

Annex 2

Report of the Facilitation Working Group to SC54

The Facilitation Working Group (FWG), Co-Chaired by Uruguay and the United States, and currently composed of representatives from Australia, Colombia, Finland, Japan, Kenya, Romania, Senegal, and Switzerland, would like to thank the Standing Committee for entrusting the group to work on Parties' behalf to explore means to improve the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention's governance structure and the functioning of the Secretariat. The Co-Chairs would also like to thank the FWG members for their robust participation and thoughtful contributions throughout the group's intersessional work, and the Secretary General for continuing to provide the group with relevant information to inform its work.

At its 53rd meeting the Standing Committee gave the FWG additional tasks on communication and governance.

Several Parties made statements during SC53 regarding communication between the Secretariat and Parties or other interlocutors. One such request was captured in Decision SC53-23:

The Standing Committee approved the report of the Facilitation Working Group (FWG), and took note of...the request to the Working Group to facilitate clarification of the Secretariat's mandate and means of communication between the Secretariat, Contracting Parties and the public in Article 3.2 cases.

In response, the FWG requested the Secretariat to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide communications with Parties, NGOs, media, and other external groups under varying scenarios including with respect to Article 3.2 cases, and inform the FWG when the SOPs are in place. SOPs are anticipated to help ensure consistent messaging, timely and equitable service to Parties, transparency, accountability, and protection of sensitive information, while also helping to manage workload and workflow within the Secretariat.

In addition, the Standing Committee decided to expand the original mandate of the FWG and requested it to undertake additional work, as indicated in Decision SC53-04:

The Standing Committee agreed to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance in order to optimize the use of resources, to create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and to increase the participation and representation of the Parties, and also to propose the considerations and means necessary to do this. To this end it decided to extend the mandate of the existing Facilitation Working Group with an open membership. The outcomes of this review and any corresponding proposals should be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Standing Committee for subsequent submission to the Conference of the Parties for decision.

In response, the FWG first sought to identify aspects of the Convention's governance that are working well, and any aspects where there might be opportunities for improvement. Key issues and common themes expressed by FWG members included improving the effectiveness of the Convention bodies and the Secretariat by clarifying and streamlining roles, mandates, and reporting structures; optimizing the use of financial resources through enhanced transparency, accountability, and prioritization; more disciplined management of time and processes at meeting sessions to maintain focus on agenda items and allow more time for discussion of strategic issues; and leveraging technology and exploring innovative, low-cost ways to create more opportunities for Parties to interact and engage. Based on the extensive input from FWG members, the Co-Chairs developed and the FWG agreed to a suite of 14 distinct multi-stage tasks organized into three

baskets (resource optimization, strategic issues, and participation/representation) to help the group better understand the potential opportunities to address these issues. Many tasks included contributions of relevant information from the Secretariat, distilling the information received into discrete concrete elements that could help Parties accomplish their goals, and a number led to the preparation of draft resolution text where the FWG determined it was appropriate to do so. This comprehensive work plan resulted in the following outputs:

- Draft resolution text on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention to clarify and streamline working groups (found in SC54-09 draft resolution on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention).
- Draft resolution text on returning to normal levels of Standing Committee oversight (found in SC54-10 draft resolution on The Responsibilities, Roles and Composition of the Standing Committee and Regional Categorization of Countries under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands).
- Draft resolution text on enhancing Parties effective participation in the Standing Committee (to be proposed at SC54 for insertion into SC54-10 draft resolution).
- Draft resolution text on rules of procedure review, reviewing and potentially retiring outdated resolutions, and incorporation of strategic discussions into the work of the Convention (found in SC54-14 draft resolution on Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other MEAs and other international institutions).
- Draft resolution text on fostering subject matter expertise within the Secretariat and on leveraging technology and written submissions (to be proposed at SC54 for insertion into SC54-14 draft resolution).
- Recommendations to the Subgroup on Finance for consideration at its next meeting regarding potential modifications to the budget structure to enhance transparency and flexibility in the Secretariat's management of funds and improve the way Parties determine budget priorities.

In conclusion, the FWG believes it has responded to the mandates from Decisions SC53-04 and SC54-23 and requests Standing Committee members' support for the text generated by the FWG, and also continues to be at the service of the Parties if the SC considers there are additional issues that the FWG could usefully address in further service to the Parties.

The Facilitation Working Group recommends that the Standing Committee:

- Take note of and welcome the working group's efforts to facilitate clarification of the Secretariat's mandate and means of communication between the Secretariat, Parties and the public in response to Decision SC54-23.
- Take note of and welcome the draft resolution text and other outputs completed and submitted by the FWG to optimize the use of resources, create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and increase the participation and representation of the Parties in response to Decision SC54-04.

ANNEX

FWG Tasks		
Theme	Nr	Task
Resource Optimization	1	<p>1. Building on SC53-05, catalogue existing Ramsar bodies, their origins, reporting structures, composition, (s)election procedures, mandates, terms of reference, and terms to the extent they exist/are known.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat’s findings related to Ramsar bodies in conjunction with outcome of FWG’s near-term discussion on leveraging opportunities, and identify any opportunities for better leveraging such groups to delegate complex/time consuming tasks, as well as de-conflicting/concluding them as appropriate.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to rationalize the bodies of the Convention with a view to leveraging the bodies to enhance the effectiveness of the governance of the convention, de-conflicting and concluding bodies.</p>
	2	<p>1. Review Conference of the Party (COP) resolutions and SC decisions, identifying those, if any, that impact day to day performance, management, or optimization or resources of the Secretariat team.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat’s findings related to resolutions and decisions impacting the Secretariat team and identify any opportunities for de-conflicting/retiring them as appropriate.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to resolve conflicts/restore normal relationships while maintaining accountability between the Parties and the Secretariat with respect to day-to-day operations, de-conflicting and/or retire previous resolutions and decisions.</p>
	3	<p>1. Identify elements, if any, of the current Rules of Procedure that impact the efficiency of the work of the Convention or which might usefully be amended to optimize resources/increase efficiency.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat’s findings regarding the current Rules of Procedure.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, collaborate with the Secretariat to recommend modifications to the text of the Rules of Procedure for consideration by the Parties.</p>

	4	1. Advise whether the Secretariat has or is considering the applicability of elements of the UN Agency Internal Control Framework to the Secretariat's existing internal practices and procedures in order to optimize resources and increase efficiency.
	5	1. Identify potential optimization of resources and/or efficiencies that could be gained, if any, by fostering thematic issue specialization responsibilities within the Secretariat team. 2. Consider the Secretariat's findings regarding optimization of resources/efficiencies that could be gained by fostering thematic issue specialization responsibilities within the Secretariat team and make recommendations as appropriate regarding any further action.
	6	1. Engage the IUCN Executive Director to request IUCN's support for facilitating the Ramsar Secretariat's participation in UN bodies where IUCN is currently accredited and Ramsar is not.
	7	1. Draft text for inclusion within a relevant draft resolution to request the Secretariat review resolutions, recommendations, or other decisions, identifying those, if any, (not related to Secretariat function) that may no longer be valid or applicable, contradict each other, or are otherwise inconsistent, and report back on its findings at SC57 (one year post-COP), with a view to Parties at COP-14 establishing a process for the Convention to regularly review and retire outdated resolutions / recommendations / decisions.
	8	1. Identify changes to the structure of the budget or to the prioritization of budget elements to address near term challenges or opportunities, if any, which might be recommended to the Subgroup on Finance for its consideration at its next meeting.
Strategic Issues	9	1. Identify potential strategic issues for Parties' consideration at SCs and/or COPs, including possible modalities for inclusion in agendas. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions for strategic issues. 3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to set out a path to explicitly incorporate strategic discussions into the work of the Standing Committee and/or the Conference of the Parties.
	10	1. Building on materials such as SC51 Inf.Doc.03 and others, identify/recommend potential briefings/guidance/other information that could be provided to Parties to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities as members of bodies of the Convention, as well as the elements of the Rules of Procedure relevant to their work. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions for potential briefings/guidance/other information that could be provided to Parties to increase understanding of roles and responsibilities and the Rules of

		Procedure and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: includes input from Task 13)</i>
	11	<p>1. Consider ways other conventions use written submissions to support their work and recommend approaches, if any, which could be possibilities for use in Ramsar, along with any estimated associated costs.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions regarding means to leverage technology and written submissions and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: Task 11 and Task 14 are combined for step two)</i></p>
	12	<p>1. Explore how Parties could systematically use working groups and/or other informal groups (e.g., Friends of the Chair/Presidency) to delegate complex tasks in order to facilitate time management during meetings with a view to increasing opportunities for strategic discussions. <i>(Note: generates input into Task 1)</i></p>
	13	<p>1. Explore means by which Parties could be more disciplined in the use of their time during sessions to ensure that, while allowing for full participation of participants, discussions remain focused on the agenda item under discussion, and that once issues are concluded they remain so, and make recommendations as appropriate. <i>(Note: generates input into Task 10)</i></p>
Participation / Representation	14	<p>1. Explore options and costs associated with leveraging internet and other communication technologies with a view to increasing participation and representation of the Parties as well as optimizing resources.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions regarding means to leverage technology and written submissions and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: Task 11 and Task 14 are combined for step two)</i></p>