THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
64th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 20-24 January 2025

SC64 Doc.26

Report of the Working Group on RIS Updating

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

i. take note of the present progress report on the work of the Working Group on RIS Updating (Working Group), established at SC63;

ii. instruct the Secretariat to update its SOP for the review of RIS, considering the comments provided by Working Group members, as outlined in paragraphs 12 and 13;

iii. instruct the Secretariat to develop a mechanism to notify Contracting Parties of milestones in the RIS update process as highlighted in paragraph 16 and 17; and

iv. review the draft resolution on updates to Ramsar Information Sheets for consideration by the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Introduction

1. In Decision SC62-53 the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare and submit a report to the Committee's 63rd meeting (SC63) on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS), including:
   a. systemic, procedural and other technical challenges and options; and
   b. financial challenges, needs and opportunities.

2. In doing so the Secretariat was instructed to obtain and collate input in consultation with Contracting Parties, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and other stakeholders. The Secretariat was also instructed to develop an approach to undertake the task in consultation with Contracting Parties through written procedures and online session(s).

3. The Secretariat submitted to SC63 the report on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of RIS as document SC63 Doc.22. The report included as Annex 1 a table which summarized the challenges identified by Contracting Parties, and presented the proposals they made, under four thematic categories relating to:
   a. the RIS review process;
   b. the RIS updating cycle;
   c. the RIS format; and
   d. capacity

4. In response to document SC63 Doc.22, the Standing Committee, through Decision SC63-33, established the Working Group on RIS Updating, to further elaborate on the priority actions presented. This was to be undertaken in consultation with the Secretariat and the STRP, informing the preparation of a draft resolution on strengthening future processes on updating the RIS. The Working Group was instructed to provide a report to SC64 with an update on its work and proposed next steps.

Meetings of the Working Group

5. The Working Group held its first meeting on 18 July 2024, and appointed Australia as Chair and Rwanda as Co-Chair. The Chair invited participants to propose priority actions and to express their expectations to help the Group define its terms of reference (TORs). Parties built on the opportunities and challenges identified in the SC63 report, and shared their expectations for the outputs of the Working Group.

6. From July to September 2024, the Group successfully organized four virtual meetings which reviewed and endorsed the TORs, which were approved intersessionally by the Standing Committee in Post-SC63 Intersessional Decision 01. The TORs are included as Annex 1 to the present document. The Group also agreed on key issues to be addressed and established three subgroups, based on the thematic areas outlined in document SC63 Doc.22:
   a. the RIS review process and RIS updating cycle;
   b. the RIS format; and
   c. capacity.

7. To advance this work the three subgroups were given specific responsibilities and met separately from the broader Group to discuss and analyse the issues and options going forward. The subgroups further assessed each of the proposals and actions included in the report to SC63, to produce an updated table of opportunities and challenges, and to inform the preparation of a draft resolution and the general work of the Working Group.

8. The updated table of opportunities and challenges is included as Annex 2 of the present document. All unresolved challenges are detailed in the table, and may be considered by any future group established to address these issues.

Draft resolution on RIS updating for COP15

9. The actions identified by the Working Group to strengthen the RIS updating process are presented in the draft resolution on Updates to Ramsar Information Sheets at Annex 3 to the present report.

10. The Group discussed the financial implications of actions to strengthen RIS update processes, including the possibility of temporary and permanent contracting of staff to assist with the backlog of RIS updates, and implementing of potential changes to the Ramsar Sites Information Service (with functions that the system may not currently be able to perform), but a consensus was not reached. In some cases, this was because the actions had been tried in the past and had not succeeded. It is likely any future working group will revisit these issues to ensure all options have been considered.

Table 1: Possible financial implications of the draft resolution

Paragraph (number and key part of text)	Action	Cost (CHF)
11. "INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to identify and recommend to the Standing Committee means to enable the automated transfer of data to RIS from external sources for specific fields, including species lists;"	TBD	TBD

Recommended priority actions

11. In line with the mandate of the Working Group, the following priority actions are presented for consideration by the Standing Committee.

Updated standard operating procedure for RIS review

12. The report to SC63 provided the following proposed action:

    "The Secretariat will update its standard operating procedure (SOP) for RIS review with a view to streamlining the process and enhancing efficiency, including reducing the number of steps, identifying key roles and accountability, and establishing indicative timelines for processing at each step."

13. The Working Group recommends that the Standing Committee instruct the Secretariat to update the SOP for the review of RIS, considering the comments provided by Working Group members, before the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15).

Updates to the Strategic Framework

14. The Working Group recommends that the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* be updated to take into account any changes made to the RIS processes. The Group suggested that this could be done at the same time as the updates to RIS processes are made. Alternatively, a separate working group could be established to undertake the significant body of work required to revise and update the *Strategic Framework*. The latter approach is reflected in the draft resolution, at paragraph 10.

Automatic notifications

15. Working Group members have been unable to reach agreement on the process and timeline for notifications. A range of options has been proposed which are referenced in the table at Annex 2.

16. The Working Group recommends that the Standing Committee consider instructing Secretariat develop a mechanism to notify Contracting Parties of agreed milestones in the RIS updating process. The Working Group recommends that Standing Committee instruct the Secretariat to provide such updates on the following occasions:
    a. Upon receipt of RIS submission;
    b. When comments have been made on an RIS in the Ramsar Sites Information Service;
    c. When a draft updated RIS has been uploaded by a Contracting Party onto the Ramsar Sites Information Service; and

d. When a finalized updated RIS has been published by the Secretariat on the Ramsar Sites Information Service.

17. The Standing Committee may also consider instructing the Secretariat to develop a mechanism in the Ramsar Sites Information Service whereby Contracting Parties working in the RSIS can see a flag that they have overdue updates, rather than receiving a notification email.

RIS format

18. Various views on the format of the RIS have been expressed by Working Group members. Given the divergence of views and the need for further discussion, it is the recommendation of the Working Group that the format of the RIS be considered during the next triennium by a new working group.

19. The draft resolution proposes that COP15 establish a new working group that can identify improvements to the RIS format that address concerns and challenges identified by Parties. A newly established working group can advance the work undertaken by the present Working Group on RIS Updating to:

    a. Reduce the administrative and technical burden on Parties, taking into consideration existing capacity;

    b. Distinguish compulsory and optional fields in the RIS format;

    c. Distinguish fields that require update, especially critical ones (e.g. factors with adverse effect), from those which do not (e.g. climate or site boundaries);

    d. Identify fields for which the RIS format wording requires updating or clarification and, where possible, improve their definition and description; and

    e. Consider advice from the STRP on the scientific and technical aspects of the prioritization and subsequent update of the RIS format, and ensuring that important historical data is not lost as a result of updating the RIS format.

20. The Working Group also recommends that the Standing Committee instructs the Secretariat to, by COP15, and in consultation with the working group:

    a. Explore means to improve the user-friendliness of the template by producing a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet version of the offline template and an app for mobile phones that also works offline;

    b. Explore means to improve the online system to allow for the upload of bulk updates from the offline spreadsheet and mobile phone app;

Annex 1
Working Group on RIS Updating: Terms of reference

1. Background

1.1 In Decision SC62-53 the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to submit a report to SC63 on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS), including:

a. systemic, procedural and other technical challenges and options; and
b. financial challenges, needs and opportunities.

In doing so the Secretariat was instructed to obtain and collate input in consultation with Contracting Parties, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and other stakeholders. The Secretariat was also instructed to develop an approach to undertake the task in consultation with Contracting Parties through written procedures and online session(s).

1.2 Through a notification sent on 17 October 2023, the Secretariat invited Contracting Parties to provide information on challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of RIS. Submissions were made by 11 Parties. The Secretariat presented an overview of challenges identified and proposals made by Contracting Parties to the STRP during its 26th meeting (STRP26) in February 2024, for discussion and to consult the Panel on possible actions. The Panel's input is reflected in SC63 Doc.22.

1.3 The report of the Secretariat to SC63 (SC63 Doc.22) on the challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of RIS provided an overview of the RIS update process, the Secretariat's work to improve this process, and the importance of the network of Wetlands of International Importance to global conservation efforts. The report also outlined the consultation process undertaken by the Secretariat, which identified challenges, proposals and actions relating to the RIS update process, across the following themes:

a. RIS review process
b. RIS updating cycle
c. RIS format
d. Capacity

1.4 In response to SC63 Doc.22, the Standing Committee, through Decision SC63-33, established a working group to further elaborate on the priority actions presented in document SC63 Doc.22, in consultation with the Secretariat and the STRP, to inform the preparation of a draft resolution on strengthening future processes on updating the RIS. The working group was instructed to provide a report to SC64, which will contain an update on its work, and propose next steps.

2. Purpose and mandate

2.1 The purpose of the Working Group on RIS Updating, established by SC63, is to:

- Assess and prioritise the challenges and opportunities provided in the report to SC63, with reference to the written and verbal comments provided by Parties to the Working Group.
    - Assess the feasibility, resourcing, legal, procedural and staffing implications for each option.
    - Rank feasible options for recommendation to Standing Committee.
- Identify feasible options to reform the RIS update process and RIS format, to:
    - Simplify and improve the efficiency of the RIS update process.

    - Make the RIS update process more useful and relevant to Parties and the Secretariat.
    - Update the RIS format with a focus on relevance of information, simplicity, and capacity implications for Contracting Parties.
- Consult with Parties and the Secretariat to identify the key barriers to the preparation, update and review of RIS, and use this to inform the outputs of the working group.

2.2 Based on the results of the prioritisation and consultation, the WG will

- Submit a report to SC64 containing an update on the work to date and recommending the next steps in the process for Standing Committee's endorsement.
    - The report to SC64 will also contain guidance to the Secretariat on updating of the standard operating procedure for RIS review (RIS Review SOP).
- Propose updates (if necessary) to the Strategic Framework that give effect to the options identified by the WG.
- Propose a process to update the RIS template, for completion in the 2025-2028 triennium.
- Develop a draft resolution on strengthening future processes on updating the RIS.
- Identify a process to work through the backlog of RIS updates that are currently sitting with the Convention's Secretariat.

3. Composition and regional representation

3.1 The Working Group will have at least one member from each region of the Convention.

3.2 The initial composition of the Working Group is Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Morocco, Peru, Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Chair of the STRP. Other Contracting Parties will be able to join at any point during the Working Group's tenure by expressing their interests to the Working Group Chair and/or the Secretariat.

3.3 The Management Working Group and Subgroup on Finance will be updated as appropriate.

3.4 The Working Group may invite external parties, as appropriate, to observe and attend meetings as required.

4. Structure, meetings and Secretariat support

4.1 The Working Group will appoint among itself a Chair (Australia), and a Vice Chair (Rwanda) and any other roles that it deems necessary.

4.2 The Working Group will hold meetings using means that allow the full and active participation of all members and/or regions in the Group. These may be face-to-face (in association with other meetings of the Convention), hybrid or virtual, the latter using an agreed platform to which all members have access.

4.3 The Working Group will take decisions by consensus.

4.4 The Chair and Vice Chair will liaise and work closely with other bodies of the Convention and relevant working groups and/or external parties as necessary.

4.5 The Secretariat will provide secretariat services for the Working Group (meeting invitations and minutes) and act as a point of contact.

4.6 The Secretariat through a notification, shall inform all Contracting Parties of the upcoming meetings of the Working Group.

4.7 If necessary, the Working Group may engage consultancy services to support or conduct the above activities, subject to the available resources.

5. Working schedule

5.1 A working schedule is provided below, but may change to accommodate the needs and schedules of the working group and its members:

Date	**Purpose**
August 2024	*Second meeting of the Working Group:* - *to establish TORs, and prioritise the work of the WG* - *Allocate responsibilities to fill out each theme in the table* - *Approve a consultation exercise and decide on the key themes* *Update table of challenges and opportunities for prioritisation exercise.* *Prepare consultation survey for Parties*
September 2024	*Third meeting of the Working Group* - *Approve updated table template* - *Approve consultation survey* - *Discuss request for funding from Subgroup on Finance* *Draft report for SC64 for WG review*
October 2024	*Fourth meeting of the Working Group* - *Decide key focus of draft resolution* *Consultation survey open (2-3 weeks)* *Written input from Secretariat on feasibility of options* *Theme leads draft input to table* *Report to SC64 (21/10/24)*
November 2024	*Fifth meeting of the Working Group* - *Review consultation results* - *Discuss Secretariat input* - *Review updated table* *Draft resolution (21/11/24)*
December 2024	Finalise updated table and draft priorities and circulate for comment
January 2025	*Sixth meeting of the Working Group, at SC64* - Update attendees on progress - Prioritise key actions from the table *Standing Committee 64* *Seek SC64 decisions to:* - *Direct the Secretariat to prepare and consult on a RIS Update SOP,* - *Allow the WG to start drafting an updated RIS Template, for completion in the 2025-2028 Triennium* - *Direct and fund the Secretariat to commence a 'congestion busting' exercise to update unprocessed RIS.*

February 2025	*Seventh meeting of the Working Group* *TBC - commence update of RIS Update SOP* *TBC - commence update of RIS Template* *TBC - commence congestion-busting of RIS updates by the Secretariat*
March 2025	*Eighth meeting of the Working Group*
April 2025	*Ninth meeting of the Working Group*
May 2025	*Tenth meeting of the Working Group*
June 2025	*Finalise intersessional work*
July 2025	*COP15*

5.2 A detailed workplan will be developed in line with these TORs, through the WG.

6. Budget

Funding may be required to support several of the Working Group's tasks, either with the approval of the subgroup on Finance, or through voluntary contributions.

Annex 2
Updated table of challenges and opportunities related to the submission and updating of Ramsar Information Sheets

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
RIS review process & RIS updating cycle	The Secretariat's RIS review process involves too many steps/too many levels of review and approval and takes too long.	The Secretariat should look at ways of streamlining the steps involved in reviewing the RIS (designation and update). RIS review by the Secretariat should place emphasis on ensuring completeness of the most relevant data fields rather than minutiae. Initial review of RIS should be sufficiently thorough so that review of resubmitted RIS does not result in new/additional comments in relation to information that was provided in the original submission.	The Secretariat will update its Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for RIS review with a view to streamlining the process and enhancing efficiency, including reducing the number of steps, identifying key roles and accountability, and establishing indicative timelines for processing at each step.	**Standard operating procedure:** *Financial* Low to no direct cost. *Secretariat capacity* **UK**: potentially worth ensuring that the role of the Secretariat is limited to where it is strictly necessary, and thus reduce the need for Secretariat staff-time. - Is there a need for an additional layer of scrutiny after that by technical staff within CPs? **Secretariat**: Review would go ahead as soon as there is guidance from CPs. There is current capacity to develop this within the Secretariat. Guidance needs to be provided clarifying particular matters (e.g., %	**Standard operating procedure** **Secretariat**: Role involves ensuring scientifically sound data is provided. SOP is an internal document – the group can decide to make changes to strategic framework (or DRs, SC decisions etc.)– this will then be translated to the SOP. **Canada**: believe that the provision of scientifically sound data is the responsibility of the CPs, not the Secretariat. **Mexico**: proposing the option to flag in the format the quality of information for assurance – whether it is original, or has gone through more rigorous scientific procedures. Secretariat: Raised that we need to amend the Strategic Framework to give effect to any such changes **Australia**: It would be good to flag low-risk high confidence items (e.g., species status changes) as minor updates, which can be made without causing a full update to the RIS edition (eg triggers no change to date of full update).

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
				change, what are national circumstances etc.) *Procedural* Creation/update of a SOP would require the Standing Committee to make a decision to direct/instruct the Secretariat to undertake this work.	Delays to the update of RIS can be caused by actions of both CPs and the Secretariat. There is a need to explore a mix of solutions to address multiple issues. Decisions will need to take into account the range of opinions around roles and responsibilities, and other aspects of a SOP.
		The Secretariat should explore options for securing additional human capacity to review RIS.	Contracting Parties may consider making budgetary provisions for the Secretariat to hire consultants (on a retainer or on a part-time basis) to support RIS review when required.	**Budgetary provisions or staffing** *Financial* Would require financial assistance, or an increase to the core budget. Suggest seeking an estimate from the Secretariat for costings, for progression to the Subgroup on Finance (potentially ~CHF140,000), as a short term-measure until any new procedures are in place. *Secretariat capacity* Secretariat capacity would be increased by this option, by the provision of temporary staff to work on RIS Updating.	**Budgetary provisions or staffing** **Secretariat:** There needs to be clarity around what any increased staff capacity is for. This could involve either short-term provision of funds, or longer-term increase to the staffing of the Secretariat, with clarity around what the staffing is for. Consideration also needs to be given to the source of the funding and any associated instructions/recommendation to Standing Committee. **Indonesia**: We agree with the Contracting Parties proposal to simplify the steps involved in the designation and updating of RIS by revising the SOP for RIS Review. The initial review of RIS should be thorough enough to ensure that the review of resubmitted RIS does not result in new/additional comments related to the

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
				Procedural Budgetary provisions would require a decision of both the Subgroup on Finance and the Standing Committee/or COP. An intersessional meeting of the Subgroup on Finance has been proposed for October, following the release of SC64 documents	information provided in the original submission. **Germany**: We support a clear communication of fields to prioritize when completing the RIS combined with a more effective Standard Operating Procedure, leading to a decrease in the number of times a RIS is reviewed at Secretariat level. Therefore, we do not see the necessity to hire consultants to support RIS review at Secretariat level.
	Communication with Contracting Parties during the RIS update process is at times insufficient	The Secretariat should confirm receipt of RIS submissions, indicating expected processing time and providing information on potential delays. The Secretariat should inform Contracting Parties regarding the need to update RIS for individual Wetlands of International Importance, before and when the RIS becomes out of date.	The Secretariat will confirm receipt of an RIS update to the submitting Contracting Party. The Secretariat will notify Contracting Parties of the need to update RIS through automated notifications to be sent six months and three months before an RIS is due for an update, on the date the RIS becomes outdated, and annually thereafter.	*Financial* There will probably be financial implications to the creation of an automated notification [**Seeking Secretariat advice**] *Secretariat capacity* **Secretariat**: RSIS can be automated now. It is difficult to make the RSIS automated for only certain CPs (e.g., an opt-in/out system). *Procedural* This would require a Standing Committee decision, instructing the Secretariat to make these changes.	**France**: Should not have automated reminders when things are late, as this is already known by CPs and will create a 'load' in terms of emails to Parties. The Secretariat could alert CPs when changes are made by the Secretariat. The WG should consider the benefits of reducing the Secretariat's workload in decisions about this. **Secretariat**: Some CPs do not want automated notifications from the RSIS and have made this clear at SC meetings. - In some CPs, one individual is responsible for several MEAs, and may not respond when the automated reminder is sent - Over recent years – Secretariat work has increased 450%, **UK**: Sometimes there is a delay in notification of RIS publication.

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
					Australia: There are a range of milestones that could lead to automatic notifications. Some notifications may be more useful (e.g., once a RIS review has progressed), and others less so (e.g., the status of a RIS). **Indonesia:** Secretariat can provide automatic notifications when the RIS review has progressed, making it easier for CPs to update promptly without having to wait for 3 or 6 months. **USA Comments on Draft Report of the Working Group on RIS Updating** Need further discussion within the Working Group on the requested automatic notifications from the Secretariat, including suggested text edits for sub-bullet b) "six and three months before the RIS becomes outdate, *on the date of expiration,* and annually thereafter"; c) when *Secretariat* comments have been made on a RIS in the RSIS"
	Regular RIS updating and global reporting on the Site network are key to tracking implementation of the Convention, but making frequent	The current cycle of six years for comprehensive RIS updates is too short. Some data in the RIS do not change frequently or rapidly. A longer cycle of nine years may be considered for comprehensive updates, while more frequent updates	The Secretariat will update relevant guidance to Contracting Parties as well as its SOP for RIS review to reflect a six-year cycle for RIS updates focusing on the most relevant information, noting that this is in line with e.g. Resolution XI.8 (Annex 1).	*Financial* Shifting timeframes would not have a direct financial cost, although a longer timeframe could indirectly reduce costs within Parties, in terms of staff time and provision of technical advice etc.	Note: CPs raised that option could be updated to 'reflect a ***nine*** year cycle' **Suggested solution/change:** - change update cycle to minor updates (e.g. of essential information) every 6 years, and full updates over a longer timeframe (e.g., 9/12years).

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
	comprehensive RIS updates presents a challenge especially for countries with limited technical and financial capacity.	may be made for the most relevant aspects/data fields. The Secretariat should continue to report on the status of the List of Wetlands of International Importance to the Standing Committee annually, as a key element in global collective review and to promote further RIS updating as well as designation.	The Standing Committee may consider repealing Decision SC62-54, and requesting the Secretariat to report on the status of the List of Wetlands of International Importance to the Standing Committee annually.	*Secretariat capacity* Shifting to a longer timeframe could free up some Secretariat time, and reduce the number of incomplete RIS, over time. *Procedural* As the original timeframe was made by a COP Resolution, an update would need to be made through another COP Resolution, following debate by Parties.	- Could consider categorising fields in terms of significance to update cycle (which one is a requirement for 6 yr or 9 yr update). **Action:** Seek STRP advice on essential fields for more regular update, and frequency of updates for various fields. **France**: Proposed to keep 6 year cycle, but to reduce the data required for the updates, and make a full review required over a longer timeframe. By increasing the period for updates, certain changes may be missed. By updating regularly, there will be more awareness of the sites. Aim to not limit reviews to technical staff – include site managers and others in this process. - Suggestion – categorise certain fields for more frequent updates - Use updates as an opportunity to engage people around the site, and 'tell the story' **Australia**: If there is the capability to make minor updates within the update cycle *without* changing the date that a full review is required, that would be helpful. **Indonesia: U**pdating the RIS more than six years can reflect significant changes in the condition of the site. However, updates could be conducted more frequently if there are significant changes due to natural disasters, etc.

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
					Argentina: According to some members of the Subgroup, in RIS Item 2.2.1 "Defining the site boundaries "Parties shall use UN [**Add data and]** cartography, while RIS Item 2.2.2 **ADD [site location]** should incorporate the conclusions of WG 23 **ADD[Regarding the use of a checkbox to indicate whether a wetland has been registered in a territory with sovereignty disputes or other mechanisms that WG 23 finds appropiate] ADD [Instructs the Secretariat to incorporate the inputs from Working Group 23 that implies an update of the Ramsar Information Sheet]**

RIS format	The RIS is long and updating is time consuming, placing a burden on Contracting Parties. In addition to low updating rates, the RIS format may also place some limitations on effective utilization of RIS data in technical reporting on the Site network, beyond tracking number of Sites.	Prioritize the RIS, identifying data fields that should be prioritized as part of an update, enabling faster review of RIS updates without compromising data quality. Make adjustments to data fields where relevant including enhanced use of drop-down menus and multiple-choice options, where appropriate in combination with text fields for additional information. Provide further guidance on "completeness of data to be submitted" for the RIS update (Resolution XI.8 does not define this) as well as more specific guidance or instructions on data to be provided in some sections/fields of the RIS.	The SC may consider requesting the Secretariat to: - identify key questions/data fields in the RIS for Contracting Parties to prioritize when submitting RIS updates, based on their relevance to tracking and reporting on changes in sites, implementation of the Convention and the Convention's contribution towards relevant targets of the GBF and the targets of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; as well as the work of the STRP including preparation of reports such as the Global Wetland Outlook. - make a clear distinction between data required at initial designation (to be updated when relevant), and key questions/data fields to be regularly updated, through labelling of fields and/or reorganization of the RIS; - further define input options for data fields in the RIS where relevant, with a view to enabling	*Procedural* - The selection of compulsory and optional fields, including the indication of constant parameters and critical information, should be performed by the Contracting Parties. The prioritization should be done at the Working Group or Subgroup level with support from the Secretariat and in consultation with the STRP. - The update of the RIS format should not result in the loss of past information. The updating process should focus on the identification of compulsory and optional fields; in case changes to the fields are required, they should not result in loss of past information. *Secretariat capacity* - Minimum support needed from the Secretariat using existing resources (online meetings, collaboration tools). *Financial* - This activity requires In-kind contribution of the Contracting Parties through	- As problems with the current system concern usability by national authorities and site managers, it is recommended that solutions are proposed by them based on their experience, with the support of the Secretariat and in consultation with the STRP, instead of vice-versa. The current system seems more focused on scientific concerns than on actual implementation, resulting in low levels of completion and update of RIS forms. **Indonesia**: development of a comprehensive glossary within the RIS online form is very important to address language barriers especially for specific and scientific terminologies.

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
			faster data entry as well as better synthesis and analysis of data. In doing this the Secretariat will draw on existing information and guidance on completion of RIS including e.g. as contained in Resolution XI.8 (Annex 1) and COP11 Doc.22. The Secretariat will review and update existing guidance relating to completeness of data and data entry in the RIS.	the participation of their representatives and experts at the Working Group or Subgroup level and at the STRP. No financial implications for the Secretariat.	
		Enable automated importing of data from other sources where possible, e.g. so that species information can be imported from Excel spreadsheets instead of being entered manually field by field for each Site.	The Secretariat will assess the feasibility of automating transfer of data to RIS from external sources for specific fields, including species lists, and report on findings to SC64 (also noting e.g. Resolution VII.13 paragraph 11 and XIII.10 paragraph 25 on direct database-to-database transfer of data and information related to the RIS).	*Procedural* - The RIS format should be improved to make it easier to submit and update information, including offline and bulk updates. *Secretariat capacity* - The Secretariat should develop an Excel and/or app version of the RIS template, with guidance from the Contracting Parties at the Working Group or Subgroup level; duplicate information should be filled automatically.	

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
				Financial - Small financial implications for the Secretariat (procurement, but perhaps a Contracting Party can make an in-kind contribution if such tools have already been developed at the national level).	
		A number of specific suggestions were made by Contracting Parties in relation to individual questions and data fields in the RIS, including proposed additions, deletions, reformulations, and amendment of response options or data formats.	The Standing Committee may consider requesting the Secretariat, in consultation with the STRP, to prepare a draft updated RIS for consideration at SC64, with a view to further focusing, streamlining and improving RIS updating. **Argentina comment:** According to some members of the Subgroup, in RIS Item 2.2.1 "Defining the site boundaries "Parties shall use UN cartography, while RIS Item 2.2.2 should incorporate the conclusions of WG 23; instead, according to other members, discussions about the basemap to eventually be used do not pertain to this	*Procedural* - Same as for the selection of compulsory and optional fields (above). - The update of the RIS format should not result in the loss of past information. The updating process should focus on the identification of compulsory and optional fields; in case changes to the fields are required, they should not result in loss of past information. *Secretariat capacity* - Minimum support needed from the Secretariat using existing resources (online meetings, collaboration tools).	- As problems with the current system concern usability by national authorities and site managers, it is recommended that solutions are proposed by them based on their experience, with the support of the Secretariat and in consultation with the STRP, instead of vice versa. The current system seems more focused on scientific concerns than on actual implementation, resulting in low levels of completion and update of RIS forms. - Several Parties reported having translated the RIS template in their local language. The Secretariat could gather the localised versions of the RIS template and consider publishing them online at no particular cost. - According to some members of the Subgroup, in RIS Item 2.2.1 "Defining the site boundaries "Parties shall use UN cartography, while RIS Item 2.2.2 should incorporate the conclusions of WG 23; instead, according to

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
			Subgroup, as the RIS template includes geographic coordinates of sites, as well as their perimeter, and does not indicate which basemap shall be used. **UK comment:** On the reference to UN cartography, we believe there was agreement to reference the language agreed in the separate meeting of interested parties on site designation, where parties agreed to language stating that some parties had proposed the use of UN cartography, whereas other parties had disagreed with this proposal, and/or had suggested it was outside the scope of the Decision SC63-34 which established the group.	*Financial* - This activity requires In-kind contribution of the Contracting Parties through the participation of their representatives and experts at the Working Group or Subgroup level and at the STRP. No financial implications for the Secretariat.	other members, discussions about the basemap to eventually be used do not pertain to this Subgroup, as the RIS template includes geographic coordinates of sites, as well as their perimeter, and does not indicate which basemap shall be used. **Secretariat** – can stop reviewing updates, if directed to by Parties. Seeking clarification if this is what has been requested. - Such a change would probably require a Standing Committee decision

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
Capacity	RIS updates require a significant amount of data as well as scientific support, including in relation to mapping, inventory and monitoring	Explore peer-to-peer learning opportunities. The Secretariat could host an online webinar series where Contracting Parties share relevant experiences, e.g. processes or programs to generate data to facilitate RIS updates and experiences with Site management planning.	The Secretariat will invite parties to share experiences and best practice in the context of its regular/ongoing RIS-related training.	*Financial* Low to no direct costs *Secretariat capacity* Secretariat capacity is limited This would require additional time and resources from the Secretariat coordinating these, and/or a platform to facilitate this collaboration *Procedural*	**Kenya:** Other countries with more experience can propose to be trainers of trainers **UK:** How often will the learning opportunities happen if each Contracting Party is updating its RIS at different times? There is also the issue of coordination of Contracting Parties to attend. **USA**: The process for gathering information for RIS updates is done at varying times, through various processes, and varying levels of capacity which may present challenges in making sure peer-to-peer experiences most effective and applicable.
		Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) could support Contracting Parties with RIS updates, and make provisions for this in their annual work plans.	The Secretariat will include a session on capacity building and support for RIS updating in the annual global RRI planning meeting.	*Financial* RRIs could enhance the budget on capacity building to support updating *Secretariat capacity* Existing *Procedural* *Update the TORs for the RRIs on capacity*	**UK:** Clarity is required as to how this will work to include all Contracting Parties, as some do not have RRIs. **USA**: Concur with the comment made by the UK.
		The Ramsar Regional Centre East Asia (RRC-EA) *Practical Guide for Ramsar Site Designation and Updating of Ramsar Information Sheets*	The Secretariat will work with RRC-EA and in consultation with STRP members/observers to update the Guide, reflecting	*Financial* Cost implications on meetings to revise and update the practical guide	**Kenya:** The existing practical guide might require perusal and inputs by Contracting Parties to determine practicability in sites.

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
		could, with some updates, be used as a guidance document for Contracting Parties in RIS updating.	as appropriate adjustments to RIS submission and review presented herein.	*Secretariat capacity* Limited to none, if agreed we would need members of RRC-EA in consultation with other RRIs *Procedural* *It needs to be adopted in the SC64/ COP15*	**Australia:** The RRC-EA could present the Practical Guide to parties in a meeting of the Working Group or intersessionally. **USA**: While there are cost and capacity implications to update such a guide, including templates with explanations of each section as well as including strong applications as examples for reference may be a cost-effective strategy to consider.
		Establish a support mechanism through which Contracting Parties may receive direct technical support for research, mapping, updating RIS and potentially other aspects such as developing site management plans. This may be similar to Ramsar Advisory Missions, and operationalized through the establishment of an "RIS fund".	The Standing Committee may consider requesting the Secretariat to undertake an analysis and prepare an options paper on the establishment, operation and resourcing of a RIS support mechanism.	*Financial* Huge costs to set up the fund *Secretariat capacity* Limited with a possibility of engaging specialists from Contracting Parties *Procedural* Updating the SOP for the RIS Fund and adoption of it in the COP15	**UK:** This is a positive option in principle, but it could require substantial financial resources and Secretariat capacity, details of which Contracting Parties would require greater clarity on, before being able to support. **Kenya:** Will the fund be sustainable? Source funding should be provided and possibly a needs assessment done for Contracting Parties to guide the Secretariat on the establishment, operation, and resourcing of the RIS Fund establishment and implementation **Indonesia:** Secretariat needs to hire a part-time consultant or to build a team of trained personnel from other resources or Contracting Parties to assist with the RIS review process, consider no financial implications for the Contracting Parties.

Thematic area	Challenges identified by Contracting Parties	Proposals from Contracting Parties	Proposed actions by Secretariat for consideration by Standing Committee	Implications of options	Other notes (e.g., timing, acceptability to Parties, sensitivities)
					USA: Concur with UK comment. Additionally, there are other short-term and quicker opportunities to improve capacity of updating RIS before turning to discussions on establishing a support mechanism that would take significant time and discussion

Annex 3
Draft Resolution XV.xx on Updates to Ramsar Information Sheets

1. RECALLING Article 3.2 of the Convention, which requires information on changes or likely changes to the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance to be passed without delay to the Bureau, or Secretariat, of the Convention;

2. ALSO RECALLING Resolution 5.3, which requests Contracting Parties to submit completed information sheets for listed Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Sites"), and Resolution XI.8, which adopted the *Ramsar Site Information Sheet (RIS)* – 2012 revision;

3. FURTHER RECALLING Resolution VI.13 ,which urges Contracting Parties to revise the data provided in Ramsar Information Sheets every six years for monitoring purposes, and Resolution XIV.13, which requests Parties to update, as a matter of urgency, the RIS for their Ramsar Sites at least once every six years;

4. NOTING the adoption of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands* by Resolution VII.11 (1999) and the adoption of revisions by, *inter alia*, Resolution XIII.12 and Resolution XIV.18;

5. FURTHER NOTING the Ramsar Regional Center East Asia (RRC-EA) practitioner's guide for *Ramsar Site Designation and Updating of Ramsar Information Sheets*[1];

6. AWARE of the various time, capacity, and resource components associated with collating and reporting information on Ramsar Sites, both at the time of their listing and during subsequent updates, and of the particular challenges for countries with limited capacity or economic limitations, and thus the need for reporting requirements to be highly prioritized, streamlined and efficient;

7. NOTING the importance of data collated in Ramsar Information Sheets to inform reporting on targets and indicators outlined in the Strategic Plan;

8. HIGHLIGHTING the critical importance of monitoring changes in ecological character and ensuring that is given consideration in any changes to timing of RIS updates; and

9. ALSO AWARE that well-organized data and information submitted through the Ramsar Information Sheets may be useful for the delivery of ecologically sound and cost-effective wetland management measures, which are necessary for the continued provision of ecosystem services to human populations and direct economic benefits;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

10. REQUESTS the Standing Committee to establish, at its 66th meeting, a working group on RIS updating, with new terms of reference based on those in Annex 1 of document SC64 Doc.26, to conduct the following work in the 2025-2028 triennium for adoption at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP16), and in so doing to take into account the

[1] http://rrcea.org/ramsar-site-designation-and-updating-of-ris/?ckattempt=1

proposals and challenges identified by Contracting Parties listed in Annex 2 of the same document:

a. Conduct a Party-led prioritization of the essential data required for RIS updates, and subsequent update to the RIS format, with the aim of [reducing the administrative and technical burden on the Parties and] enabling the timely submission of data and information;

b. Based on the outcomes of the prioritization exercise and subsequent update of the RIS format, conduct an update of the relevant sections of the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (2022 update)*[2] following agreement at the appropriate COP to the outcomes of the Working Group;

c. Provide guidance on completeness of data to be submitted for an RIS update and provide context for how the submitted information will be utilized; and

d. Work with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to understand the implications of changing the RIS updating timeframe;

11. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to identify and recommend to the Standing Committee means to enable the automated transfer of data to RIS from external sources for specific fields, including species lists;

12. [REQUESTS Contracting Parties to use Resolution XI.8 Annex 2 (Rev. COP14) as the main reference for the Ramsar Information Sheets completion and update;]

13. [[INVITES][FURTHER SUGGESTS] Contracting Parties to [utilize][consider] the Ramsar Regional Center East Asia (RRC-EA) practitioner's guide for *Ramsar Site Designation and Updating of Ramsar Information Sheets*[3] as a [reference][starting] point for how a Contracting Party can update RIS, and INVITES the RRC-EA to work with Contracting Parties to improve the guide, in line with the agreed updated RIS format;] and

14. REQUESTS the STRP to consider the recommendations of the working group and provide advice on maintaining the scientific integrity of RIS data collection in this and any future work of a working group on RIS updating.

[2] https://rsis.ramsar.org/RISapp/StatDoc/strategic_framework_en.pdf
[3] http://rrcea.org/ramsar-site-designation-and-updating-of-ris/?ckattempt=1