

## **Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention**

### **Chapter 1: The aim and scope of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs)**

1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) formally recognized by the Convention are operational means of support for the effective implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. RRIs improve the visibility of the Convention through international cooperation at regional level on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving in each case all relevant national and regional stakeholders.
2. As appropriate, RRIs could either be physically established centres that have a regional training or capacity building programme, regional cooperation networks with no physical centre, or a combination of both.
3. Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. In practical terms, a RRI may or may not correspond to one of the six global Ramsar regions.

### **Chapter 2: Governance and functioning of the RRIs**

4. The development, coordination and functioning of RRIs is the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders.
5. RRIs establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent manner. This requires the establishment of a governing body for each initiative made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders. The governing body meets regularly, guides and monitors the initiative's work programme and its resources, independently manages the activities of the initiative and publicly provides all its members with relevant information.
6. The complementary roles of RRIs and the Ramsar Secretariat, including their respective responsibilities, may be defined in written arrangements, if agreed by all Contracting Parties concerned.
7. Equitable and transparent governance and coordination structures should be laid down in a set of operational procedures, based on written, commonly agreed terms of reference, rules of procedure, or operational guidance. These operational procedures are made public and shared with the Ramsar Secretariat.

8. The coordination or governance mechanisms of each RRI are defined in its statutes and need to include the active participation of all Contracting Parties and other stakeholders participating in the initiative. RRIs are coordinated by a dedicated RRI secretariat with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat as appropriate.
9. RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned. They need support from all participating Contracting Parties. To be eligible for funding from the Convention, such support must be confirmed through a formal letter by the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in the Parties concerned, which would ideally be renewed for each period between two meetings of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties (COPs). Sufficient national support by the Parties concerned is essential to set up a minimal operational structure for effective work in the region.
10. It is the responsibility of the involved stakeholders, and in particular of the Heads of the Administrative Authorities in the Contracting Parties, which engage in the governance of RRIs, to develop, coordinate and manage RRIs. Depending on available human and financial resources, the Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist the RRIs to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through mobilization of additional resources.
11. Each RRI is encouraged to have its own system for accounting and presenting reports, which is supervised by its governing body, in order to be able to carry out its activities, receive financing, and implement specific projects.
12. Each RRI is encouraged to have professional staff involved to supervise or coordinate regional projects and programmes, in order to enhance the implementation capacity for the Convention in the region.
13. RRIs are encouraged to make optimal use of the existing Ramsar tools, in particular the Resolutions and their technical annexes, the manuals, guidelines, methods, etc. RRIs are encouraged to establish regular contacts and cooperation with the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its National Focal Points and other appropriate experts, that may be recognized as partners of the initiative, in order to obtain the best scientific and technical advice globally available, and to contribute regional experience into STRP's global work.
14. RRIs members, Contracting Parties and other stakeholders, may meet regularly with the assistance and guidance of the Ramsar Secretariat. These meetings should be prepared and announced sufficiently in advance and have concrete objectives and expected results.

### **Chapter 3: Status of the RRIs**

15. In order to establish a coordination body or mechanism, key support from a host country, an International Organization Partner (IOP) of the Convention, or a host intergovernmental organization is essential. This may need a hosting agreement to be signed with such entities, in order to provide sufficient independence of operation to the RRI in terms of staffing, accounting, fundraising and implementation of its work plan.
16. RRIs do not form part of the Ramsar Secretariat or of any national authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements. The RRIs are encouraged to establish their own identity, which specifies their independence, their status and role. They apply

relevant provisions of national legislation and seek to obtain a formal recognition in their host country.

17. When a RRI is hosted by an institution, a hosting agreement should recognise the specific status of the initiative and its operational independence with regard to the host institution, following the format adopted by the Standing Committee.
18. RRIs are approved by the COP and/or the Standing Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions and that they comply with the Operational Guidelines.
19. All Contracting Parties participating in a RRI shall sign a formal letter of engagement, following the format adopted by the Standing Committee, and participate actively in the activities of the initiative's work plan in accordance with its statutes.

#### **Chapter 4: Participation in RRI**

20. Active participation in RRIs should be encouraged by the Ramsar national Administrative Authorities. It may include representatives of other ministries, Ramsar IOPs, other non-governmental and civil society organizations, universities, local communities, and the private sector, in addition to the Convention's other national focal points for CEPA (Communication, Education, Participation, Awareness) and STRP.
21. RRIs should strive to actively collaborate with intergovernmental and international partners in their region, with regional conventions, regional and sub-regional economic commissions and basin organizations, and with Ramsar IOPs, to establish complementary activities and work programmes, to create synergies and to avoid duplication.

#### **Chapter 5: Relation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the RRIs**

22. A RRI is not and cannot act as a regional office of the Convention. It presents itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of RRIs, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. A practical means to this end may be to adopt a specific logo and to use it in combination with the Ramsar logo in consultation with the Ramsar Secretariat. A RRI may also establish and regularly update a specific website.
23. The active involvement of all Ramsar National Focal Points, including those for CEPA and for STRP, of the relevant Contracting Parties is encouraged in order that the RRIs can achieve significant results.
24. The development of effective coordination and collaboration between RRIs acting regionally and the Ramsar Secretariat acting globally and being responsible to the Standing Committee and COP is essential.
25. The Secretariat maintains regular contacts with the RRIs through its Senior Regional Advisers to ensure that the objectives and work programmes of the RRIs are in alignment with the Convention's Strategic Plan, and that Ramsar's Operational Guidelines are applied throughout the different regions.

26. The Secretariat invites comments from all RRI when it proposes new programmes and activities in a joint effort and disseminates key documents in the languages of the Convention also to RRI. Such documents may be prepared in anticipation to be reviewed by the Standing Committee and the Conference of the Parties.
27. The Ramsar Secretariat communication team involves the RRI in its work programme and in specific campaigns, including for World Wetlands Day, from the start of such activities. In this way, Ramsar messages can be spread consistently across the globe.

#### **Chapter 6: The role of the RRI to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan**

28. The work programme of each Ramsar Regional Initiative should be aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan, focus on the fulfilment of the priorities of the region concerned, and contribute to the implementation of relevant international agreements, thereby serving to build synergies to support the implementation of the Convention in the region.
29. RRI support the Contracting Parties to develop projects in the framework of the work plan of the initiative to implement the Strategic Plan in view of obtaining financial support from donors.
30. The work programme of RRI improves the visibility of the Convention and the general awareness of the objectives of its Strategic Plan. The work programme should include specific activities related to CEPA. RRI are invited to ask the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel for advice and send a report on the results of their activities to the panel.

#### **Chapter 7: Financing of the RRI**

31. All participating Contracting Parties are encouraged to provide assistance to RRI, and donors are encouraged to provide funds for their activities, for example through financing provided by specific projects or programmes.
32. When possible or necessary, RRI may have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their governing bodies, in order to carry out their activities, receive financing, and execute specific projects.
33. RRI generate their own resources and should take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources from a variety of fairly distributed reliable sources, allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.
34. Each COP establishes a core budget line to support RRI Initiatives over the coming triennium. The Standing Committee allocates these funds annually to specific RRI that request so and fulfil the Operational Guidelines.
35. Financial assistance to a RRI from the core budget of the Convention is provided for a limited period of time, in principle only for a period corresponding to the interval between two meetings of the COP. Afterwards, the initiative should be self-supporting. Financial support to regional centres that meet the Operational Guidelines can be obtained for a period of up to six years in total.
36. RRI that receive financial support from the Ramsar core budget shall use part of this support to find long-term financing from other sources, in particular if they receive support from Ramsar support for more than one period between two COPs.

37. Support from a host country is especially important if a coordinating office is to be established.

#### **Chapter 8: Reporting and evaluation of the RRI**

38. RRI are requested to present annual reports on progress with work and financial status in the past year to the Ramsar Secretariat, together with finance and work plans for the coming year, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee. A summary of Ramsar and other funding sources is reported. RRI should inform the Ramsar Secretariat about collaborations they establish. Such reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the documents for the annual meeting of Standing Committee.

39. The RRI that satisfy the Operational Guidelines are approved by the Standing Committee as operating within the framework of the Convention for the period between two meetings of the COP, and receive the status of Ramsar Regional Initiative.

40. All RRI that do not report on their activities to the Ramsar Secretariat in time, will have their status of Ramsar Regional Initiative withdrawn by the Standing Committee.