



Activities on culture in the Ramsar Convention

Culture and wetlands

The text of the Ramsar Convention notes that “wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value”. The principle of integrated attention to culture has therefore always been a part of the Convention.

Formal expressions of the Parties’ thinking on the subject were adopted in COP [Resolutions VIII.19](#) on “Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites” (2002) and [IX.21](#) on “Taking into account the cultural values of wetlands” (2005). A major [guidance document](#) was also published in 2008.

In the Ramsar context, culture is interpreted as a property of human groups or societies which expresses aspects of their identity, shared values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge systems, creativity and other practices. These things often contribute directly to the maintenance of wetlands. They also represent a key suite of benefits provided by wetlands to people (i.e. cultural ecosystem services), which Parties commit to maintain as part of their “wise use” obligation to maintain wetland ecological character.

Organisation of work

Since 2005, under the authority of the Standing Committee, a Ramsar Culture Working Group (now the [Ramsar Culture Network](#), RCN) has led the Convention’s work in this area. Managed by the Secretariat, the RCN comprises approximately 180 volunteer experts spanning all regions of the world; developing knowledge, disseminating information, building partnerships and contributing to projects (such as [Rapid Cultural Inventories](#) for wetlands, and case studies of synergies with World Heritage). Sub-groups have been established on special interest topics.

The Convention’s work on culture received a major boost in 2015 with the signing of an agreement between the Ramsar Secretariat and the MAVA Foundation. MAVA has agreed to provide part-funding (42%) for a series of activities (to be delivered primarily through the Ramsar Culture Network) over three years up to March 2018, in the four key areas of policy, knowledge, networking and partnerships. A considerable challenge has been set to raise the remaining funds.

Supporting strategic objectives

An analysis has shown that Ramsar’s culture-related activities will contribute in some way to 16 of the 19 targets in the Convention’s [Strategic Plan for 2016-2024](#) (Resolution XII.2), and to the “priority areas of focus” on ecosystem services, participation of stakeholders (including indigenous peoples and local communities) and synergies with other Conventions. They also support the contribution of wetlands to relevant global Sustainable Development Goals.

More information: <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-culture-network>
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