CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

53rd Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 29 May – 2 June 2017

**Draft Report**

**Thursday 1 June 2017**

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

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

**Uganda**, as Chair of the Working Group on Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs), introduced document SC53-11 *Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives*.

Interventions were made by **Australia**, **Colombia** on behalf of the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Group, **Cuba** on behalf of the CariWet RRI, **Estonia**, **Kenya** on behalf of the Africa Regional Group, **Republic of Korea**, **Romania** on behalf of **France**, **Senegal**, **South Africa**, **Switzerland**, **Tunisia** on behalf of the Africa Regional Group, **United States of America** and **Uruguay** on behalf of La Plata Basin RRI.

There was broad support for the proposal of **Sweden**, contained in document SC53-11, that a Draft Resolution on the topic of RRIs be taken forward for consideration at COP13, taking into account the Working Group’s report.

There were diverging views on the extent to which the Working Group’s report fulfilled the mandate established by Decisions SC52-18 and SC52-19 in response to Resolution XII.8 on *Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*. A number of Parties considered that the Working Group had not been mandated to propose revised Operational Guidelines, as proposed in Annex 2 to document SC53-11, but only to assess the applicability of the existing Guidelines approved through Decision SC52-16. Other Parties had a different interpretation and indicated their support for the revised Guidelines contained in Annex 2, which they considered to be a result of the applicability assessment.

**Senegal** requested advice from the Legal Adviser on this matter, as well as on the application of the Rules of Procedure, specifically Rule 2, paragraph k), and Rule 25, paragraph 5 c).

The **Chair** concluded that further discussion should be deferred to the afternoon session of the meeting, when the Legal Adviser would provide her advice.

Agenda item 10. Update on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

The **Chair** invited the **Secretariat** to present document SC53-12 *Update on Ramsar Regional Initiatives*.

In response to a question from **Kenya** speaking on behalf of the Africa Regional Group, the **Secretary General** confirmed that the Secretariat was mandated to support all RRIs, but that the nature of this support varied in line with the diversity of the RRIs themselves.

In response to questions raised by **Senegal**, the **Secretariat** provided clarification concerning differences in the funds carried forward for RRI activities in 2017 resulting from different reporting dates (as shown in the table in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12) and the figures shown in Annex 1 to document SC53-20, and on utilisation of the funds allocated to the Amazon Basin and Indo-Burma RRIs.

The **Secretariat** further confirmed that the proposed allocation of the Ramsar 2017 core budget for RRIs set out in the table in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12 was indicative only, based on the allocations made in 2016, and that it was for the Standing Committee to decide on the actual allocation in 2017 of the available total of CHF 120,000.

**Australia** and **Canada** suggested that the request for additional funding made by the Senegal Basin RRI should be dealt with by the Sub-group on Finance.

**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 RRIs 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

The **Chair** recalled that consideration of this item had been completed under Agenda item 5, *Report of the Management Working Group*.

Agenda item 12. Report of the CEPA Oversight Panel

The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel** recalled the decisions of COP12 and SC52 that had established the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and maintained the CEPA Oversight Panel with modified responsibilities. The Oversight Panel would continue to monitor and report on CEPA issues, monitor and report on progress in implementation of the CEPA Programme, and advise the Standing Committee and the Secretariat on CEPA work priorities at national and international levels. The Working Group would guide the communication activities of the Secretariat, including priorities and design of the Secretariat’s CEPA Action Plan, monitor effectiveness of the Plan, and develop (with the advice of the STRP) a new approach for advising and supporting CEPA in the Convention for submission to COP13.

The Oversight Panel had met a number of times by teleconference during 2016 and developed its own Work Plan with a focus on priority needs and activities to deliver them. As part of that Work Plan, the Panel had recognised the need for a strategic approach to CEPA implementation and was therefore keen to contribute advice on how the Convention would manage the CEPA Programme into the future.

Four issues had arisen from discussions between the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel and the Chair of the CEPA Working Group held during the present meeting:

* The need for COP13 to revisit the CEPA governance question and what will be the work of the Oversight Panel;
* The continuing need to be mindful of the limited resources available to the Secretariat and to match the Contracting Parties’ ambitions to this, noting that the work of the Secretariat added value to help Parties to meet their obligations, but that the Secretariat’s Action Plan was too ambitious;
* 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 how to improve outcomes.

He reported that a meeting of the CEPA Oversight Panel would be held in July 2017 to further progress matters discussed during SC53.

There being no interventions from the floor, the Chair concluded that the Standing Committee had taken note of the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel.

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

Agenda item 13. Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities

* 1. Implementation of Secretariat CEPA Action Plan (document SC53-03)

The **Secretary General** introduced the document, outlining progress in implementing the CEPA Action Plan for the Secretariat 2016-2018. She noted the three underlying principles outlined at paragraph 7 of the report, and the areas of grouped activity listed at paragraph 8.

**Senegal** observed that the plan gave a clear indication of how to move forward, not just with communications but with a range of cross-cutting activities. He reminded the Secretariat of the value of branded hard-copy products which can highlight Ramsar and help communicate its strategic goals. He also invited the Secretariat to work further to share and promote the best practices of Contracting Parties.

The **Standing Committee** took note of the report and the comments of Senegal.

* 1. Report on World Wetlands Day 2017

The **Secretariat** presented a summary of outputs for World Wetlands Day 2017 and activities organized across the regions around the theme of ‘Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction’, and presented the winning photograph of the Youth Photo Contest.

**India**, **Romania**, **Senegal**, **South Africa**, the **United States of America** and **Wetlands International** noted the successes of the campaign and the importance of the theme. The Standing Committee acclaimed the engagement of France, where 655 activities were recorded to celebrate World Wetlands Day, and of Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico and Morocco, which had the most activities in their respective regions.

In response to suggestions by **Senegal** and **South Africa to develop a clearing-house mechanism**, the **Secretary General** noted that development of a ‘Wise Use Resource Library’ to this end was included as a task in the Secretariat’s CEPA Action Plan for 2016-2018, and pointed to the new thematic information section on the website, which includes a page and outputs on disaster risk reduction. She suggested that the development of a clearing-house such as that of the Convention on Biological Diversity could be considered by Parties when reviewing the effectiveness of the Convention. She also highlighted the very effective collaboration with partners including Wetlands International to make the campaign a success.

The **Secretariat** noted **Senegal**’s observation on the importance of providing materials for children as well as adults, and **Romania**’s suggestion for a letter of appreciation to event organizers. It was confirmed that Contracting Parties could use the images submitted to the photo contest, as entrants had accepted a disclaimer that photos could be used for education and awareness-raising by Parties to the Convention and its partners.

* 1. Theme for World Wetlands Day 2018

The Chair noted that this issue had already been addressed under agenda item 6.a on *Progress with preparations for COP13 - COP theme and logo*.

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

Agenda item 10. Update on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (continued)

**Canada** confirmed that the Sub-group on Finance had met during the lunch break and had acted to implement the decision of the Standing Committee during the morning plenary session to make allocations from the 2017 core budget as set out in the last column of the table contained in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12, i.e. CHF 30,000 for each of the four RRIs.

Agenda item 9. Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (continued)

The **Chair** asked the Legal Adviser to respond to the questions raised during the morning session.

The **Legal Adviser** reported her conclusions that:

* Decisions SC52-18 and SC52-19 did not prohibit the Working Group from putting forward revisions to the Operational Guidelines, provided that such revisions related to issues raised in the Working Group’s report;
* The Rules of Procedure did not explicitly preclude a Party that was not a member of the Standing Committee from becoming the Chair of a Working Group. Nevertheless, the relevant Rules of Procedure would benefit from revision to improve their clarity and logic.

Following extensive discussion with contributions from **Colombia** on behalf of the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Group, **India**, **Senegal**, **South Africa**, **Sweden**, **Switzerland**, the **United States of America** and **Uruguay**, and responses from the **Secretariat** to a number of questions raised, the **Chair** proposed that the report of the Working Group be taken forward as an input to the development of a Draft Resolution to be submitted for consideration at COP13.

**Senegal** welcomed the proposal and offered to join other Parties interested in drafting decision language.

**Uruguay**, speaking as a member of La Plata Basin RRI, stated that it was unable to accept the Operational Guidelines agreed by Decision SC52-16. The RRI would instead continue to apply the previous Guidelines, pending an eventual COP13 decision on revised Operational Guidelines.

**DecisionSC53-11: 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 13. Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities (continued)

d. The Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Awards 2018

The **Secretariat** introduced document SC53-13 *The Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards: Categories, criteria and nomination procedures*.

Specific suggestions for amendments to the document were madeby **Canada**, **Senegal**, **Tunisia** andthe **United States of America**.

The **Secretariat** confirmed that these had been noted for incorporation and responded to a number of questions raised.

**Colombia** suggested that efforts might be made to review the impact of the Awards on wetland conservation.

**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”

The **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-14 *Update on the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands*. She noted that the project had been signed by her predecessor and that considerable work was ongoing. A number of Contracting Parties had participated in this work, but others had raised questions or concerns about whether activities were in line with the mandate given by the COP or the decisions of the Standing Committee. No specific recommendation was being tabled; however, the Secretariat was requesting guidance from Parties on the way forward. There was a contractual agreement with the MAVA Foundation, but MAVA understood that the Ramsar Secretariat had to act in conformity with the wishes of Contracting Parties, hence the need to have clear guidance.

Interventions were made by **Australia**, **Colombia** on behalf of the Latin America and the Caribbean Region, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Finland**, **Kenya**, **Nepal**, **Senegal**, **Switzerland**, **Tunisia**, the **United States of America** and **Uruguay**.

Parties emphasised the importance of culture and wetlands, but differed in their views on how this could best be taken forward in the context of the Convention. **Uruguay** stressed that the main concern was in relation to whether the project had been established in accordance with the applicable rules.

The **Chair** established an open-ended Contact Group, suggesting that Australia, Colombia, and Nepal might form the core of the Group, along with Senegal, Uruguay and any other interested Party. He asked the Contact Group to meet and report back on 2 June 2017.

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

The **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-16 *Progress report on the implementation of the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention*. She reported that UN-Habitat had informed the Secretariat that it would not have the capacity to act as chair of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), though it would continue to participate as a member. The Secretariat was seeking to understand the implications for itself of the Accreditation, especially taking into account the instructions from Contracting Parties in Resolution XII.10 and Decision SC52-09 to ensure that costs were not borne by the core budget and to minimize the impact on the Secretariat’s time and resources.

She noted that the document proposed a step-by-step approach, which would enable a fuller understanding of the demands of the scheme and of the potential associated risks to the Convention, for example in cases where wetlands in accredited cities were threatened. She invited advice on the ongoing operation of the IAC, on the Parties’ desire to implement an incremental approach, either by initially restricting the number of applications, by limiting the scheme to cities linked to Ramsar Sites, or by engaging in an alternative programme with UN-Habitat and other partners to identify issues and good practices before proceeding with the Accreditation. The Secretariat had indicated that unless the new Chair of the IAC could take responsibility for the operation of the Committee, resources would be required for the Secretariat to fulfil any related tasks.

**Tunisia** recognized the concerns of the Secretary General and the issues with the start-up phase of the Accreditation, underlined the need to respect the intentions of the Contracting Parties expressed in Resolution XII.10, and called for the Secretariat to recover lost time by publishing the call for applications as soon as possible after SC53, and for the deadline for applications to be put back by one month to 30 October 2017. The delegate proposed that the scheme should be implemented as originally agreed, and reported that Tunisia would be able to act as Chair of the IAC, and the Republic of Korea would co-chair the Committee. He welcomed the ongoing promotion efforts by Parties and IOPs, and suggested that accredited cities be announced either at the COP13 Ramsar Awards event or at the end of the proposed high-level segment. He noted that organisations including FAO and UNDP had expressed an interest in promoting the scheme, and thereby Ramsar.

**Colombia** reported that it would be unable to approve implementation without clarification on the resource implications of Accreditation and the long-term identity of the IAC chair.

**Austria** called for implementation, recalling that Austria and Sweden had promoted the scheme at COP12 on behalf of the Europe Region, as an increasingly important and effective way to mobilise communities. They had worked to craft a Resolution which would not overburden the Secretariat. IAC meetings could be timed to coincide with Standing Committee or STRP meetings.

The **Republic of Korea** urged the Standing Committee to enable the scheme to proceed. Some 20 Parties were preparing to make applications, and the Secretariat’s role was limited to collating and forwarding applications received to the IAC.

**UN-Habitat** praised the scheme, especially as much ongoing urbanisation was uncontrolled and concentrated around vulnerable coasts or inland water bodies. Though unable to take up the role of IAC chair, it would continue to work with the co-chairs on technical criteria and processes.

The **Chair** adjourned the meeting, inviting the Standing Committee to resume the discussion in the following session.