

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

48th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 26-30 January 2015

SC48-17

Follow up on Resolution XI.1: Languages of the Convention, visibility and stature, ministerial COP segments, and synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the report on the follow up on Resolution XI.1 and review the attached draft resolution on enhancing the Convention's languages, visibility and stature, and synergies with other MEAs and other international institutions, for consideration by the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Background

1. Resolution XI.1 on *Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat*, in paragraphs 17 and 18, asks the Standing Committee and all Contracting Parties to take the following actions:

“17. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee through an appropriate Working Group representative of Parties to develop strategies that explore:

- a) accommodation of UN languages into the Convention;
- b) elevation of Ramsar visibility and stature, including *inter alia* enhancing high-level political engagement in the work of the Convention at national, regional and global level; the working group will among other possibilities look into establishing a ministerial segment at the COP including the topics to be addressed at this level;
- c) enhancement of synergies with MEAs and other international entities including through Regional Initiatives;
- d) increased involvement in UNEP's initiatives and programs regarding biodiversity-related MEAs to enhance cooperation and synergies between Ramsar and UNEP;

and INVITES all Parties to participate in this group and its discussions including through electronic means where feasible; and

18. REQUESTS the Working Group to provide each Standing Committee meeting with a progress report including any implications such as financial ones and recommendations, and ALSO REQUESTS the Standing Committee to submit a report, including its recommendations, to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.”
2. Standing Committee through Decision SC46-15 approved the following subgroups and defined their memberships and Chairs: Subgroup 1, on accommodation of United Nations languages into the Convention; Subgroup 2, on elevating the visibility and stature of the Convention; and

Subgroup 3, on enhancing synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities.

3. Through Decision SC46-24, Standing Committee asked the Management Working Group to coordinate work on these issues, and to report to SC47 and COP12 on progress.
4. Following discussions within subgroups and the plenary Management Working Group, Standing Committee 47 through Decision SC47-07 decided:

“Concerning accommodation of UN Languages under Resolution XI.1:

- b) to address the longstanding differences in treatment of the three official Convention languages;
- c) to allocate resources from the current budget surplus to fund the costs of translating SC48 documents into French and Spanish;
- d) to instruct the Secretariat to include within all draft core budget scenarios for 2016-2018, prepared for Parties’ consideration at SC48, the costs of translating all SC documents into French and Spanish;
- e) to continue considering translation of additional STRP documents into French and Spanish, based on inputs by the Secretariat and the STRP, with a view to reviewing this issue at SC48; and
- f) to request the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a Resolution in response to Resolution XI.1 for the consideration of SC48, addressing accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, supported by:
 - analysis of legal considerations in relation to the Convention text as well as COP Resolutions including the Rules of Procedure;
 - options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources.

Concerning Visibility & Stature and Synergies

- g) to address these issues within the Strategic Plan Working Group and in follow-up to Resolution XI.1 for discussion at SC48 as appropriate.

Concerning the Ramsar–IUCN Task Force:

- h) to continue the negotiations on improving operations and to report on progress at SC48.”

5. This document presents the progress on these issues, and proposes ways forward for each.

Concerning accommodation of UN languages

6. With regards to items b), c) and d) above, the Secretariat has allocated the resources to fund the costs of translating SC48 documents into French and Spanish, and is including in all draft core budget scenarios for 2016-2018 (Doc SC48-20) the projected costs of translating all Standing Committee documents into French and Spanish for Parties’ consideration.
7. Regarding item e), the Secretariat estimated the cost of presenting additional STRP documents into French and Spanish in document SC47-02, and has proposed in document SC48-18 and its accompanying draft Resolution on the outcomes of the STRP Review Committee that the meetings of the STRP will operate in the three Convention languages and that meeting documents will be made available in these languages, subject to the availability of funding.

8. With reference to item f), the Secretariat has commissioned a legal briefing addressing the accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, and the resulting paragraphs are included in the draft resolution annexed to this document.

Concerning visibility and stature, and synergies with MEAs and other international entities

9. In regard to item g), it was agreed that the Strategic Plan Working Group would address these issues, and the draft of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan in document SC48-19 includes considerations on them. They may be further considered for discussion at SC48 as appropriate.
10. The discussions in Standing Committee and the Strategic Plan Working Group, and reviews of the National Reports received, have identified key elements to increase the visibility and stature of the Convention and synergies with MEAs and others. They are presented in the draft resolution text annexed to this document. These elements are also summarized in the annexed information document prepared by the Secretariat at the request of the Strategic Plan Working Group.
11. The Ramsar Secretariat and UNEP are preparing a memorandum of understanding on areas of common interest, such as improving synergies and the catalytic role of each organization, gaining access to information about the status and condition of wetlands, and enhancing efficient exchange of information and advice.
12. Concerning the Ramsar–IUCN Task Force, high-level meetings are held twice a year which focus on issues requiring attention and potential areas for cooperation. There has been good collaboration and progress on natural heritage and water and wetlands issues, and the Secretariat also appreciates the pro-bono legal analysis of transboundary water conventions carried out by IUCN’s legal expert. Further opportunities exist for greater collaboration on GEF, private sector and biodiversity activities, which both sides will take up.
13. The Secretariat notes with satisfaction the support received from IUCN on human resources issues and the assistance given to renovate its offices and place the Ramsar logo on the exterior of the joint headquarters. Greater visibility for Ramsar is still needed.
14. Three issues need further attention: a system is needed to ensure that IUCN consults the Secretariat before putting in place any policies and procedures that affect Ramsar; delivery of financial services needs to be improved; and IUCN has increased charges for services.

Resolution XII.xx (provisional number)

Enhancing the languages of the Convention and its visibility and stature, and increasing synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions

1. RECALLING that Resolution XI.1 in paragraphs 17 and 18 instructed the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties to explore strategies for the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention, for the elevation of the Convention's visibility and stature, including through enhancing high-level political engagement in its work, and for the enhancement of synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other international entities including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
2. FURTHER RECALLING that Resolution XI.1 called for the establishment of a working group to develop such strategies and report on its progress to each Standing Committee meeting, and also requested that the Standing Committee submit a report with recommendations to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
3. ACKNOWLEDGING the reports of the Management Working Group of the Standing Committee on the above matters and EXPRESSING APPRECIATION for the significant work carried out during the triennium;
4. APPRECIATING the work of the Strategic Plan Working Group in ensuring that the 4th Rasmars Strategic Plan presents ways forward on these issues;
5. NOTING the interest of all Parties in enhancing the visibility and stature of the Ramsar Convention and increasing synergies with other MEAs and with UNEP, and in supporting the development and implementation of the Convention by introducing other official UN languages into its operations;
6. REAFFIRMING that the accommodation of additional languages into the daily work of the Convention would support the engagement of more Contracting Parties to the Convention;
7. NOTING the accession by a growing number of Arabic-speaking countries to the Ramsar Convention and the increasing implementation of the Convention by Arabic-speaking Contracting Parties;
8. APPRECIATING the range of distinct wetland types such as wadis, sabkhas and oases in Arabic-speaking countries, and the presence of organizations and individuals in the region with expertise in the conservation and wise use of wetlands, whose contribution would be beneficial to the further implementation of the Convention;
9. UNDERSTANDING the range of pressing wetlands issues in Arabic-speaking countries, relating in particular to the need for equitable sharing of national and transboundary water resources, in light of the increasing demand from the region's growing population and changes in water availability due to changing rainfall patterns;
10. RECALLING that the Standing Committee in Decision SC47-07 instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a Resolution in response to Resolution XI.1 for its consideration at SC48, addressing accommodation of the Arabic language into the Convention, to be supported by a legal analysis of relevant provisions in the Convention text and existing Resolutions including

the Rules of Procedure, and options for a phased introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention;

11. NOTING the need to address the longstanding differences in treatment of the three official Convention languages and WELCOMING the legal briefing on the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention;
12. Also WELCOMING the Secretariat's progress in preparing a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to enhance collaboration on areas of common interest; and
13. EXPRESSING APPRECIATION for the quality of the cooperation between the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ramsar Secretariat, and progress which they have together made in enhancing support to the operations of the Secretariat and thus the implementation of the Convention;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Concerning accommodation of UN languages:

14. INVITES the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention to develop a strategy outlining the phased integration of Arabic into the work of the Convention which:
 - i. Classifies the language needs of the Secretariat according to the short-, medium- and long-term work of the Convention;
 - ii. Identifies barriers to effective translation, publishing and interpreting, and actions needed to overcome them such as the employment of a multi-lingual communications officer and a review of the relevant Rules of Procedure for Standing Committees and other bodies including the Scientific and Technical Review Panel;
 - iii. Designates the timeline for phased integration of procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones for all languages;
 - iv. Establishes a system for review of materials for communication and collaboration, and for updating on progress under the strategy; and
 - v. Outlines the financial implications of further phased integration of languages in line with the scale of existing resources;
15. RECOGNIZES that a phased approach will be needed to integrate Arabic into the Convention as an "official" and "working" language, with a gradual increase in funding, capacity and outputs;
16. CALLS UPON the Contracting Parties to cooperate with the Ramsar Secretariat to enhance collaboration and coordination with regard to spreading the financial and human costs of language integration through the development of an appropriately purposed fund ;
17. INSTRUMENTS the Standing Committee, through an appropriate working group of representatives of the Parties, to monitor the progress made in language integration and report its findings for consideration by the Parties at COP13;

Concerning visibility and stature, and increasing synergies:

18. REAFFIRMS that the establishment of a high-level ministerial segment at the Conference of the Parties addressing clearly defined topics would increase the global, regional and national profiles of the Ramsar Convention;
19. INVITES all Parties which are considering hosting meetings of the Conference of the Parties or Regional Meetings to consider including a high-level ministerial segment to improve the visibility and impact of the Convention, *inter alia* through invitations at global or regional levels, invitations to ministers as keynote speakers, or convening of round-table discussions;
20. ENCOURAGES all Ramsar National Focal Points to increase their efforts to coordinate with their national counterparts of other Conventions, and with all wetland practitioners including Ramsar Site managers, to inform them of Ramsar activities, processes and issues of common interest;
21. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to activate and develop networking mechanisms, including Ramsar National Wetlands Committees, to ensure collaboration with national ministries, departments and agencies, and global and regional bodies including UNEP, UNDP, WHO, FAO, UNECE, ITTO, the Global Environment Fund, to enhance the wise use of wetlands;
22. INVITES Contracting Parties to implement the *Guidelines for International Cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19) including by establishing cooperative mechanisms for the management of shared wetlands and hydrological basins;
23. URGES Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners and global and regional partners to continue supporting Ramsar Regional Initiatives and applying the *Operational Guidelines 2016-2018 for regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* (annexed to Resolution XII.xx), to increase political engagement and implementation of the Convention;
24. INSTRUMENTS the Ramsar Secretariat to continue implementing Resolution XI.6 on *Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions* and to report on progress regularly to the Standing Committee;
25. Further INSTRUMENTS the Ramsar Secretariat to continue working to strengthen collaboration with UNDP, UNESCO, UNECE, the World Bank, WHO, WMO, FAO and others and report on progress to the Standing Committee on an appropriately regular basis;
26. REQUESTS that the Ramsar Secretariat and UNEP work together on the implementation of their memorandum of understanding and report to the Standing Committee on the progress of the activities concerned;
27. RECOGNIZES that the Ramsar Convention is a biodiversity, a water and a sustainable development Convention and CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to implement the *Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands* (Resolution IX.1 Annex A) and the *Integrated Framework for the Convention's water-related guidance* (Resolution IX.1 Annex C) and EXHORTS Contracting Parties and the Convention's partners to implement Resolution XI.21 *Wetlands and sustainable development*;
28. ENCOURAGES the Parties and other stakeholders to increase their efforts to communicate wetland values and integrate them into a basin approach to land-use plans and other relevant local, national and global decisions;

29. Further RECOGNIZES the relevance and contribution of all wetlands to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and URGES Contracting Parties to include, under their own national targets, priorities for management, restoration and repair of wetlands in line with the global priorities for sustainable development, for example in the current versions of Goal 1 *“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”*; Goal 6 *“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”*; Goal 14 *“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”*; and Goal 15 *“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”*;
30. RECOGNIZES the collaboration between the Secretariat and IUCN and the good progress made on several issues, and ENCOURAGES both sides to collaborate further on GEF, private sector and biodiversity activities.