

## Report of the meeting of the Strategic Plan Working Group

4 September 2023, 13:00 – 17:00

### Participants:

Algeria, Australia, Brazil (Co-Chair), Canada (Co-Chair), China, Costa Rica, Czechia, Finland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mauritius, Oman, Slovakia (online), Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and representatives of the STRP, WWT, IWMI and BirdLife International.

Botswana and Republic of Korea as interested Parties.

Secretariat: Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General

Consultants: Mr Rob McInnes (lead), Mr Nick Davidson, Ms Luisa Ricaurte, Ms Rebecca Woodward, Mr Matthew Simpson, Ms Priyane Amerasinghe, Ms Christine Prietto, Ms Sana Mezoughi

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Co-Chairs opened the meeting, welcoming delegates and introducing the consultant team. They provided an overview of activities to date, including two meetings of the Working Group that had approved the strategy for engagement and consultation with different stakeholders, and adopted the workplan to guide the different steps until COP15, which will need to be adjusted once the dates for COP15 are finalized. They noted the survey which had been circulated, stressing that this meeting offers the opportunity to provide initial comments and identify priorities.

### **2. Review of process towards SP5 and progress against workplan**

*and*

### **3. Update on activities to date**

The Co-Chairs reported that the Group had adopted its engagement and consultation strategy in June, and recalled that this involved desk research and other activities as well as the survey which had been shared.

The consultant presented the activities to date<sup>1</sup>, identifying three project stages: scoping and work planning until June 2023; the two workstreams of document review and research and engagement and consultation, until November; and development of the draft Fifth Strategic Plan (SP5) for COP15.

### **4. Preliminary results from survey**

The survey had been published in the three languages of the Convention and, as of 2 September, 686 responses had been received, including from 71 of 172 Parties, 18% of National Focal Points and 30% of SPWG members. The STRP Chair noted that the Panel had given responses which had been reviewed by its thematic leads.

The consultant noted the breakdown of responses by stakeholder type and region, and that the deadline for responses had been extended to 29 September and that versions would be published, in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese and Portuguese. It was highlighted that one of the key challenges lies in compiling a significant body of information that would reflect the different types of wetlands.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see the presentation at [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/consultant\\_update\\_SP5WG\\_september\\_2023.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/consultant_update_SP5WG_september_2023.pdf).

He underscored the ambition to reach as many stakeholders as possible, and encouraged Parties and Group members to promote the dissemination of the survey, including to local as well as national stakeholders. He invited meeting participants to identify opportunities to maximize engagement through different facilitation groups and existing meetings and processes.

The STRP Chair noted the wealth of potential sources and the need to focus on more strategic national and sub-national assessments. The consultant described the challenge of accessing these. STRP Focal Points and National Wetlands Committees were cited as well placed to identify key national information, and regional organizations as a source of regional data; participants were invited to identify such organizations. The STRP Chair further noticed that the potential conclusions arising from the survey should be read against the backdrop of the best available scientific information.

The consultant noted the critical role of National Reports (NRs) as a monitoring mechanism enabling analysis over time; and underlined the value of aligning with reporting processes outside the Convention.

He confirmed that the responses could be disaggregated, e.g. by role, sector, scale and region, and analyzed to highlight key issues and identify differences and gaps. Birdlife International queried how the outcomes of the survey will be disaggregated by the goals of the Strategic Plan.

Regarding the validation of findings, he reported that an audit trail would show the evidence for each finding and that each should be based on multiple sources. This underlined the importance of getting a wide range of responses from different types of sources. Further surveys could address specific issues or regions to help validate findings.

He noted that drivers of threats and the solutions to them vary by country and context, and so it is critical to receive enough survey responses from each region – ideally at least 500 from each.

Participants stressed the need for the final Plan to be as simple and accessible as possible, without losing key content, and to align with processes of other bodies. This would make it easier to integrate into national policy development. They identified a need for a process to simplify the abundant information being gathered, and for SP5 to have clearly articulated ambitions and actions.

The Co-Chair (Canada) concluded the item, once again calling for:

- **participants to respond to the survey, and**
- **noting the new deadline for responses and the language versions that would soon be available.**

She asked them to:

- **disseminate the survey as widely as possible to regional representatives and others,**
- **provide feedback via [spwg@ramsar.org](mailto:spwg@ramsar.org), and also**
- **provide information on regional wetland committees or workshops.**

## **5. Review of current (SP4) targets**

### *Structure*

The consultant outlined the structure of SP4, with its goals, targets and, under each target, a baseline and indicators to measure progress, and resources and tools. He noted some issues with the consistency

of the language used, the need to align with the language used for Resolution XIV.4, and the opportunity to update the referenced resources and tools.

The STRP Chair proposed that the structure of goals, targets and indicators remain, while supporting the prioritization as the STRP were working on indicators that might better align with other reporting mechanisms.

Georgia underscored that numerous countries identified lack of financial resources and data as a problem, and stressed that a short, effective list of indicators including headline indicators may be helpful to counter this.

Costa Rica explained that the issue for it and other countries in the same region is the lack of awareness of the SP as a basis to define national priorities and access the financial resources available from funds such as the GEF and JICA. This is a communications and capacity-building challenge. The consultant agreed that an appropriately action-oriented SP will support efforts to use it to access such funds, including through Ramsar Regional Initiatives.

For Botswana, the main challenge is to increase the visibility of the plan to increase its implementation.

#### *Hierarchy and prioritization of indicators*

The consultant invited consideration of the possible structures of SP5 – might targets have a hierarchy or be prioritized? He noted that if so, it would still be possible to work towards a streamlined NR form.

Brazil cautioned against such a hierarchy, noting that countries should be able to identify key priority areas for their national strategies from the list of targets in the Strategic Plan and that it might be challenging to agree upon criteria to enable some sort of prioritization that would be applicable to all countries.

Canada expressed interest in prioritization and a hierarchy, to help Parties focus their implementation.

The STRP Chair agreed with a comprehensive review of SP indicators to ensure they are all “active” and can be clearly communicated. He welcomed the idea of prioritization, possibly of headline indicators which would have sub-targets and sub-indicators. The future framework of the Global Wetland Outlook should link to these with the STRP reporting to SC64 on this task.

Costa Rica noted that financial resources and the lack of baseline indicators were a major challenge to meet the goals of SP4; each Party should be able to choose its priorities from a matrix of indicators.

Australia, while acknowledging regional variety, expressed support for prioritization, to help Parties make decisions on investing resources and the Secretariat prioritize its work. Guidance within the Plan might support the streamlining of NR content.

Brazil reiterated that efforts to prioritize may be time-consuming and potentially unachievable. The focus should be on identifying meaningful actions and their indicators that will enable the achievement of goals. Brazil noticed that there were different understandings of “prioritization” that might range from assigning higher importance to some targets from identifying pathways that would enable countries to translate global targets into locally relevant policies. He noted in this regard the need for a shared

methodology for valuation of ecosystem services that could raise the visibility of wetlands across different policy areas.

### *Global targets*

The consultant noted that global targets might enable indicators that could also have utility at the regional and national level. Parties could then respond to indicators based on their specific contexts, while Brazil considered that targets should be context specific.

The STRP chair noted that there are key drivers which are mostly globally consistent, and that it will be important to draw these together to guide future discussions.

Georgia noted that countries reporting on different regional priorities will not enable a “big picture” to emerge. She suggested that consultation on global drivers might draw these out. She noted that the language of indicators must be useful at national level and suggested that the Working Group prepare factsheets on how to monitor against global indicators.

The Co-Chair (Canada) suggested:

- **that the consultant provides a brief assessment of the pros and cons of prioritization and hierarchical targets and of the different pathways to address prioritization and present this to the next SP5WG meeting.**

### *Continuity with previous Plans*

The consultant noted the merit of continuity but recalled the divergence of SP4 from the first three Plans. He cited continuity as key for the NR, to enable long-term analysis. The co-consultant noted that for continuity in NRs, consistency in indicators is key, while goals and targets may be reworded.

### *Tying in to other processes, mapping, avoiding duplication...*

The consultant recalled the different structure of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) with its targets and sub-targets and its different indicator types, and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators which allow for the different socioeconomic contexts of countries.

Brazil noted the opportunity to align SP5 with the SDGs and GBF and other processes, while highlight the need for consistency with existing mandates. He suggested inclusion of actions to support sustainable livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and address social and economic vulnerability, for a possible outcome in line with GBF Target 9, possibly including inventories of IPLCs that live and depend on Ramsar Sites, and of the contributions to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. He also proposed additional emphasis on the links between conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, and both sustainable management of water resources in line with national legislation and also the need to address the impacts of climate change on wetlands and enhance resilience.

Canada also highlighted the importance of relevance to IPLCs.

Georgia noted that it uses National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to measure implementation of all Conventions, so indicators should reflect this. She suggested that guidance on indicators, as produced for the GBF, might lead to better responses.

The Co-Chair (Brazil) noticed that there may be different views on what “alignment with GBF” would mean and entail and stressed the need to clarify whether alignment with the GBF would be through targets, indicators or NBSAPs.

Georgia warned against trying to replicate the more general GBF, noting rather that GBF targets 2 and 3 cover the work of this Convention, so SP5 can inform those targets to avoid duplication.

The STRP Chair noted that Task 5.2 in the STRP work plan is to provide guidance on the relationship between the Convention on Wetlands and GBF indicators and advise CBD National Focal Points on resulting actions; this task should be tied to the development of SP5.

Botswana saw the main challenge as avoiding duplication of work between processes and ensuring synergies, with support for Parties addressing their specific national priorities.

#### *Other comments*

Iran stressed lack of access to funds for wetland conservation and management due to sanctions, stressing that environmental project funds should be exempted from the sanctions.

Saint Lucia emphasized the need for capacity building as well as financial support.

Brazil highlighted opportunities to build technical and scientific capacity through regional collaboration, and financial resources through innovative solutions such as a wetland financing network and payment for ecosystem services as well as strengthened multilateral funding.

#### **6. Monitoring and indicators – the National Report form**

Brazil as Co-Chair asked what is needed to improve indicators? Are there areas for improvement? Should they enable disaggregation at all levels?

The consultant noted that the NR form should not include data which is not in the SP or mandates from Resolutions; but not all the SP4 indicators are in the NR, and reporting the percentage of Parties which have completed an action may not be the most useful format. Are Parties using SP data to complete the NR?

Brazil noted the absence of adequate indicators on under-represented wetland types, and against Target 16 on communication, capacity development, participation and awareness (CEPA), and also that Parties have existing capacity for national reporting as it is now.

The STRP Chair noted different sources of data on indicators that are valuable for the Convention such as Earth observation data. Questions included in the NR should be continued if they are assessed as valuable.

The consultant noted that the SP4 “list of tools and resources” needs to be updated with new datasets as they become available.

For Georgia, the format of the report is not a problem, it just needs updating with new indicators.

The co-consultant noted that the global format of NRs does not prevent the national focus of questions, and recalled the Convention's historically high levels of NR completion.

Brazil as Co-Chair recalled that recent decisions from COP-15 of CBD on monitoring have included the possibility of binary yes/no indicators that could be included in national reports to complement existing indicators.

The UK noted that it is important to ensure that the work in preparing NRs is useful also for other processes, and monitors global as well as national impacts. Panama agreed that it would be possible and desirable to show indicators with a double impact, as informing other processes.

The consultant noted the opportunity to make changes, including updating the content of tools and data for indicators, that are not radical but make the process more efficient and allow better delivery of outcomes – a more streamlined process would be a huge benefit for the Convention.

**7. Next steps: SP5 Working Group**

- **The report of the session will be published on the Strategic Plan webpage.**
- **Participants are asked to respond to and further disseminate the survey and to reach out to the consultants with information as appropriate.**
- **The consultants will go through the survey results and discuss with the STRP on indicators, and will come back to the WG with advice and findings to discuss and with some ideas on the way forward.**
- **The next meeting will take place virtually around 30 November.**

**8. 17.00 Close**