 'Trilateral Ramsar Site Floodplains of the Morava-Dyje-Danube Confluence' |

			recognised by Austria, Czech Republic and Slovakia in June 2004)
RAM28	1992	Bulgaria	Srébarna (part of the transboundary Ramsar Site 'Lake Calarasi (Iezerul Calarasi) - Srébarna' recognised by Bulgaria and Romania in April 2013)
RAM47	2001	Bulgaria	Srébarna – second RAM application

A number of the reports resulting from the 21 relevant RAM applications include recommendations specifically addressing transboundary cooperation. Among these are the reports of RAM44 (Czech Republic, 2001), RAM45 (Togo, 2001), and RAM56 (Montenegro, 2005), recommending enhanced transboundary cooperation with Germany, Benin and Albania, respectively.

RAM69 (Costa Rica, 2010), RAM72 (Nicaragua, 2011) and RAM77 (Costa Rica, 2014) addressed transboundary issues concerning the ecological character of the two Ramsar Sites 'Humedal Caribe Noreste' (Costa Rica) and 'Refugio de Via Silvestre Río San Juan' (Nicaragua). RAM69 recommended *inter alia* that:

- Owing to both its geographical location and functional/ecological linkages, the conservation of Humedal Caribe Noreste required significant transboundary cooperation and collaboration in the framework of the Ramsar Convention Guidelines on International Cooperation;
- Rigorous environmental impact studies should be conducted for any project or activity that could affect the hydrology and hydrodynamics of the Ramsar Sites on either side of the border (Humedal Caribe Noreste in Costa Rica, or Refugio de Vida Silvestre Río San Juan in Nicaragua); and
- A system for monitoring the ecological character of the Ramsar Sites in both countries should be established.

However, as of December 2017, the reports of RAM72 and RAM77 had not yet been published on the Ramsar website.

Recommendation 3

The potential of the RAM as an independent, internationally recognised means of addressing issues relating to the conservation and wise use of transboundary wetlands and wetland systems should be further explored, particularly with regard to the possible inclusion of representatives of neighbouring countries as observers and/or participating stakeholders during RAM field missions.

2.4.4 RAMs relating to Article 2.5 and Article 4.2 boundary restriction/compensation cases

A comprehensive consultancy report on 'Change in ecological character of wetland sites – a review of Ramsar guidance and mechanisms' was submitted (in draft form) to the Ramsar Secretariat by Dave Pritchard in November 2014. In addition to a 10-page chapter on the RAM process, which highlights many of the

key points that are also raised in the present report, there is a chapter dedicated to Articles 2.5 and 4.2 of the Convention. These relate to deletion or restriction of Ramsar Site boundaries because of a Contracting Party's "*urgent national interest*" (Article 2.5) and the provision that a Contracting Party exercising its Article 2.5 rights "*should as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources*" (Article 4.2). A detailed analysis of the provisions of the two Articles and a review of 'case law' (i.e. instances of their application) is included in the 2014 Pritchard report and not repeated here.

There have been four cases where a RAM was <u>specifically</u> triggered by Article 2.5/4.2 issues:

RAM1   Belgium (1988) Schorren van de Beneden Schelde (loss of Ramsar Site area owing to port expansion)
RAM19 Germany (1990) Wattenmeer, Ostfriesisches Wattenmeer & Dollart (loss of Ramsar Site area owing to construction of dykes to enclose saltmarsh)
RAM46 Germany (2001) Mühlenberger Loch (loss of Ramsar Site area due to infilling for industrial development)
RAM54 Georgia (2005) Wetlands of Central Kolkheti (proposed site boundary restriction due to oil terminal construction)

A number of other RAMs have addressed Article 2.5/4.2 issues, even though they appear not to have been primarily triggered by such considerations. These include: RAMs 5 & 32 (Uruguay, 1988 & 1993), RAM10 (United Kingdom, 1989), RAM27 (Islamic Republic of Iran, 1992), RAM53 (Ukraine, 2003), RAM58 (Spain, 2006), RAM61 Denmark – Greenland, 2009), RAM62 (Mozambique, 2009), RAM64 (Norway, 2010), RAM71 (Morocco, 2010) and RAM79 (Norway, 2015).

Hence, over the years, a considerable body of potentially valuable experience and lessons learned has been built, which may capture wisdom that usefully amplifies the global good practice principles contained in existing Ramsar guidance. However the lack of consistency in RAM field missions, reports, recommendations and follow-up actions, emphasised elsewhere in this report, means that this potential is largely unrealised. The corresponding conclusion and recommendation of the 2014 Pritchard report remains valid and is repeated (and slightly expanded on) here:

Recommendation 4

Where a RAM is associated with Article 2.5/4.2 issues, the RAM report should contain a specific section offering information on experience and lessons learned that might assist with other Article 2.5/4.2 cases, even when these are not the subject of a RAM.

2.4.5 RAMs and the Montreux Record

As noted in section 1.1, Recommendation 4.8 (COP4, Montreux, 1990), established a link between the RAM (then 'Monitoring Procedure') and the Montreux Record, instructing: "*the Convention Bureau* [Secretariat] *to give priority to application of the Ramsar Monitoring Procedure, within the limits of budgetary constraints, at sites included in this record.*"

As of December 2017, approximately one-third (29 of 82) RAMs concerned sites included in the Montreux Record, but there have been only four such missions during the past decade, most recently RAM70 at Doñana, Spain in 2011 and RAM73 Palo Verde, Costa Rica, in the same year. It should be noted that both of these were second RAMs to the sites concerned (following RAM51 to Doñana in 2002 and RAM39 to Palo Verde in 1998). At present, both sites remain on the Montreux Record. This evokes both the limitations of the RAM – it is not a 'magic bullet' capable of rapidly resolving complex, long-standing challenges – and its strengths – the Contracting Party and other stakeholders considered organisation of second missions to be worthwhile.

Eleven of the 21 Montreux Record-related RAMs to date (i.e. just over half) have been followed by the eventual removal of one or more sites from the Record. Altogether, 15 sites that have received RAMs have been removed. Without detailed case-by-case analysis, probably involving interviews with the principal stakeholders, it is impossible to reach firm conclusions about the significance of the RAM in ensuring that measures taken at the sites concerned fulfilled the criteria for removal from the Montreux Record. Having said that, there are at least three instances where a RAM was organised specifically in response to a Contracting Party proposal that a site was ready for removal from the Montreux Record and where such removal duly followed. These are: RAM40 (Italy, 1998), RAM50 (India, 2001) and RAM60 (Islamic Republic of Iran, 2009). In addition, RAM55 (Croatia, 2005) and RAM65 (Guatemala, 2010) were specifically tasked with reviewing the factors that had led to the inclusion of the sites in the Montreux Record, their subsequent evolution, and the measures required for removal from the Montreux Record.

There has only been one instance of a site being added to the Montreux Record after a RAM: Lac Tonga, one of the two Ramsar Sites visited by RAM21, Algeria, in 1990, was added to the Montreux Record in 1993. However, both Lac Tonga and its sister Ramsar Site, Lac Oubeïra, were subsequently removed from the Montreux Record in 2009.

It is be beyond the scope and mandate of this report to review the Montreux Record mechanism itself (and this is covered in the 2014 Pritchard report referred to above). However, the limitations of the mechanism, as currently operated and perceived, are reflected in the relatively static nature of the list of Ramsar Sites included in the Montreux Record. Some sites that would almost certainly qualify for inclusion in the Montreux Record (on the basis of actual or potential change in their ecological character) have not been included owing to perceptions of the Record as constituting a "black list" or "red list" that could cause embarrassment

or other unwanted difficulties for Contracting Parties. Such sites would potentially benefit from the RAM, whether or not they are included in the Montreux Record. This suggests that Recommendation 4.8, which requires priority to be given to implementing the RAM at Montreux Record sites, should be seen as 'advisory' rather than 'mandatory' and this is, in fact, the situation that currently pertains, *de facto*.

Recommendation 5

The operative paragraphs of COP Recommendation 4.8 that relate to the RAM should also be addressed as part of the proposed process to review and amend Recommendation 4.7 and its Annex (see Recommendations 1 & 14 of this report). It is suggested that application at Montreux Record sites might be among a number of priorities for the RAM in future, but not the sole or most important priority.

2.4.6 Duration of RAM missions

The average duration of the field-mission component of a RAM (for the 71 RAMs for which this information is available from the Ramsar website) is approximately six days.

There are, however, some important regional differences in average mission duration (rounded to the nearest whole day):

Africa: 7 days (n = 15)
Asia: 7 days (n = 8)
Europe: 4 days (n = 34)
Latin America and the Caribbean: 9 days (n =11)
North America: 4 days (n = 3)

As could be expected, the average duration in Europe is significantly less than in Africa, Asia or Latin America and the Caribbean (though the sample size for Asia is rather small). The figure for North America needs to be interpreted with the very small sample size in mind and the fact that all RAM applications in the region have been in Mexico.

The average duration of a RAM may be a useful guide for both the Secretariat and the Contracting Party concerned when assessing the potential resource implications of a proposed RAM.

2.4.7 Terms of Reference for RAMs

As on so many issues of importance to the consistent and effective operation of the RAM, Recommendation 4.7 is silent on the matter of Terms of Reference (ToR) to guide and underpin missions. The early, rather simple, applications of the Monitoring Procedure appear to have been predicated largely on the basis of

somewhat informal exchanges between the (then) Ramsar Bureau and the Administrative Authority concerned. There is no evidence in these cases (at least in the mission reports themselves) of formal Terms of Reference having been discussed and agreed.

As the mechanism evolved into the considerably more elaborate process that typifies present-day applications of the RAM, so the desirability of formally agreeing ToR has become more evident. A clear statement of RAM objectives and *modus operandi* is in the interests of both the Contracting Party and Secretariat, assists communication with site stakeholders and other interested third parties and enables progress to be assessed during the implementation and follow up phases. However, the library of RAM reports demonstrates an uneven approach, with some missions operating on the basis of well-elaborated and clearly presented ToR; some referring to the existence of Terms of Reference, but not including them in the final RAM report; some including a brief statement of 'mission objectives' (or similar); and others appearing, at least on the evidence of the published reports, to lack a formal ToR (or even clearly formulated objectives) altogether.

A positive example is the case of RAM46 (Mühlenberger Loch Ramsar Site, Germany, September 2001), where a four-page, stand-alone ToR document was produced prior to the mission and included as an Appendix to the RAM report (and published as such on the Ramsar website). It is not suggested that the ToR for a RAM always needs to be as lengthy as in the case of RAM46 (which addressed matters of particular political sensitivity), but the sections and sub-headings used provide a useful checklist:

- Introduction (single paragraph summarising the RAM mechanism);
- Background (approximately 1 page describing the situation triggering the RAM – essentially a notification from the Administrative Authority to the Secretariat advising of its wish to restrict the boundaries of a Ramsar Site and to implement compensatory measures, having regard to the provisions of Articles 2.5 and 4.2 of the Convention);
- The Ramsar Site concerned (two-paragraph summary of basic information about the site);
- Issues to be considered by the RAM (a clear articulation of 10 specific points that the mission was mandated to examine);
- Composition of the RAM (proposed composition of a seven-person mission team, including representatives of the Secretariat, Administrative Authority, two international technical experts, the Federal State of Hamburg, a conservation NGO, and the European Commission);
- Planned timetable (an outline of the anticipated schedule for each of the three days of the mission); and
- Follow-up to the RAM (two paragraphs addressing the procedure for finalising the report of the mission, inclusive of findings and recommendations, and for making the report public, in line with Recommendation 4.7 of the Conference of Parties, by posting on the

Ramsar website; note, however, that these paragraphs did not address any element of subsequent follow-up to the report, once finalised and published).

Recommendation 6

A concise Terms of Reference document should be agreed by the Contracting Party and the Secretariat ahead of each RAM mission and included as an Annex to the RAM report. Whilst there should be flexibility in format and length to take account of the unique circumstances of each RAM, it is suggested that the ToR should <u>always</u> include:

- A brief statement of the background to the RAM;
- The objectives of the RAM and the issues it is requested to address;
- Identification of key stakeholders;
- The composition of the RAM mission team;
- The expected process and timeframe, including planned follow-up to the mission.

2.4.8 Size and composition of RAM mission teams

<u>General</u>

Most RAMs have been conducted by a small core team, hereafter referred to as the 'RAM team'. The average size of a RAM team is just over 2.5 persons (range from 1 to 10), though this rises to just over 3 persons if the 22 one-person missions, including the majority of applications of the 'Monitoring Procedure' from 1988 to 1995 are excluded. There have continued to be occasional RAM missions conducted by just one person, although there are only three such examples during the last four inter-sessional periods since COP9 in 2005. These are:

RAM60	Alagol, Ulmagol, Ajigol	I.R. of Iran	2009
RAM61	Ramsar in Greenland	Denmark (Greenland)	2009
RAM76	Mývatn-Laxá	Iceland	2013

There are no significant differences between regions when it comes to the typical size of a RAM team.

The RAM team, which is typically multi-national, has usually been supported by a national-level advisory group of varying size, composition and degree of formality. In some cases, this supporting group has been assigned a formal advisory role. In other cases, there has been a more informal arrangement, whereby national stakeholders accompanied the field mission, acting both as observers and as resource persons. For example, during RAM49 (Ouse Washes, United Kingdom, 2001) the RAM team was accompanied for all or part of its mission by

representatives of the UK Administrative Authority, government environment and nature conservation agencies and NGO stakeholders. During RAM82 (Sistema Delta Estuarino del Rio Magdalena Ciénega Grande de Santa Marta, Colombia, 2016), the government formally assigned a group of experts from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (the Administrative Authority) to accompany the mission.

<u>The role of the Secretariat</u>

The Secretariat clearly plays a critically important role in applications of the RAM, with its typical functions including, but not necessarily limited to:

- Engaging in initial consultations with the Contracting Party concerned and maintaining regular interaction with the Administrative Authority on all aspects of the mission once it has been decided to implement a RAM;
- Contributing to the formulation of Terms of Reference for the mission;
- Assembling the RAM team, including recruitment of technical experts, where required;
- Making logistical arrangements for the mission;
- Dealing with representations that may be received from local, national or international stakeholders and other interested parties, including NGOs;
- Coordinating the team prior to, during and after the mission;
- Participating in the mission;
- Contributing to (and in many cases leading) drafting of the mission report;
- Liaising with the Contracting Party during the review of the draft report;
- Finalising and publishing the report;
- Liaising with the Contracting Party and relevant stakeholders during the implementation and follow-up phase, following the finalisation of RAM findings and recommendations.

These functions are generally undertaken by the Secretariat's Regional Teams, especially the Senior Regional Advisors (formerly known as Regional Coordinators), with high-level input from the Deputy Secretary General or Secretary General when required.

A RAM can therefore bring significant resource implications in terms of Secretariat staff time and it has sometimes been suggested that the limited capacity of the Regional Teams represents a bottleneck restricting the frequency and efficiency with which RAMs can be implemented. This is an issue that cannot be assessed on the basis of information contained in the library of RAM reports. However, consultations with the Senior Regional Advisors suggest that the 'bottleneck' factor is not currently a major concern, since only in the Africa region is there a (small) 'queue' of Parties requesting RAMs that have not yet been initiated, and here it may be the case that broader resourcing issues, including financing of RAMs, may be more important. However, it cannot be excluded that perceptions of limited Secretariat capacity tend to restrict the number of requests coming from Parties.

The Secretariat participated in the field mission for all but eight of the 76 RAMs for which the reports are available on the Ramsar website. The eight missions where Secretariat staff were not present were:

RAM05	Uruguay	1988
RAM06	Greece	1988
RAM18	Pakistan	1990
RAM26	Egypt	1991
RAM40	Italy	1998
RAM59	U.R. of Tanzania	2008
RAM60	I.R. of Iran	2009
RAM70	Spain	2011

In the case of the three more recent missions without Secretariat participation, it should be noted that: the RAM59 team included the Chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee (Paul Mafabi, Uganda) and an STRP IOP observer (Dave Pritchard); RAM60 was undertaken by a former Director of Wetlands International with extensive knowledge and field experience of wetlands in Iran (Mike Moser); and RAM70 was led by a former Ramsar Secretary General (Delmar Blasco).

The role of technical experts

Technical experts have been included in RAM teams since the early days of the Monitoring Procedure, when, for example, an expert in international environmental law participated in RAM11 (Greece, 1989). Most RAM teams have included at least one technical expert (and often two or three), from among the following groups:

- Independent experts specifically recruited for the RAM and employed on a consultancy basis;
- Experts representing another Contracting Party;
- Experts employed by an IOP (see below for further discussion);
- Members of the STRP (see below for further discussion).

A question that may arise is the distinction between, and relative importance of, independence and neutrality. It is the function of the RAM to provide expert advice from an independent, external (international) perspective to the relevant Contracting Party concerning the conservation and wise of one or more Ramsar Sites. An individual expert participating in a RAM may have extensive prior knowledge or experience of a particular site and/or, in some cases, be an employee of an IOP that has previously expressed a position concerning that site. In such cases the experts involved were clearly not entirely 'neutral', but given that the RAM is advisory in nature, and both the composition of the team and any formal terms of reference are agreed in advance with the Contracting Party, and RAM reports are not finalised and published until reviewed by the Contracting

Party, this should not be a major concern; it is the technical quality of the expert advice that is most important.

The role of International Organization Partners (IOPs)

The special status of the IOPs within the 'Ramsar family', including as participants in the STRP with long-term experience of the Convention, specialised technical knowledge and access to global expert networks, makes them in many ways a natural partner for the RAM. Indeed, the IOPs have long championed the RAM as one of the most important tools available to Contracting Parties for addressing site-based management challenges. Some IOPs (notably BirdLife International and WWF) have made significant financial contributions to the RAM, whilst all have contributed at some point with 'in kind' contributions of staff time and technical expertise. The IOPs' provision of experts whose time (and often other costs) is contributed free of charge is of particular value, given the general absence of a Ramsar core budget allocation for the RAM.

However it also true that the campaigning and lobbying work of some IOPs may mean that Contracting Parties are cautious about appointing them formally to a RAM team. Nevertheless, IOP representatives have participated in the RAM teams for at least 13 missions, including, in more recent years:

RAM46	Germany	2001	BirdLife
RAM59	U.R. Tanzania	2008	BirdLife
RAM70	Spain	2011	IUCN
RAM71	Morocco	2010	WWF
RAM75	Pakistan	2012	WWF
RAM78	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2014	IUCN

IOPs have been regularly included in RAM teams in Africa, Asia and Europe, but never in either Latin America and the Caribbean, or in North America.

Recommendation 7

Greater use of IOP expertise should be made in future, where this is appropriate to the circumstances of individual missions and acceptable to the Contracting Party concerned. Such an approach could help to ensure the most effective use of the limited financial resources and Secretariat capacity available for application of the RAM.

The role of the STRP

Perhaps surprisingly, the STRP has been rather little utilised as a resource for the RAM. There are only seven cases where an STRP member has participated in that capacity in a RAM field mission, as follows:

RAM34	United Kingdom	1994
RAM42	Senegal, Mauritania	2000
RAM44	Czech Republic	2001
RAM46	Germany	2001
RAM50	India	2001
RAM59	U.R. of Tanzania	2008
RAM71	Morocco	2010

It is also notable that although the RAM is the flagship technical advisory mechanism of the Convention, the STRP has not generally been asked to provide input to RAM missions or reports. Areas where the STRP (including STRP National Focal Points) might usefully contribute, other than in actual mission participation, include:

- Reviewing and commenting on draft Terms of Reference for RAMs;
- Helping to identify suitably qualified and experienced technical experts;
- Reviewing and commenting on draft RAM reports;
- Reviewing and commenting on follow-up to RAM reports.

It is not suggested that the STRP should necessarily have a role in <u>all</u> RAM applications, but such inputs could help to identify linkages between RAMs and to realise more of the potential for information sharing and lesson learning that the RAM offers.

As is the case for the Secretariat, an enhanced role for the STRP in the RAM could have time and capacity implications for the STRP and it is recognised that Contracting Parties have expressed the clear wish for the STRP to focus on the Priority Tasks identified in the Panel's triennial Workplan. However, the routine involvement of STRP National Focal Points in RAMs (e.g. commenting on Terms of Reference, participating in field missions, reviewing draft reports) would appear to be a logical step with no implications for the time or capacity of the STRP itself.

Recommendation 8

Consideration should be given to the opportunities for enhancing the contribution of the STRP to application of the RAM, including (but not limited to) ensuring the involvement of STRP National Focal Points in RAMs.

<u>RAM team participants and observers from other Contracting Parties</u>

Inclusion of RAM team participants or observers from other Contracting Parties brings opportunities for maximising the value of the RAM not only as a bilateral mechanism between the Secretariat Contracting Party in whose territory the Ramsar Site is located, but as a means of increasing international cooperation, sharing experience and building capacity for wetland conservation, particularly at intra-regional level.

Representatives of other Contracting Parties (generally either from the Administrative Authority itself or one of the government's technical agencies) have participated as members of the RAM team on ten occasions:

RAM28   Bulgaria   1992
RAM29   South Africa   1992
RAM32   Uruguay   1993
RAM34   UK   1994
RAM37   I.R. of Iran   1997
RAM39   Costa Rica   1998
RAM49   UK   2001
RAM51   Spain   2002
RAM59   U.R. of Tanzania 2008
RAM62*   Mozambique   2009

During RAM51 (Doñana, Spain, 2002), the mission included an expert representative of the Administrative Authority in neighbouring Portugal. This had the advantage of bringing in somebody with experience and understanding of regional ecological, socio-economic and cultural issues, who also had a thorough knowledge of the Ramsar Convention, including the obligations accepted by Contracting Parties in relation to the conservation and wise use of Ramsar Sites.

During RAM59 (Lake Natron, Tanzania, 2008), the RAM team included participation of a representative of the Administrative Authority of neighbouring Uganda (also Chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee at the time) and the mission was joined by three observers from Kenya (one from the National Environment Management Authority and two from the Kenya Wildlife Service).

*The same representative of the Ugandan Administrative Authority that participated in the RAM team for RAM59 also contributed to RAM62 (Zambezi Delta: Marromeu Complex, Mozambique), potentially enabling the transfer of experience and insights from one RAM to another (although the specific issues being addressed were somewhat different in the two cases).

Recommendation 9

When planning future RAMs, consideration should be given to the opportunities for, and benefits of, inclusion of a representative of another Contracting Party, as a RAM team member or observer.

2.4.9 Joint missions with other MEAs

There have been 13 RAMs that were conducted as joint missions with other MEAs. These are:

RAM32   Uruguay   1993   Conducted together with Unesco MAB, but not formally tagged as a joint mission

RAM41	Tunisia	2000	World Heritage Convention
RAM42	Senegal, Mauritania	2000	World Heritage Convention
RAM47	Bulgaria	2001	World Heritage Convention
RAM51	Spain	2002	World Heritage Convention
RAM53	Ukraine	2003	Unesco MAB
RAM59	U.R. of Tanzania	2008	UNEP-CMS and AEWA
RAM62	Mozambique	2009	UNEP-CMS and AEWA
RAM66	Congo	2010	UNEP-CMS and AEWA
RAM70	Spain	2011	World Heritage Convention
RAM71	Morocco	2010	UNEP-CMS and AEWA
RAM74	Mexico	2011	World Heritage Convention
RAM80	Italy	2015	World Heritage Convention

There are potential advantages and disadvantages of such joint missions.

Potential advantages include:

- Increased efficiency from the perspective of the Contracting Party when related MEAs are seen to be working together at a practical level;
- Increased authority and impact of mission findings and recommendations;
- Increased attention for Ramsar-related issues on the back of the generally higher profile of the World Heritage Convention among policy- and decision-makers, the media and the wider public;
- Sharing of administrative and financial costs.

Potential risks include:

- Ramsar being seen and/or treated as the 'junior partner' in joint missions with the World Heritage Convention, with the result that Ramsar issues receive a lower profile;
- Parties receive 'mixed messages' from two MEAs;
- Cooperation between the MEAs is not maintained during the crucial follow-up phase to the mission.

It is difficult to conclude from the joint mission reports the overall extent to which these potential advantages and risks apply in reality. However, consultations with the Secretariat's Senior Regional Advisors indicates that, in general, the experience of undertaking joint missions with other MEAs has been positive.

The report of RAM80 is very much branded and structured as a document of the World Heritage Convention, with a one-page Ramsar introduction appended to the version included in the Ramsar website. This is not necessarily a problem in itself, particularly as only a small part of the Laguna di Venezia World Heritage Site has, thus far, also been designated as a Ramsar Site (Valle Averto, 500 ha), but it is difficult to discern from the report how the mission's findings and recommendations which are expressed mainly in relation to Italy's status as a State Party to the World Heritage Convention, relate to the obligations accepted

by Italy as a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention. This aspect is much better covered in some of the other joint mission reports, for example RAM74, which includes separate sections summarising the obligations accepted by Mexico under each of the Conventions, while the Recommendations chapter identifies those applicable to both Conventions and those that are specific to one Convention or the other.

Recommendation 10

The reports of missions conducted jointly with other MEAs should always make clear which Findings and Recommendations relate to obligations under both MEAs and which relate specifically to obligations under one MEA or the other.

2.4.10 Cost of missions

There is no evidence available from the library of reports on which to base any findings, conclusions or recommendations concerning the financial or human resource costs involved in organising, implementing and following up a RAM.

2.4.11 Language of RAM reports

The vast majority of the 76 published RAM reports exist in only one Ramsar language. No RAM report exists in all three languages and only five are wholly or partly available in a second language. As of 1 December 2017, the applicable statistics were:

RAM reports in English only: 49
RAM reports in French only: 9
RAM reports in Spanish only: 13
RAM reports in Spanish/English: 4
RAM reports in French/English: 1
RAM reports in French/Spanish: 0

The library of RAM reports constitutes a substantial repository of information and experience that may have significant value as a resource for lesson learning within the Convention. This potential is evidently restricted, given that no report is available in all three languages and most are in just one language (predominantly English). The inherent length and technical complexity of RAM reports gives easy access only to those with a high degree of proficiency in the relevant language, and, at the same time, makes translation costs prohibitive in the absence of a budget line for this purpose. Focusing on preparation and translation of a well-structured, concise, yet sufficiently detailed Executive Summary might offer the most affordable and useful solution.

The fact that the great majority of RAM reports have never been translated may also suggest that the information sharing, capacity building and lesson learning potential of the RAM has not been much explored in the past (notwithstanding

the budgetary restrictions mentioned in the previous paragraph). Whilst it is clear that the actual operation of the RAM is primarily a bilateral exercise for the Contracting Party concerned and the Secretariat, and that the report of each mission will be of greatest interest to the stakeholders directly involved at each site, it is important that the potential relevance to a wider (regional and/or global) audience is not overlooked when drafting findings, conclusions and recommendations. Similarly, the preparation of new RAM missions may benefit from review of the RAM library to identify where similar issues may have been addressed in the past.

Recommendation 11

RAM reports should always contain an Executive Summary. The Contracting Party concerned should have an opportunity to study and comment on a draft Executive Summary, in line with the provisions of Recommendation 4.7.

The final Executive Summary should be translated into the other official languages of the Convention (and wherever possible also into the official language/s of the country concerned, if different) and posted on the Ramsar website.

It is suggested that all Executive Summaries should, as a minimum, contain:
- A brief overview of the main technical issue(s) being addressed, with tagging of keywords to facilitate online searching and a link to the relevant RIS(s) and any previous RAM report covering the same site(s);
- The date and duration of the mission and the date that the report was finalised;
- A statement of the composition of the mission team, ensuring that the broad affiliation of each team member is readily apparent (e.g. Contracting Party, Secretariat, STRP, IOP, independent technical expert);
- A link to the Terms of Reference of the mission;
- The principal conclusions arising from the RAM;
- The recommendations of the RAM;
- A statement about how the conclusions and recommendations of the mission are to be followed up.

2.4.12 Length of reports

The length of RAM reports varies hugely, but has tended to increase over time. For example, the 33 published reports under the 'Monitoring Procedure' banner (from 1988 to 1995) averaged just over 12 pages in length (range 2 to 46) and tended to be very concise and to the point, focusing on a summary of the background to the mission, the findings of the mission in relation to the specific issues raised, and corresponding recommendations. Conversely, the 20 most

recent reports published on the Ramsar website (covering the period 2008 to 2016) average 49 pages in length (range 14 to 89).

There has certainly been an evolution in the level of detail contained in RAM reports, which has contributed significantly to the increase in average report length. It might be expected that the reports of missions triggered primarily by a single issue and/or those dealing with smaller Ramsar Sites would be shorter than those addressing multiple issues at larger sites. However, there is no clear evidence that this is the case. RAM79 (Norway, 2015), for example, addresses a single primary issue at a 322 ha Ramsar Site and is 44 pages in length, broadly similar to the 46-page report for RAM78 (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2014) that addresses multiple pressures affecting a site of 800,000 ha.

A fair conclusion would be that each RAM is unique in terms of specific issues and local/national context and that the report of each mission should therefore be as long as it needs to be, without undue restriction or prescription. However, it is also true that the team responsible for producing each RAM report needs to consider that final report length may have consequences for:

- Technical credibility (e.g. an overly short report could appear superficial and lacking in the technical credibility required for its conclusions and recommendations to carry authority/weight);
- Clarity of key messages (key messages may become lost in an overly lengthy report, especially in the absence of a good Executive Summary);
- Accessibility and digestibility (an overly lengthy report may simply fail to engage the attention of intended key audiences, a risk that is again particularly high without an effective Executive Summary);
- Speed and efficiency of report preparation and follow-up (the longer and more detailed the report, the more time it is likely to require for drafting, review and finalisation, with corresponding implications for the capacity and resources of the Secretariat and Administrative Authority concerned, was well as the time of consultants who often play a major role in report drafting);
- Cost of translation (as mentioned elsewhere, a long report, especially if there is no Executive Summary, may be prohibitively costly to translate, thereby restricting access to the report and limiting its potential value in wider information sharing and lesson learning within the Convention).

The length of RAM reports can be optimised by addressing the structural points raised in section 2.4.13 below, particularly by avoiding the inclusion of superfluous background and descriptive material.

2.4.13 Structure of reports

Many RAM reports do not contain an Executive Summary and have radically differing structures, significantly limiting realisation of their potential individual and collective value. RAM82 (Colombia, 2016), for example, does not include an Executive Summary, has no clear up-front statement of the principal technical

issue(s) that the RAM was addressing, and contains a c.25-page technical description of the site, before the current status of the site is mentioned. The structure of RAM80 (Italy, 2015) is mainly related to the provisions of the World Heritage Convention. RAM74 (Mexico, 2012) is an example of a clear and well-structured report, as is RAM64 (Norway, 2010), though the detailed structure of these two reports differs considerably.

Recommendation 12

It is important that flexibility is retained and that there is no attempt to impose a uniform structure for RAM reports. However, it is recommended that the following elements should always be included and readily identifiable from the headings and sub-headings used in the report:

- Executive Summary.
- Background to the mission (<u>brief</u> summary of consultations that resulted in initiation of the RAM, and its main objectives).
- A brief description of the site, including a location map (country scale) and a site map (showing the Ramsar Site boundaries) and links to the Ramsar Information Sheet, but avoiding lengthy technical description where this has no <u>direct relevance</u> to the <u>specific issues</u> being addressed by the RAM.
- A summary of the current situation, as assessed by the RAM team, focusing on findings and conclusions that apply to the core issues for the mission.
- A stand-alone list of all Recommendations.
- A section on follow-up to the mission's recommendations.
- Terms of Reference for the mission (probably as an Annex).
- Composition of the RAM team (Annex – if not already included in the ToR)
- Programme of the field mission (Annex).
- List of stakeholders consulted and other contributors (Annex).

2.4.14 Number and structure of Recommendations

As with other key high-level elements of RAM reports (e.g. Executive Summary, Terms of Reference), the Recommendations emerging from RAMs are extremely variable in terms of their number, level of technical detail and elements such as timeframe, who the recommendation is addressed to, what exactly should be done and how successful implementation should be monitored and evaluated.

In terms of the simple number of recommendations, some RAMs have not included recommendations, but have limited themselves to findings/conclusions. Other missions resulted in a single, broad, over-arching recommendation (e.g. RAM42, Senegal/Mauritania, 2000; RAM49, UK, 2001). At the other end of the spectrum, those missions resulting in the largest number of recommendations have been RAM35, Trinidad & Tobago, 1995 (at least 83 recommendations) and RAM38, Guatemala, 1997 (76 recommendations).

RAM reports are drafted for review and eventual acceptance by the Contracting Party concerned. At a broad level, therefore, recommendations are addressed to the Contracting Party and it is ultimately up to each Party to determine whether and how to implement each recommendation. As emphasised previously, however, RAMs are advisory in nature and their purpose is to provide Parties with the best available technical advice. Recognition that ultimate responsibility lies with the Contracting Party should not, therefore, prevent RAM teams from providing expert advice on aspects such as timeframe and relevant actors/stakeholders, as well as substance.

Recommendation 13

It is recommended that future RAMs should address the following points:

- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly linked to findings and conclusions and that these, in turn, are clearly linked to the Terms of Reference for the mission;
- Ensuring that recommendations are clearly identified as such in the RAM report;
- Ensuring that recommendations are numbered to make follow-up cross-referencing as simple as possible;
- Grouping related recommendations under corresponding sub-headings;
- Distinguishing between short-term, medium-term and long-term actions;
- Testing whether each recommendation:
  - Identifies clearly what action should be taken?
  - By whom? (being as specific as possible, and considering actions required by government, public-sector bodies, private sector, civil society)
  - By when?
  - Subject to which enabling conditions?
  - With which measurable indicators of (a) implementation and (b) success?
- Supporting text recommendations with a <u>simple</u> table of suggested actions, timeframes (perhaps related to Ramsar triennia), key stakeholder groups and practical indicators of successful implementation; How (and by whom) will progress with follow-up to RAM recommendations be monitored? How, by whom and to whom should progress be reported? And what measures will be taken if progress is assessed as insufficient by time x, y or z?

2.4.15 Follow up to RAM reports

The biggest challenge revealed by the review and analysis of RAM reports is that the report itself appears too often to be a 'full-stop', rather than a stepping stone in a longer-term process. None of the reports provide guidance in respect of how progress with the implementation of actions recommended by the mission should be followed-up, monitored and assessed.

There is a number of mechanisms already in place – on paper at least – that could contribute to this, e.g. progress reports on Montreux Record sites and Article 3.2 cases to be submitted to the Standing Committee, and of course triennial National Reports to the Conference of Parties. However, evidence indicates that these are not used systematically enough by either the Parties themselves or the Secretariat.

Taking into account the suggestions made in section 2.4.14 for strengthening the formulation and presentation of RAM recommendations in the first place, would be a good start. However, ensuring an effective response to RAM reports ultimately requires engendering national-level ownership of that response and engaging stakeholders. One means of achieving this might be to follow up RAM reports with a nationally convened workshop, or similar process (which might still have participation from international experts) for translating RAM recommendations into an action plan within the country.

3. Enhanced information and guidance on the RAM

The information presented in sections 1 & 2 leads to the overarching conclusion that the RAM is an important and valued tool, but one that does not reach its potential, in large part due to an absence of up-to-date information and guidance, so that the mechanism has developed in an *ad hoc* manner and there is limited internal lesson learning.

Recommendation 14

The minimal guidance provided to the Parties, Secretariat and other stakeholders through Annex 1 to Recommendation 4.7 (COP4, Montreux, 1990) should be revised, expanded and brought up-to-date through:

a. Development of information and communication products that:
   i.   Briefly explain what the RAM is;
   ii. Describe and illustrate (with examples) how it can assist Parties with implementing the Convention.

b. Development of practical and technical guidance for Parties, Secretariat and other stakeholders in the form of a simple 'how to' step-by-step manual covering *inter alia* the following topics:
   iii. The process for initiating a RAM;
   iv. Preparation of a RAM (e.g. development of Terms of Reference, composition of the Mission team, engendering national-level ownership and stakeholder engagement);
   v.   Structure and content of RAM reports (including crafting of effective recommendations);
   vi. The process for following up a RAM report.

3.1 Next steps

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Recommendation 15

A draft COP Resolution should be prepared by the STRP (with input from Parties, IOPs and Secretariat) to supersede Recommendation 4.7 and its Annex, taking into account the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this review.

3.1 Next steps

Recommendation 15