

Report of the Secretariat on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to consider two possible approaches to enhance collaboration between Contracting Parties intersessionally, and instruct the Secretariat on which approach to follow in preparing a plan to be presented to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee.

Background

1. This report provides a response to the request made in Resolution XIV.3 on *The effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention on Wetlands*, paragraph 12, which:

INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to propose approaches, including possible online systems, and in particular a closed members' portal, continuously updated member address lists, and further improved access to online documents that would enhance collaboration between Contracting Parties intersessionally, including, but not limited to, in working groups, and in the preparation of draft resolutions by allowing Parties to submit and provide comments on draft resolutions. The Secretariat is instructed to report its proposals about such technologies, including the costs and benefits of such systems and how the proposal manages any risk of creating a participation gap between Parties with different levels of internet access, to SC62, so that Parties can assess whether there is interest in investing Convention resources in implementing such technologies as a means to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Convention, and if so, recommend this matter is given priority in the deliberations of the Subgroup on Finance;

2. The request made in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3 covers a wide range of potential technologies and processes. The Secretariat has therefore secured the services of OneOff-Tech, a firm that specializes in the implementation of digital technologies for knowledge management with relevant experience with multinational organizations and processes.
3. Resolution XIV.12 authorized the use of CHF 10,000 from the unspent funds allocated to the work of the Effectiveness Working Group for the 2019-2021 triennium to fulfil the mandate of the Resolution XIV.3.
4. A call for proposals to undertake an analysis as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3 was advertised through the Convention and IUCN websites. Proposals were submitted by five entities. The Secretariat evaluated the proposals based on their relevant experience, capacity to deliver and value for money, following IUCN's procurement policies and guidelines. OneOff-

Tech had the highest score during the evaluation process and was subsequently contracted for the assignment.

5. As part of its assignment, OneOff-Tech undertook a review of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other similar organizations to understand how they have addressed the collaboration challenges expressed by Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands. The review revealed that each MEA utilizes different digital tools for supporting the processes of drafting, editing and commenting on documents, and for searching for and retrieving information and collaborating within working groups. However, none of the MEAs has comprehensively solved the issue of streamlining remote collaboration through digital technologies. The findings of this review are included in the Report *Review of the mechanisms to facilitate virtual collaboration among the Convention on Wetlands' Contracting Parties*¹.
6. The Secretariat explored the IUCN Motions Platform, which is custom-built specifically for IUCN needs and processes. The Secretariat concluded that it does not meet the needs of the Convention as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3. However, the Secretariat has taken several lessons and ideas from discussions with IUCN, such as the use of an online submission form for draft resolutions, to inform the proposed process of submitting draft resolutions to COP15.
7. The consultant's project report and the Secretariat's review of the IUCN Motions Platform have provided an expert view and recommendations on which the Secretariat has based two possible approaches and next steps for consideration by the Standing Committee.

Proposed approaches

8. The Secretariat acknowledges the varying opinions among Parties regarding the desired functionality, ease of use, and costs associated with an online collaboration system. To address this, the Secretariat proposes two distinct approaches for consideration by the Standing Committee. The first approach leverages existing systems within the Secretariat, enabling rapid implementation at a minimal cost. The second approach offers a more integrated solution with enhanced functionality, but would require investment and piloting before full implementation.
9. Under the first approach (approach 1), relevant contact information of individuals within a defined group (e.g. working groups, groups of interested Contracting Parties, all Parties) would be made accessible, including address lists of group members. This would facilitate communication through conventional means such as email, phone calls, and video meetings. For collaborative document preparation, the Secretariat would use SharePoint, a widely used web-based application that would enable Parties to submit and provide comments on documents in an open space where comments would be visible and accessible to all members of a defined group.
10. As an example, for the preparation of a draft resolution submitted by a Party or working group, this approach would follow these steps:
 - a. The Secretariat creates a dedicated space on SharePoint and grants access to the lead author of a draft resolution;
 - b. The lead author uploads a first draft and generates a link to the online document;
 - c. The lead author determines the recipient list(s) to whom the link will be sent for commenting on the document;

¹ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/review-of-the-mechanisms-to-facilitate-virtual-collaboration-among-the-convention-on>.

- d. The selected individuals and/or groups open the link and provide their comments to the document online; and
 - e. The lead author incorporates the received comments and updates the document accordingly. Depending on the complexity of the document and the extent of comments received, subsequent rounds of editing may be necessary.
11. The benefits of this approach would be that it could be implemented quickly at low cost, leveraging existing tools, specifically the constituent relationship management (CRM) system which the Secretariat currently uses to manage contact information, mailings and meeting registration, and Office 365 in conjunction with SharePoint for which the Secretariat has a global license. This approach would be user-friendly, requiring no additional logins, credentials, or training for Parties.
12. The second approach (approach 2) would provide relevant contacts (individual members within a defined group) with access to a secure platform that requires controlled login credentials. This platform would ensure a secure access to both contacts and documents. Within this platform, members of groups would be able to communicate through chat and posts, specifically within the context of a task(s) or document(s). Additionally, a collaborative document-editing feature would be available. To maintain control and privacy, access levels could be defined for members, granting them the ability to comment and/or directly edit text based on their designated permissions.
13. As an example, for the preparation of a draft resolution submitted by a Party or working group, this approach would follow these steps:
- a. The lead author of a draft resolution logs into the platform;
 - b. The lead author uploads a first draft of a resolution to a dedicated space on that platform, which has been prepared by the Secretariat;
 - c. The lead author defines the access rights of other members (users of the platform) to the draft, defining their level of access to the document (read/write/comment);
 - d. The lead author posts a message on the platform to notify the identified members about the availability of the draft and provide instructions on how to access it;
 - e. Depending on a member's level of access, they may edit or comment on the draft;
 - f. Communication concerning the draft takes place through discussion threads and chats within the platform; and
 - g. Once a defined period of time for edits and comments has ended, the lead author consolidates and finalizes the document.
14. The benefits of this second approach would be enhanced functionality that would enable Parties to access multiple documents within the same space, both comment on and edit documents, and engage in discussion threads. The ability to edit documents would be the key element of enhanced functionality available with this approach. This approach would require setting up a suite of tools that integrate communication (written, potentially voice and video), maintaining spaces for contact lists and document storage. It would involve creating user logins with controlled access rights based on defined user roles such as the ability to edit. Due to its higher complexity, a clear definition of processes would be necessary, including a rights matrix which would define which individuals had which rights (e.g. the right to edit), review of workflows and naming conventions. Maintaining such a system would require resources from the Secretariat, training and ongoing support to users. Depending on the choice of tools, additional licenses and/or hosting fees would occur. Should Parties want to pursue this approach, it is recommended that the approach be piloted by an established working group to

assess the utilization of available tools, overall value provided, and user feedback of the approach to determine the suitability of the approach before broader implementation.

15. A matrix comparing the functionality, costs and support required for the two options is presented as Annex 1.
16. It is important to note that neither approach fully overcomes the challenge of working in the three official languages of the Convention. While there are multiple solutions for live interpretation of virtual meetings including Kudo and Zoom, which have been used by the Secretariat, online collaboration on document in multiple languages remains difficult. To the knowledge of the Secretariat, OneOff-Tech and the interviewed MEAs, no such tools are available.

Recommendation of the Secretariat

17. It is the view of the Secretariat that the needs and interests of Parties, as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3, can be largely met through approach 1 utilizing existing tools and resources. The Secretariat proposes, subject to Standing Committee approval, presenting a plan to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC63) for implementing and utilizing this approach to enhance collaboration in the preparation of draft resolutions for consideration by COP15.

Annex 1

Matrix comparing the functionality, costs and support required for the two proposed approaches

	Approach 1	Required support	Approach 2	Required support
Contacts	Contacts available on the CRM	Medium - Creation of online lists for consultation	Contacts available in platform linked to users	High - Synchronization of lists from CRM to platform
Access	Link gives access	Low – Creation of link	Login to a platform	High - User management and support
Upload draft	Upload through link	Low	Upload to platform	Low
Enable commenting / editing	Link gives access to commenting	Low – Definition of rights per link	Commenting and editing based on assigned role	Medium – Maintenance of roles and training for lead
Communication	Email and online meetings	Medium – Known communication methods	Discussion threads within the platform	High - Training and support for all users