

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

Draft Report

Wednesday 31 May 2017

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1. Opening statements

Opening statements were made by:

- a. Mr Jorge Rucks, Uruguay, Chair of the Standing Committee;
- b. Mr Stewart Maginnis, Global Director, Nature-based Solutions Group, IUCN (on behalf of the Director General of IUCN);
- c. Ms Jane Madgwick, Chief Executive Officer of Wetlands International, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs); and
- d. Ms Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention.

Agenda item 2. Review and adoption of the Provisional Agenda

The **Chair** tabled documents SC53-01 *Provisional Agenda* and SC53-01 Add.1 Rev.1 *Annotated Provisional Agenda* and opened the floor to comments.

In its capacity as Chair of the Sub-group on Finance, **Senegal** noted that a second meeting of that Sub-group had been arranged for the lunch break on Thursday 1 June and asked that the Provisional Agenda be updated accordingly.

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

At the invitation of the **Chair**, the **Secretary General** read out the names of observers contained in document SC53-Inf.Doc.02 Rev.1 *List of registered observers*.

Senegal asked the Secretariat to ensure compliance in future with Article 7, paragraph 8, of the Rules of Procedure, which requires the list of registered observers to be notified to Contracting Parties 14 days prior to meetings of the COP or Standing Committee.

The **Chair** expressed his confidence that the Secretariat would comply with this requirement.

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 4. Report of the Secretary General

The **Secretary General** presented highlights of her written report contained in document SC53-02 *Report of the Secretary General*, complemented by new information on activities undertaken since the document had been finalised. She drew particular attention to developments relating to:

- Servicing the Contracting Parties through the organisation of meetings of the COP, Standing Committee and STRP, and enhancing the Secretariat's accountability;
- Increasing the relevance of wetlands and the Convention in the broader global agenda, including sustainable development policy objectives;
- Strengthening support and enabling implementation of the Convention;
- Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention; and
- Strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness.

Parties formally welcomed the new Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and other new Secretariat staff, thanked the Secretary General for her report and expressed confidence in and support for the work undertaken to date.

India was grateful that the Secretary General had highlighted the issue of capacity building of wetland managers as a priority task to focus on in the future, and drew attention to the potential for cooperation with the World Lake Conference organised biennially by the International Lake Environment Committee.

The **United States of America** appreciated the solutions-oriented efforts made by the Secretary General to understand the views of Parties and to strengthen the Secretariat. A lot of positive change had been achieved, but further work was needed, which would require openness to new approaches and innovative ways of working by all those concerned.

Switzerland commended the new Secretary General for acting strategically and inclusively to bring the Secretariat into a more modern era and to engage more closely with the functioning of UN conventions. Switzerland requested further information about whether the management of a large project, such as that in favour of the CariWet Regional Initiative mentioned during the Secretary General's presentation, was within the mandate of the Secretariat.

Colombia warmly welcomed the willingness of the new Secretary General to listen to all Contracting Parties and other interested groups.

Kenya was also pleased to see the passion and impetus that the new Secretary General had brought to the Secretariat's work and appreciated the intersessional work of the Standing Committee and all subsidiary bodies and working groups.

Senegal thanked the entire Secretariat team, in particular for the work done on documentation, which was much improved. The Secretary General's oral presentation had included a lot of information of activities carried out after the report was published. In future, it would be useful to make such material available in an updated version of the document. Senegal shared Switzerland's concern that project management might not be within the Secretariat's mandate. Recent experience showed the need for complete transparency with regard to projects and it would be more appropriate for the Secretariat to support the RRI to mobilise resources themselves.

Seychelles, speaking on behalf of the Africa Regional Group, called for a paragraph on Wetland City Accreditation to be added to the Secretary General's report. This was an initiative that African

Parties considered very important for increasing the Convention's visibility and linking with local government and city administrations.

Uruguay thanked the Secretary General for her work to date in enhancing the effectiveness of the Secretariat and looked forward to further progress. Uruguay acknowledged the work conducted with other Parties through the Facilitation Working Group, which it co-chaired with the United States of America, and in particular the efforts made to facilitate enhanced relations between the Convention and IUCN.

Nepal was encouraged by the proactiveness, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the Secretary General and assured her of full support.

The **Islamic Republic of Iran** thanked the Secretary General, Secretariat team and IOPs for their work and drew attention to the challenges associated with dust storms in West Asia and the Middle East. Greater engagement of the Ramsar Secretariat in this issue would be welcome, given that the major reasons, in addition to climate change, included wetland dessication and poor management of water resources in the region. They welcomed contributions from any country to an international conference on the subject to be held in Tehran in June.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** noted that it was important to consider least developed countries in the work of the Convention, and also important to prioritise monitoring and evaluation of what was actually being achieved as a result of Convention implementation.

Cuba wished to hear more about plans for increasing engagement with the UNFCCC. Close collaboration between Ramsar and UNFCCC was particularly important for island states such as Cuba.

Romania considered that the Convention had embarked on a new and positive era, but reminded the meeting of the decision taken at SC52 concerning a Regional Officer for Europe. There was a real need for such an Officer to support for Contracting Parties in the region that have between them designated over one thousand Ramsar Sites.

Australia commended the Secretary General on producing such a comprehensive report in a short period of time. Ramsar had been through a difficult time. Australia nevertheless encouraged all colleagues to maintain a focus on the important goals of the Convention and to resist a tendency to focus on the minutiae of administration.

The Secretary General thanked Parties for all of their comments and statements of confidence. She underlined that the progress made reflected the efforts of the whole Secretariat. She had taken note of the need to work across the regions in order to serve the Parties in a more consistent way, and of the importance of strengthening monitoring and follow up. She proposed that the point raised in relation to the CariWet project be covered under Agenda item 9 on the RRI and if appropriate also under Agenda item 20 *Report of the Sub-group on Finance*. Wetland City Accreditation would be covered under Agenda item 15. She recalled that her report provided an overview and other documents provided further detail on different items under the Agenda. At the request of the Facilitation Working Group, the Secretary General ensured that her presentation had included any new information or updates, but trusted that this would not require the written report itself to be reissued; this was not normal practice in other fora. She concurred that there was an enormous opportunity to connect with UNFCCC, but awareness of Ramsar's potential contribution was currently very low and there was much to be done to rectify this. Regarding a Regional Officer for Europe, she noted that this was not covered in the approved budget, that needs and priorities would

be assessed in developing the budget for the next triennium and that alternative options for serving the Convention in the best possible way, within existing resources, could be considered.

South Africa underlined the importance to the Africa Region of follow-up to Resolution X.10 on Wetland City Accreditation, which African Parties regarded as a key means of raising the visibility of the Convention.

Following further observations from **Senegal** concerning the mandate of the Secretariat to manage projects, it was agreed that this matter would be taken up under Agenda item 20.

In response to a request from **Senegal** for a closed meeting of the Management Working Group, the Chair asked the Executive Team to meet during the lunchbreak.

Agenda item 5. Report of the Management Working Group

Australia, as Vice-Chair of the Management Working Group (MWG), presented a summary of conclusions and action points from the meeting of the MWG held on Monday 29 May 2017. This summary had been distributed to Standing Committee participants (see Annex 1).

The **Standing Committee** noted the report of the MWG and took the following decision:

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 MWG 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 MWG.

The **Chair of the Standing Committee** stated that during the MWG discussion on the Status of Working Groups of the Standing Committee (document SC53-05), the Parties expressed interest in reviewing the effectiveness of the Convention, including for example its working groups, its governance, the Rules of Procedure and other elements. As agreed, and as he had committed to as Chair of the Management Working Group, he had consulted interested Parties, and proposed that this work be carried out by the Facilitation Working Group through an extension to its mandate. He presented a draft decision which was agreed as follows:

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.

Presentation

The **Chair** drew attention to the fact that SC53 would mark the last meeting of the Standing Committee for Mireille Katz of the Secretariat staff. Ms Katz would shortly be retiring, having served the Convention tirelessly for some 33 years in a range of capacities, most recently as Executive Assistant to the Secretary General. He made a presentation to Ms Katz, conveying the Standing Committee's sincerest appreciation of her work and warmest wishes for her retirement. A proposal of **Uganda** that Mireille Katz be designated a 'Wetland Person of International Importance' was endorsed by acclamation.

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

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

The **Chair** referred to document SC53-07 *Progress with preparations for the 13th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties* and invited the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in its capacity as Chair of the Sub-group on COP13, to introduce this agenda item.

The **UAE** presented the report of the Sub-group on COP13, which had met during the afternoon of Monday 29 June 2017 (see Annex 2).

In response to a question from **Kenya**, the **UAE** confirmed that approval had recently been received from the relevant authorities for a high-level segment to be held during COP13. Discussions would be held with the Secretariat about the exact timing and theme.

Japan, supported by **India**, noted that the proposed dates of COP13 coincided with the World Lake Conference being held in Japan from 15 to 19 October 2018. Since the themes and likely participation in the two conferences would be very similar, Japan asked that consideration be given to adjusting the dates of COP13.

Nepal thanked the **UAE** for the excellent work done to date and welcomed the holding of a high-level segment at COP13; this would increase impetus for the Convention's work.

Kenya, speaking on behalf of the African Region, welcomed the planned high-level segment to raise the profile of the Convention and the issues around wetland loss. They invited the Host Country, other Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to set an appropriate agenda for ensuring meaningful results. They offered the assistance of a person familiar with the organisation of the high-level segment at COP9.

Uganda welcomed and supported the holding of a high-level segment at COP13 and recalled that the Ministerial Dialogue held during COP9 in Kampala had galvanised political support. Setting the agenda would be key to deriving maximum benefit. It would also be important to have early clarity on visa issues.

In response to a question raised by **Colombia**, **Uganda** recommended that the theme of the high-level segment should be the same as the theme of the COP. Their key point would be to determine exactly what contribution the high-level segment should make within the overall theme.

The **Secretary General** outlined the efforts that had been made to find a suitable date in the international calendar and the challenges associated with this, in particular the change of dates of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The last quarter of 2018 included also the COP of the UNFCCC, as well as a number of other key meetings. She greatly appreciated the flexibility that had already been shown by the Host Country in this regard.

Following further discussions, with contributions from **Japan, Senegal, the UAE** and the **Secretary General**, it was agreed that further consultations would be held with interested Parties before a decision was made by SC53 on the dates of COP13.

The Standing Committee noted the Report of the Sub-group on COP13 and the interest expressed by Parties in the organisation of a high-level segment and took the following decision:

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 (as contained in document SC53-08, and with the correction of the dates, 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.

Follow-up to Agenda item 5. Report of the Management Working Group

The Deputy Secretary General reported that the informal working group on languages had met during the lunch break earlier that afternoon and had agreed to recommend that the Standing Committee be invited to approve an intersessional process, through which the group would work with the Secretariat to take this matter forward to SC54.

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 7. Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-18 triennium and annual plan for 2017

At the invitation of the **Chair**, the **Secretary General** introduced Doc. SC53-09 *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat*, including both its content and the process of its development. She recalled that the Standing Committee was being asked to take note of and approve the document, which reflected comments received during SC52 as well as decisions SC52-12 and SC52-13.

Interventions were made by **Argentina, Australia, Colombia** (on behalf of the Latin American & Caribbean Regional Group), **Finland, India, Nepal, Senegal, United States of America** and **Uruguay**. Members of the Standing Committee welcomed improvements made in the Work Plan. Interventions included a number of suggestions for amendments to the contents of the Work Plan. Parties that tabled specific proposed amendments were requested to provide these in writing to the Secretariat.

Decision SC53-07: The Standing Committee approved the *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat* (Doc. 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

The **Chair of the STRP** summarised the report contained in document SC53-10 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)* and updated the Standing Committee on the Panel's progress to date in implementing the STRP work plan for 2016-2018.

The **Chair of the STRP** foresaw lower expenditure than budgeted, and invited initial consideration of how remaining funds might be reallocated. He also informed the Standing Committee that Second Order Drafts of the Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment and regional assessments of IPBES were open for review until 26 June. He also invited Parties to note that the call for proposals for the second IPBES work programme was expected in March 2018.

Members of the Standing Committee including **Kenya, Tunisia** and the **United States of America**, and Parties including **Canada, India** and **South Africa** acknowledged the progress of high-priority activities and the financial and other support extended by the IOPs to tasks. They welcomed the financial situation, and suggested activities that would be welcomed should the funds become available.

In response to enquiries, the **Chair of the STRP** confirmed: that STRP members would be available to attend pre-COP meetings and COP13, and external meetings if invited and subject to funding; that the 21st meeting of the STRP in January 2018 would be able to review Draft Resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties; and that members could review documents and provide advice within the STRP's ad-hoc advisory function. He noted that rotating STRP meetings between regions from the next triennium may be an effective means to promote regionally-balanced participation. In response to a request by Kenya, he proposed to include in future reports to the Standing Committee a list of Parties and Focal Points which had given feedback on STRP drafts.

The **Secretary General** noted that consideration of budget reallocations needed to be considered after the completion of the work of the Sub-group on Finance.

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.**