

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)  
53<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee  
Gland, Switzerland, 29 May – 2 June 2017

## Decisions of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 2: Review and adoption of the Provisional Agenda

**Decision SC53-01: The Standing Committee approved the Provisional Agenda and revised Annotated Provisional Agenda, with the addition of the second meeting of the Sub-group on Finance.**

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

**Decision SC53-02: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed by the Secretary General, as contained in document SC53 Inf.Doc.02 Rev.1.**

Agenda item 5: Report of the Management Working Group

b. Proposal of new MOUs

**Decision SC53-03: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to conduct a review of all current and proposed cooperative agreements (whether Memoranda of Understanding, Memoranda of Cooperation, or similar), taking account of the present document as well as the work previously conducted for SC52, to report to SC54. The Standing Committee further decided that:**

- this review should be conducted on the basis of criteria which could include those suggested by Management Working Group members, such as an assessment of costs and benefits of existing and proposed agreements, value added, mechanisms for monitoring results, possible development of an agreement ‘template’ and consideration of whether some partnerships could be taken forward effectively without the need for formal written agreements;
- the draft MOU with South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP, Annex 1 to Doc. SC53-04) should be considered within this wider review of cooperative agreements;
- the Secretary General may sign the proposed letter of agreement with the International Partnership on Blue Carbon, responding to the invitation received from the Government of Australia, which had been made available to the Management Working Group.

c. Review of existing Working Groups

**Decision SC53-04: The Standing Committee agreed to review the effectiveness of the Convention’s governance in order to optimise the use of resources, to create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and to increase the participation and representation of the Parties, and also to propose the considerations and means necessary to do this. To this end it decided to extend the mandate of the existing Facilitation Working Group with an open membership. The outcomes of this review and any corresponding proposals should be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Standing Committee for subsequent submission to the Conference of the Parties for decision.**

d. Strategy on the use of UN languages

**Decision SC53-06:** The Standing Committee decided that the matters dealt with in document SC53-06 *Preparation of a Language Strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands* should be taken forward intersessionally by the Secretariat in consultation with the open-ended informal working group established by SC52. The working group was asked to report to SC54 on the outcomes of its further deliberations, including any proposals that might be taken forward to COP13, subject to approval at SC54.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Sub-group on COP13

**Decision SC53-05:** The Standing Committee approved the main theme of COP13 as ‘Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future’, which would also serve as the theme for World Wetlands Day in 2018. The Standing Committee confirmed that the logo of COP13 would be finalised by the Host Country, taking into account comments made by the Sub-group on COP13. The Standing Committee approved the Provisional Agenda for COP13 contained in document SC53-08, and the addition of the high-level segment and correction of the title of item XIV), and requested the Host Country, in consultation with interested Parties and the Secretariat, to further develop plans for the organisation of a high-level segment.

**Decision SC53-16:** The Standing Committee decided that COP13 would take place from 21 to 29 October 2018, and thanked the Host Country for its proposal to hold a high-level segment, noting the need to take into account the dates of the high-level segment of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Agenda item 7: Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-18 triennium and annual plan for 2017

**Decision SC53-07:** The Standing Committee approved the *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat* (document SC53-09) subject to the incorporation of amendments proposed by Parties and implications of decisions to be taken on other SC53 agenda items. The Standing Committee confirmed that the integrated nature of the document should be retained and that the core function of the Secretariat related to administration and servicing the governing and subsidiary bodies and of the Convention should be retained as a separate element. It further agreed to include an indication of whether activities were to be covered by core or non-core funding.

Agenda item 8: Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

**Decision SC53-08:** The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) Chair and agreed to:

- emphasize to Contracting Parties the importance of participation by STRP National Focal Points in the development and review of STRP outputs, especially the report on the State of the World’s Wetlands and their Services to People;
- encourage appropriate reviewers from all Contracting Parties to provide input about wetlands in the Second Order Draft of the IPBES Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment, as well as the Second Order Drafts of the IPBES regional assessments; and
- remind Contracting Parties, in light of the ongoing and more recent outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, about Ramsar guidance on appropriate policy and national responses to such outbreaks.

Agenda item 9: Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

**Decision SC53-11: The Standing Committee noted that some Contracting Parties would continue to implement the Operational Guidelines in effect as of COP12.**

**Decision SC53-12: The Standing Committee decided that a Draft Resolution on Ramsar Regional Initiatives should be prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with interested Parties, for consideration at COP13. This work should take account of the information contained in the Working Group's report, as contained in document SC53-12.**

Agenda item 10: Update on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

**Decision SC53-09: The Standing Committee took note of the update on Ramsar Regional Initiatives contained in document SC53-12 and recommended to the Sub-group on Finance the allocation of CHF 30,000 from the 2017 core budget for RRI to each of the four new initiatives covering the Senegal Basin, Amazon Basin, Central Asia and Indo-Burma. The Standing Committee confirmed that the allocation of funds should be considered by the Sub-group on Finance, during its deliberations on the allocation of the 2016 core budget surplus.**

Agenda item 11: Strategy on the use of UN languages

See Agenda item 5, Decision SC53-06 above.

Agenda item 12: Report of the CEPA Oversight Panel

**Decision SC53-10: The Standing Committee requested that the Panel continue its work as outlined and confirmed the importance of the four specific issues raised in the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel, namely:**

- the need for COP13 to revisit CEPA governance and the work of the Oversight Panel;
- the need to match the Contracting Parties' ambitions to the limited resources available to the Secretariat;
- the need to specify what outcomes the Parties wanted to obtain from CEPA, focusing on engagement and participation, providing what Parties need, training opportunities, addressing governance, and having a rigorous look at CEPA, possibly reducing the heavy focus on communications and social media; and
- the need to seek opportunities to work collaboratively, until COP13, and consider how to improve outcomes.

Agenda item 13: Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities

d. The Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Awards 2018

**Decision SC53-13: The Standing Committee approved the proposed procedures for the COP13 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, as contained in document SC53-13, subject to incorporation of the amendments tabled by Parties.**

- e. Update on the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”

**Decision SC53-15: The Standing Committee approved the report of the Contact Group established under Agenda item 13 and mandated the Secretariat to take forward the Contact Group’s recommendations, including by:**

- seeking further legal advice to put the ongoing work onto a sound legal footing, with the Secretary General authorised to sign a new contract if necessary;
- reviewing the Ramsar website to ensure that the project is appropriately reflected in relation to the priorities of the Convention, as approved at COP12; and
- exploring: (a) a further project in each Ramsar region, on the basis of the availability of co-financing, which could include, where possible, opportunities to enhance CEPA outcomes; and (b) future opportunities with MAVA for collaboration of mutual benefit.

Agenda item 14: Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on partnership and synergies

**Decision SC53-17: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to continue working actively with the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), as well as with other relevant United Nations agencies, on water-related indicators, and in particular indicator 6.6.1 on wetland extent, to contribute to its methodological development, to ensure that Ramsar National Reports, and more specifically on wetlands extent, are included as the main source of information and to avoid duplication of reporting at national level; and requested that the Secretariat explore options for institutional arrangements that include being a leader for indicator 6.6.1 or its sub-indicator on extent.**

**Decision SC53-18: The Standing Committee requested that the Secretariat transmit to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) the elements of the Ramsar Strategic Plan that are aligned to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, SDGs and the four-year framework of programme priorities (2018-2022) for the seventh replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund annexed to CBD Decision XIII/21.**

**Decision SC53-19: The Standing Committee requested that the Secretariat review the actions in Annexes I and II of CBD Decision XIII/24 that are relevant for the Convention, and provide inputs to the synergy process as appropriate.**

Agenda item 15: Progress report on implementation of the Wetland City Accreditation

**Decision SC53-14: The Standing Committee:**

- confirmed the composition of the IAC until COP13 as set out in Resolution XII.10, with the exception that the Chair would be Tunisia and the Co-Chair would be the Republic of Korea, while UN-Habitat would serve as a member of the Committee;
- welcomed the offer of RRC-EA to participate in the IAC;
- agreed that the participation of the Secretary General or her designee in the IAC should be largely symbolic;
- confirmed that the administrative role of the Secretariat should be minimal, limited to receiving applications and forwarding them to the IAC, without an impact on core budget funding (meaning operation of the IAC including translations of WCA applications and other relevant documents would have to be covered by external funds to be mobilised by the IAC);
- noted the specific proposed amendments to document SC53-16 tabled by South Africa; and
- agreed an extension of the deadline for the submission of WCA applications until 31 October 2017.

Agenda item 16: Report on national and regional targets of the Strategic Plan

**Decision SC53-20: The Standing Committee took note of document SC53-17, requested that the Secretariat take into account the comments made, and invited Parties that encountered challenges in using either the National Reporting Format or the voluntary online reporting system to advise the Secretariat as soon as possible.**

Agenda item 17: The status of the List of Wetlands of International Importance and update on the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS)

**Decision SC53-21: The Standing Committee took note of document SC53-18 and instructed the Secretariat to take into account the comments made with regard to the structure and content of the report and to follow up bilaterally with those Parties that had made specific observations on individual Ramsar Sites and/or other elements of the technical Annexes to the document.**

Agenda item 18: Options for holding future meetings of the Standing Committee in Geneva

**Decision SC53-22: The Standing Committee decided that its future meetings would continue to be held in Gland, and welcomed the offer of Switzerland to work with the Secretariat to consider the feasibility of a visit to a Swiss Ramsar Site at a future meeting, without drawing on core budget funds.**

Agenda item 19: Report of the Facilitation Working Group

**Decision SC53-23: The Standing Committee approved the report of the Facilitation Working Group (FWG), and took note of:**

- the work completed to date by the FWG, the confidence they had expressed in the Secretary General, and the work and changes made to foster strengthened implementation of the Convention, and that as a result of this high confidence and full support, the FWG was stepping back from its closer-than-usual facilitation role;
- the Working Group's offer to be of continued service to Parties for new tasks, as it steps back from its heightened facilitation role;
- Decision SC53-04, which had already extended the mandate of the FWG to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance in order to optimise the use of resources, to create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and to increase the participation and representation of the Parties, and also to propose the considerations and means necessary to do this; and
- the request to the Working Group to facilitate clarification of the Secretariat's mandate and means of communication between the Secretariat, Contracting Parties and the public in Article 3.2 cases.

Agenda item 20: Report of the Sub-group on Finance

**Decision SC53-26: The Standing Committee took note of the preliminary core budget results for 2016, the preliminary 2016 balance sheet and the 2016 draft financial statements as of 31 December 2016, and the delay of the 2016 financial statement audit.**

**Decision SC53-27: The Standing Committee took note of the replenishment of the reserve to its maximum of 15% of 2016 core budget, equivalent to CHF 762,000 in accordance with Resolution XII.1.**

**Decision SC53-28: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to develop an intersessional proposal on the use of the travel funds and to seek approval of the Subgroup on Finance, as well as to look into the option of participation in IUCN's training courses.**

**Decision SC53-29: The Standing Committee decided to use the 2016 surplus as follows:**

***Proposed reallocation of 2016 surplus funds ('000 CHF)***

Description	SC53	Comments
<b>Core Surplus</b>	5 1 0	
<b>Position and contract extension approved by the Executive Team (21-22 February 2017):</b>		
Part-time Accounting Assistant	86	50% July 2016 - December 2018 (Level A3)
Finance Management - transition period	70	Up to SC53 and 2016 audit
<b><i>Subtotal approved by Executive Team</i></b>	156	
<b>Core Surplus, Remaining Balance</b>	354	
<b>Proposal for Remaining Surplus:</b>		
Planning, Capacity Building and Team Building to ensure effective operations of the Secretariat (2017 and 2018)	110	Planning Workshop x 2: 30 Workshop x 2: 30 Conflict resolution / leadership x 2: 40 Team-building x 2: 10
Executive Team Meeting	8	As needed
<b><i>Subtotal, Proposal</i></b>	118	
<b>Core Surplus, Remaining Balance</b>	236	
COP Priorities (Resolution XII.1) - Ramsar Advisory Missions	90	Sierra Leone (35), Nicaragua (25), Iraq (30)
Regional Initiatives	60	To be set-aside in case needed and availability of funds
Improvements for the on-line system for National Reports	10	
Pre-COP interpretation	32	Asia (12), Americas (8), Africa (12)
<b>Remaining Balance</b>	44	To be allocated at next SC

**Decision SC53-30: The Standing Committee further instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution on financial matters to be considered at COP13 and to include the Accounting Assistant position.**

**Decision SC53-31:** The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, regarding its proposal to start the use of designated reserves for exceptional annual core budget surpluses, to:

- report back to the Sub-group, on the basis of the Terms of Reference for the Financial Administration of the Convention at Resolution 5.2 Annex 3, paragraph 8;
- create an operational reserve on a pilot basis, if needed; and
- report on the experience to SC54.

**Decision SC53-32:** The Standing Committee took note of the non-core budget and voluntary contributions for 2016 and instructed the Secretariat to continue including a breakdown of voluntary non-core contributions received (as per table 3 of document SC53-20) in documents for future Standing Committee meetings, and to indicate which of these contributions relate directly to the budgeted non-core expenditure priorities of the triennium (as per document SC53-20, Annex 5).

**Decision SC53-33:** The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to take steps to undertake a financial / management review of non-core funds.

**Decision SC53-34:** The Standing Committee took note of the improvement in the status of outstanding contributions of Contracting Parties, and encouraged Contracting Parties to pay any outstanding dues in due course.

**Decision SC53-35:** The Standing Committee took note of the proposed Secretariat actions for 2017 on outstanding contributions mentioned in document SC53-21 paragraphs 11 and 12, and recommended that the Secretariat publish on the Convention website the status of contributions.

**Decision SC53-36:** The Standing Committee approved the proposal of the Secretariat to change the method of calculating the annual provision against dues receivable from Contracting Parties, as presented in document SC53-21, table 4, in line with the practice of other Conventions.

**Decision SC53-37:** The Standing Committee:

- took note of the cumulative voluntary contributions of Contracting Parties in the Africa region, which had totalled approximately CHF 99,000 between 2009 and 31 December 2016, and recognized that such contributions should be allocated to Regional Initiatives for the Africa region; and
- instructed the Secretariat, upon further analysis and subsequent audit confirmation of the final balance of the voluntary contributions for 2016, to seek advice from the Africa region on the allocation of the 2016 balance for the African Regional Initiatives.

**Decision SC53-38:** The Standing Committee allocated, from the 2017 core budget for Ramsar Regional Initiatives, CHF 30,000 to each of the following new initiatives: Amazon Basin, Central Asia, Indo-Burma and Senegal Basin.

Agenda item 21: Other matters

- a. Date and venue of the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee

**Decision SC53-24:** The Standing Committee agreed that the 54<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee would be held in the week of 23 – 27 April 2018 at IUCN headquarters in Gland, Switzerland.

b. Adoption of the report of the 53rd Meeting

**Decision SC53-25: The draft reports of the meeting for Wednesday 31 May and Thursday 1 June were adopted, subject to the inclusion of specific amendments tabled by Austria, Colombia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Tunisia and the United States. The Standing Committee authorised the Chair to approve the report of the meeting for Friday 2 June.**

c. Any other business

**Decision SC53-39: The Standing Committee authorised the Secretariat, on an exceptional basis, to proceed with the project funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) in support of CariWet and to work with the donor to find an interim human-resources mechanism to support CariWet, and invited Parties to identify a sustainable approach and corresponding guidelines in a Draft Resolution to be submitted for consideration at SC54.**