

Report of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of this first progress report on the work of the Institutional Strengthening Working Group established at SC62;
- ii. take note of the consultant's synthesis report produced to support the work of the ISWG; and
- iii. review paragraphs 10 and 11 of the present document and extend the work of the ISWG to allow for additional activities.

Report on progress and future tasks

1. At its fourteenth meeting (COP14), the Conference of the Contracting Parties adopted Resolution XIV.6 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions*, in which paragraph 22:

"instructs the Secretariat, in consultation with interested Contracting Parties, to prepare an institutional strengthening report with recommendations reflecting the needs of the Secretariat to achieve organizational robustness to support the implementation of the convention, including but not limited to those related to administrative arrangements, governance, leadership, human resources interdependency, high-level political engagement, and the Convention's visibility objectives, and requested the Secretariat to present the report with recommendations to the 62nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC62) for discussion and a subsequent draft resolution to SC63 for its consideration."

2. In line with Paragraph 22, the Secretariat provided a report at SC62¹ based on two consultations with interested parties, which included various options to address challenges under five topics.
3. The Standing Committee at SC62:
 - a. Took note of the Secretariat's report on institutional strengthening to support the

¹ See document SC62 Doc.11 at <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc62-doc11-secretariat-report-institutional-strengthening-support-implementation>.

implementation of the Convention in response to Resolution XIV.6, paragraph 22.

- b. Took note of the recommendations of the interested Contracting Parties and the Secretariat reflected in Annex 2 of the report.
 - c. Established a Working Group to lead the process to achieve organizational robustness to support the implementation of the Convention, including through the preparation of a draft resolution for the consideration of the Standing Committee at its 63rd meeting and requested that the terms of reference for the working group be tabled at SC62. (Decision SC62-17)
 - d. Took note of the terms of reference agreed by the Working Group presented to SC62 in document SC62 Com.2. (Decision SC62-51)
4. Once established, under the Chairmanship of South Africa and Co-Chairmanship of the United States of America, the Institutional Strengthening Working Group (ISWG) produced an ISWG Workplan (see Annex 1 of the present document) and met four times ahead of SC63: on 11 October 2023, 11 January 2024, 12 February 2024, and 4 March 2024. The ISWG had 17 members with representation from each of the six regions of the Convention. These were: Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Panama, South Africa, Switzerland, Ukraine, United States of America, Zambia and Zimbabwe. (According to the Terms of Reference of the Working Group, other Contracting parties were eligible to join at any time.) The ISWG, with help from the Secretariat, launched a SharePoint database for document management and to inform deliberations for members and interested Contracting Parties.
 5. **ISWG Meeting 1:** The initial meeting of the ISWG on 11 October 2023 featured a broad discussion which solicited ISWG views on core definitions of terms, as well as a common understanding of the goals and objectives of the ISWG. Facilitated by a joint presentation by Switzerland and Mexico, the ISWG navigated a chronology of previous efforts from 1984 to the last triennium in 2022. The ISWG reviewed an initial workplan and took note of the tensions between the scale of the task and the time allotted prior to SC63. A consultancy to support the creation of a “synthesis report” was debated, with Switzerland offering to explore possible resources to contribute to this effort. (The ISWG offered no objections to Switzerland’s offer.)
 6. Following the identification of voluntary contributions from Switzerland, a “Terms of Reference for the Preparation of Governance Synthesis Report” and selection process was initiated by a consultant selection panel, including Co-Chairs (South Africa, United States), Colombia, Iran, and Switzerland. The ToRs were reviewed and approved by the ISWG members. Out of seven applications, a leading candidate (Dr Sophie Thirion) was selected on December 11 2023, based on a quantitative evaluation and deliberations of the panel.
 7. **ISWG Meeting 2:** The subsequent meeting of the ISWG on 11 January 2024 featured a presentation by Dr Thirion on the possible framework and layout for the synthesis report, which contained, *inter alia*, a purpose, background, chronology of events, challenges, and options to address those challenges. Following a discussion, the ISWG also considered a narrow timeframe ahead of SC63. While Decision SC62-17 called for a draft resolution to be presented at SC63, the ISWG decided to seek an extension to allow for adequate consideration of the synthesis report, and the use of an in-person consultation workshop at SC63 to produce a summary of options for review by Contracting Parties at SC63.

8. **ISWG Meeting 3:** A presentation from Dr Thirion on the draft report anchored the ISWG meeting on 12 February 2024. ISWG members were invited to offer views on the draft report, which elicited recommendations to include additional information, such as hosting scenarios, as well as edits to ensure consistency of key terms and definitions. ISWG members were invited to provide additional comments by 19 February 2024, which would then contribute to a final report by March 2024. The Chair reiterated the opportunity for an in-person workshop on Day 1 of SC63 (3 June 2024) to advance the development of a draft resolution, including the drafting of a summary options table.
9. **ISWG Meeting 4:** The ISWG met on 4 March 2024 to review the final synthesis report, review the draft report of the Working Group for SC63, and discuss possible approaches to develop the options table. Following a discussion with members, the Chair indicated that the report would be shared with SC63 as part of the Report of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening. Plans were also made to meet on the margins of SC63 in a hybrid format. A small working group was also formed to compile a “bridging document” summarizing challenges and options to inform future discussions.

Steps for the ISWG to develop a draft resolution per Decision SC62-17

10. The ISWG recommends the following steps for consideration at SC63:
 - a. Interested Parties are requested to take note of the final synthesis report “*Governance synthesis report on institutional strengthening in response to Decision SC62-17 of the Standing Committee of the Convention on Wetlands*” which is accessible on the Convention website at: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/governance-synthesis-report-institutional-strengthening>.
 - b. Interested Parties are requested to attend the ISWG-led information session (of which the date and time are to be determined) that will detail an extension of the timetable ascribed in Decision SC62-17, including new steps pending approval from SC63. These include but are not limited to the following changes to the ISWG Workplan (see Annex 1):
 - i. The ISWG will meet for an in-person consultation workshop on 3 June to generate an outcomes report following an in-depth review of the synthesis report and conclusions, and discussion of stakeholder engagements.
 - ii. Shortly after SC63, the ISWG will provide a virtual information session open to all Contracting Parties on the outcomes of the synthesis report and present a way forward containing an updated workplan.
 - iii. The ISWG will meet virtually to generate a first draft of a report on the challenges and options for the institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands, as well as develop a stakeholder engagement plan to solicit views, including from relevant organizations and all geographic regions.
 - iv. On the basis of these deliberations a draft resolution will be tabled for SC64 by the ISWG in November 2024.
 - c. Pending the in-person consultation workshop, Contracting Parties are invited to consider

supporting additional activities of the ISWG from June 2024 to January 2025.

11. Following the Standing Committee's consideration of the proposed approach and the suggested steps outlined above, and noting any agreed amendments, the ISWG will adopt the outcome and work towards implementing it.

Annex 1
ISWG Workplan

Date	Deliverable	Responsibility	Cost	Comments
11 October 2023	ISWG Meeting 01	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	Set the scene, discuss objectives of the project and potential approach/key steps (workplan refinement).
20 October 2023	SharePoint document portal developed	Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	SharePoint portal populated with all relevant documents from COP2 to COP14, folder for all documents related to the ISWG created. Allows for easy and equal access to all information related to the work of the ISWG.
10 December 2023	Consultant appointed	Evaluation panel	CHF 0,00	Consultant appointed to develop a synthesis report.
8 January 2024	Synthesis report framework	Consultant	CHF 10 000 (Funded by Switzerland)	Synthesis report layout to be developed to allow to early intervention by the WG on the structure and content of the report.
11 January 2024	ISWG Meeting 02	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat		WG Meeting 02: meeting to discuss framework for the synthesis report and to discuss the workplan.
05 February 2024	Draft synthesis report	Consultant		Draft synthesis report developed and distributed to WG members for comment.
12 February 2024	ISWG Meeting 03	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat		WG Meeting 03: Workshop on draft synthesis report.
28 February 2024	Final synthesis report	Consultant		Final synthesis report developed.
04 March 2024	ISWG Meeting 04	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat		Present of updated synthesis report. Prepare feedback report to SC63 and plan for the next steps.
20 March 2024	ISWG sub-group meeting	ISWG sub-group	CHF 0,00	Workshop with a sub-group of volunteering members from the ISWG to discuss how to present the challenges, opportunities and options in a way that will enable decision making, develop a draft table, and discuss the approach to use to populate the table.

Date	Deliverable	Responsibility	Cost	Comments
12 April 2024	Framework for an evaluation matrix of challenges and options developed	ISWG sub-group	CHF 0,00	Challenges extracted from synthesis report and grouped into sub-groups. Indicate in the table which of the challenges are being addressed through other processes / working groups. Complete the framework (testing and to use as an example) for one theme “administrative arrangements”.
12 April 2024	ISWG Meeting 05	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	Present and discuss layout of Rev 0 of the table and discussion to confirm the approach to use to complete the challenges and options evaluation report.
16 May 2024	Rev 0 of the report on challenges and options for the institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands developed	ISWG sub-group: theme leaders	CHF 0,00	Theme leaders consisting of volunteering members of the ISWG sub-group to complete the evaluation matrix (for their respective themes) and identify key questions that will assist to unpack the challenges (identify root causes) and describe the implications (pros and cons) of the options.
16 May 2024	ISWG sub-group meeting	ISWG sub-group	CHF 0,00	Meeting to discuss Rev 0 of the report on challenges and options for the institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands.
3 June 2024	ISWG Meeting 06	Chair, Co-Chair, ISWG sub-group theme leaders	CHF 0,00	Workshop to discuss Rev 0: challenges and root causes, questions that need clarity and who to engage to discuss these questions. Identify next steps, including planning for stakeholder engagements and identification of roles and responsibilities of WG members. As with all ISWG meetings non-ISWG members are welcome to participate. Report will be available two weeks after the meeting for written input.
4-7 June 2024	SC63: Report from the ISWG provided	Co-Chair	CHF 0,00	Report from the ISWG: Request for extension, to note the outcomes from the synthesis report, to note the next steps (stakeholder engagements and approach towards a resolution).

Date	Deliverable	Responsibility	Cost	Comments
20 June 2024 (TBC)	Online information-sharing session with all CPs	ISWG members, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	Aim is to host an online information session to share with all Contracting Parties (CPs): the aim of the ISWG, the approach followed and the progress to date (outcomes of synthesis report) and to alert them of next steps (challenges and options report).
July 2024	ISWG Meeting 07	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	Potential meeting to continue to work on challenges and options report-continuation of meeting from 3 June, if necessary.
July 2024	ISWG sub-group meeting	ISWG sub-group	CHF 0,00	Meeting to discuss outcomes from meeting with the ISWG and update the report on challenges and options for the institutional strengthening and plan for required engagements.
early July 2024	Rev 1 of the report on challenges and options for the institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands developed	Chair, Co-Chair, ISWG sub-group	CHF 0,00	Table on objectives, problem statement challenges, options, outlining costs and benefits and other implications of various options as well as short and long term recommendations.
Jul-Aug 2024	Engagements on draft (Rev 1) challenges and options report	Chair, Co-chair, ISWG sub-group (TBC)	CHF 0,00	Engagements held with, amongst others, the Convention Secretariat, UNEP, IUCN and CPs to refine the challenges and options report/ evaluation matrix.
Aug 2024	Resolution draft preamble developed	TBC	CHF 0,00	Develop the preamble for the draft resolution early on in the process. Skeleton resolution to be developed concurrently with Rev 2 of the report.
end August/ Early Sep 2024	ISWG Meeting 08	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	WG Meeting 08: Discussion on stakeholder consultation outcomes and finalise options report, start discussions on the content for a draft resolution.
30 September 2024	Rev 2 (final) of the report on challenges and options for the institutional strengthening of the Convention on Wetlands developed	Chair, Co-Chair, ISWG sub-group (TBC)	CHF 0,00	Evaluation matrix /options report finalised, ready for submission to accompany the resolution to be sent to SC64.

Date	Deliverable	Responsibility	Cost	Comments
October 2024	First draft of resolution (Rev 1)	TBC	CHF 0,00	First draft resolution to be based on outcomes of options report.
October 2024	ISWG Meeting 09	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	WG Meeting 09: Discussion on draft resolution.
November 2024	ISWG Meeting 10	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	WG Meeting 10: Discussion on updated draft resolution.
24 November 2024	Updated draft resolution (Rev 2)	TBC	CHF 0,00	Report from WG and draft resolution submitted to SC64.
January 2025 (TBC)	SC64: Report from the ISWG provided	Co-Chair	CHF 0,00	Present options report for noting and resolution for approval to table at COP15.
February 2025	ISWG Meeting 11	Chair, Co-Chair, Convention Secretariat	CHF 0,00	Discussion on updated draft resolution (to be confirmed pending outcomes of SC64).
February 2025	Updated draft resolution (Rev 3)	TBC	CHF 0,00	Includes outcomes from SC64.
April 2025	Information sharing on draft resolution	TBC	CHF 0,00	Undertaken as part of regional meetings for COP.
23-31 July 2025	COP15		CHF 0,00	Resolution negotiation and adoption.