

Component 1: Review of existing Ramsar scientific and technical guidance and processes, their utility, use, application and conversion into practical tools

Stephanie Mansourian

3 October 2014



Réserve Intégrale du Lac Tonga (Algeria), Ramsar Site. Photo: © S. Mansourian

Table of Contents

Acronyms list.....	3
Executive summary	4
1. Introduction.....	7
2. Key findings.....	11
2.1. Who is the guidance for?	11
2.2. How is the scientific and technical guidance defined?.....	12
2.3. To what extent is the scientific and technical guidance used?	13
2.4. How effective are the content and format of guidance?	14
3: Analysis of findings	17
Key Challenges identified	17
Addressing these challenges	17
Annex 1: Survey responses	23
Annex 2: Interviewees for component 1.....	31

Acronyms list

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
COP	Conference of the Parties
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GMO	Genetically-modified Organism
MAB	Man and Biosphere
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
NFP	National Focal Point
STRP	Scientific Technical and Review Panel
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas

Executive summary

At Ramsar's 2012 Conference of the Parties (COP), Resolution XI.16 was adopted to undertake "a review of the delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention." The review is made up of five components and five reports, of which this is the first.

This report specifically focuses on "*reviewing the application and utility of Ramsar guidance and the full range of processes by which scientific and technical Convention implementation needs are identified, articulated, prioritized, and converted into tools and guidance for the range of implementation stakeholders, and the extent to which the tools and guidance are disseminated to, and taken up by, identified stakeholders*". It is based on the analysis of 15 interviews, 45 survey responses and a desk top review of key documents.

Findings

Audiences – Ramsar's audience can be divided into four major categories, each requiring different guidance: 1. policy makers require guidance on turning Convention requirements into policy, reporting back on Convention requirements, policy implementation and strategic decision-making, 2. practitioners and wetland managers require concrete guidance on how best to manage wetland sites, 3. scientists require more in depth and rigorous studies on key and emerging issues related to wetlands, and 4. wetland users require information on the values of wetlands, general background information on wetlands etc.

Process to define guidance – Guidance needs are defined by Parties via the COP.

Communicating needs for guidance - Needs for guidance are communicated to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in part by the Ramsar Secretariat (whose Senior Regional Advisers collect requests from their respective regions), and in part by Parties.

Awareness and use of guidance - A significant proportion of respondents (both interviewees and survey respondents) were either not aware of Ramsar scientific and technical guidance, or either rarely or never used it.

Disseminating guidance - Published guidance is essentially disseminated via the website, webinars and workshops.

Responsiveness of guidance to needs - The majority of survey respondents (66%) felt that existing guidance addressed their needs while, in contrast, interviewees generally felt that the guidance that exists is too general.

Effectiveness of the content and format of guidance - The largest share (36%) of survey respondents used handbooks, then resolutions (25%), technical reports (21%) and briefing notes (12%).

Scientific versus technical guidance – Interviewees and survey respondents did not distinguish between scientific and technical guidance. A significant majority (68%) of survey respondents reported that they felt that the guidance was neither too scientific nor too technical.

Modus Operandi - A majority (53%) of survey respondents reported that they were familiar with the STRP *modus operandi*.

Challenges

Although Ramsar's scientific and technical guidance, and particularly the work of the STRP and its value, are widely recognized, a number of key challenges were identified through the research phase. These are:

Disconnects – there are visible disconnects at different levels: a) between the practical needs of wetland managers and policy-makers and the scientific and technical products emerging from the STRP and Ramsar, b) between STRP National Focal Points and both wetland managers at one end and the STRP at the other. In terms of communicating guidance needs from the “ground-up”, there is no obvious mechanism to collect nationally-relevant (and/or regionally-relevant) requests for scientific and technical guidance related to wetlands and refer them back to the STRP. Equally, the dissemination of STRP products to target audiences is not as effective as it could be.

Audiences – Ramsar is faced with a diverse audience when it comes to scientific and technical guidance and this has not been sufficiently reflected in its processes and products.

Language – the technical nature of the language used in STRP guidance as well as the fact that English is the predominant language, have excluded a large number of interested parties from the STRP and its products.

Limited outreach to wetland managers – while there are over 2000 Ramsar sites and an even larger number of wetland managers, this group is not well engaged in the STRP.

Breadth of workplan versus resources – the workplan of the STRP is overly ambitious, and yet funding and human resources are extremely limited.

Representation on the STRP – The STRP does not adequately represent the full constituency of the Ramsar Convention. While it is praised for being apolitical, at the same time it may be too remote from its core constituency.

Addressing these challenges

There is a clear and identified need for scientific and technical guidance for implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

Redefining the niche and structure of the STRP - The STRP currently functions like a global technical working group of wetlands experts, with tangential links to the Ramsar Convention. There is an opportunity to establish more direct links between the guidance needs of the target audiences and the work undertaken by the STRP.

Strengthen a regional approach grounded in partnerships as an avenue to expand STRP's regional and local relevance and reach - In line with COP11, Resolution XI.18 para.24 which “requests the STRP and Secretariat to identify opportunities and mechanisms for holding intersessional regional or subregional meetings of STRP National Focal Points and other wetland experts in order to strengthen regional and subregional scientific networks...” , a more regional approach would have the benefit of not only ensuring regional relevance and language, but also of tapping into other resources. Such an approach would require a shift from a centralised structure to a more regional and network-based one. At regional (and national) levels STRP could establish relevant partnerships that can help to ensure that: a) the work is complementary to theirs, b) other bodies can take on some of the locally-relevant research (and fund it in collaboration with Ramsar/STRP), c) the guidance is developed in the

local language(s), d) the guidance is disseminated locally, and local and regional capacities are strengthened.

Categories of guidance and its presentation - Four categories of guidance can be highlighted: 1. reviewing draft scientific and technical materials for approval by the Parties, 2. guidance that is for Parties to better implement the requirements of the Convention, 3. maintaining sight of bigger picture and emerging issues, and 4. guidance that can support wetland managers in their day-to-day management of Ramsar wetlands. Each category of guidance should be pitched differently, even if it stems from one same source. Indeed, the same scientific and technical guidance can be “translated” into different content (notably, using different media) for different audiences. For example, case studies can be an effective and powerful medium to demonstrate key issues which can be of interest to both a policy and a practitioner audience.

Redefining STRP membership and engagement - The current membership of the STRP is composed of scientists. However, the voice of key Ramsar stakeholders such as wetland managers, is not effectively represented on the STRP.

Workplan and funding - The STRP is constrained by the fact that its members are volunteers, and the workplan is an extremely long and unrealistic “wishlist” of elements with no funding attached. A more realistic workplan should be designed which would only contain elements that have funding committed and/or real names of leaders (or groups of leaders) next to it. Only should new funding or partners come on board would any items in the “wishlist” be submitted as additional items to the workplan on an inter-sessional basis.

Expanding the role of the Secretariat - The Ramsar Secretariat should be given the mandate and resources to play a more important linking and facilitating role with respect to scientific and technical guidance. In particular it can help to reach out to key audiences, re-develop work produced by the STRP for target audiences, disseminating this work and build capacity (related to the application of the tools). It can also help to maintain momentum, particularly in between meetings.

Monitoring - Improved monitoring would help to both better understand the value of guidance produced and to ensure that it is indeed being used, applied and addresses real needs.

1. Introduction

The core mission of the Ramsar Convention (1971) is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”. Contracting Parties commit to three key issues which are: 1. Wise use of wetlands, 2. Listing (and effective management) of wetlands of international importance and 3. International cooperation (particularly as concerns transboundary wetlands).

Over the years, Ramsar has grown rapidly from 35 Parties and 300 Wetlands of International Importance (“Ramsar Sites”) in 1984, to 77 Parties and 610 Ramsar Sites in 1993, and 168 Contracting Parties and 2,187 Ramsar Sites today.

Since its third Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting, Ramsar has formalised scientific and technical guidance first via a working group on wise use (at COP 3) then a working group on advising on the formulation and implementation of the Convention's wise use concept, and on elaborating criteria and guidelines for identification of wetlands of international importance (at COP 4), and finally by setting up a subsidiary body: the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) at COP 5 in 1993.

Rapid growth of the Convention has inevitably impacted on the roles of different bodies to the Convention, and notably on the scientific and technical function.

Background

In July 2012, Ramsar Contracting Parties adopted Resolution XI.16 to “ensure efficient delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention” in which Contracting Parties approved “a review of the delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention”, the findings of which would be reported to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) in June 2015. The review was commissioned and undertaken in collaboration with the Review Committee set up at the 46th Standing Committee Meeting (Decision SC46-14).

Methodology

Two independent consultants, Stephanie Mansourian and Veronica Lo, were contracted during the period of May-July 2014 to undertake this review, with input from the Secretariat and the Review Committee.

The methodology utilised consisted of: a) desk top reviews, b) interviews (a total of 52 stakeholders – see Annex 2), and c) an online questionnaire (conducted through Survey Monkey, see Annex 1) which was completed by 45 Ramsar stakeholders. Interviews were held in English, French and Spanish, and the questionnaire was also available in all three languages.

The review was divided into five components, as listed below. These components are separate reports with each consultant taking the lead on a component.

1. Review of existing Ramsar scientific and technical guidance and processes, its utility, use, application, conversion into practical tools etc;

2. Review of the roles of relevant Ramsar bodies which provide scientific support and delivery to stakeholders;
3. Review of the scientific guidance and tools of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to identify useful lessons and best practices that could be emulated by Ramsar;
4. Review of the scientific guidance and tools of relevant non-MEAs to identify useful lessons and best practices that could be emulated by Ramsar; and
5. Final report drawing on the above analyses, that summarises major findings, lessons and recommendations for: 1.) Improving the way scientific guidance is developed, applied and converted into tools; and 2.) Improving scientific support and delivery by Ramsar bodies and processes.

This report deals with component 1, namely: *“reviewing the application and utility of Ramsar guidance and the full range of processes by which scientific and technical Convention implementation needs are identified, articulated, prioritized, and converted into tools and guidance for the range of implementation stakeholders, and the extent to which the tools and guidance are disseminated to, and taken up by, identified stakeholders.”*

In 2006, 2007 and 2008 other reviews of Ramsar’s scientific and technical guidance were produced, which this review also considered in the background and literature review phase (see Box 1).

Box 1: Comparison with previous reviews

Three previous reviews of Ramsar scientific and technical guidance were also considered when undertaking this review. These were:

- USFWS (2006). “Analysis Concerning The Use Of Resolutions, Recommendations And Guidelines Emanating From The Ramsar Convention “;
- Bucher, E.H. and E. Curto (2008). “Assessment Of The Use Of Ramsar Conventions, Guidelines, And Recommendations In Argentina, Bolivia, And Uruguay “;
- van Boven, G. (2008?). “An Evaluation of the Use & Utility of Ramsar Guidance. A report to Ramsar Scientific & Technical Review Panel and Ramsar Secretariat”.

The focus, scope, objective and methods for each review were slightly different rendering direct comparison difficult.

However, some similarities and differences can be mentioned:

- The first two reviews focused on specific countries and audiences, whilst the last one was global like the current one. The list of survey recipients was however, limited in the current review with, in particular, significantly less wetland site managers receiving the survey for lack of complete contact details within the Secretariat. However, in contrast, the current review undertook a significant number of interviews (54 in total).
- The use of Ramsar guidance by wetland site managers has been generally limited.
- Van Boven queried in much greater detail the value of individual guidance, which this review did not set out to do.
- Van Boven also found, as has this review, that handbooks appear to be the most frequently used guidance, particularly by practitioners.
- Then, as now, the language of guidance – both the fact that it is too technical, and the fact that it is essentially in English – is a problem.

This component of the review was undertaken via interviews and an online survey (Monkey Survey).

The online survey was made available over a 17 day period (from 21 May to 6 June) and sent to 657 people. Both the survey and the interviews covered: 1. Value in addressing needs; 2. Utility/user-friendliness/relevance of tools; 3. Appropriateness of methods/approaches; 4. Gaps; 5. The *modus operandi* of the STRP (see Annex 1 for the detailed survey questions and responses).

In total there were 45 useable responses (32 useable responses to the English survey, five useable responses to the Spanish survey and eight useable responses to the French survey). Several responses were not useable because of incompleteness. Even in useable responses, not all respondents answered all questions. There are several possible reasons for the low response rate, including: 1. lack of time, 2. that the survey was not relevant to survey recipients; 3. Too many other surveys and demands placed on them at the same time, 4. Lack of reminders, 5. Relatively limited time to complete the survey.

Twenty-eight (28) people were invited for interviews for this component of the overall review. Some declined, others did not reply. As a result, a total of 15 people were interviewed (one responded in writing – see Annex 2 for a list of interviewees).

Survey respondents and interviewees were categorised according to their relationship with Ramsar as per Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewees and survey respondents

	Interviewees	Survey Respondents	% of total¹
Ramsar National focal point	5	20	41%
Site manager	4	7	18%
Administrative authority	2	9	18%
STRP national focal point	2	11	22%
Other	2		3%
Total	14	47	

¹ note that some respondents considered themselves as falling under two categories – e.g, both National Focal Point and site manager – reason for which the total % adds up to more than 100%.

2. Key findings

This section highlights key findings emerging from both the survey and interviews, while Section 3 provides an analysis of these findings. Findings under this section reflect the essence and the majority of opinions emerging from the research phase. A more comprehensive overview of the survey results can be found in Annex 1.

2.1. Who is the guidance for?

Resolution XI.16 identifies the following audiences for Ramsar scientific and technical guidance:

- managers of individual wetland sites
- managers of networks of wetlands such as on migratory waterbird flyways;
- wetland policy makers
- those responsible for regulating use of and impacts on wetlands;
- policy-makers in other sectors such as water, agriculture, health, urban development, and energy;
- stakeholders and local communities who may depend upon wetlands and wetland ecosystem services;
- educators and researchers;
- private sector organizations;

These stakeholders can be re-grouped into four main categories as follows:

1. **Scientists** – including scientists from other institutions, those from other MEAs, researchers and educators;
2. **Policy-makers** – including from the environment and water sectors, but also other related sectors;
3. **Practitioners** – in particular wetland managers, but also others from related fields such as protected area managers;
4. **Users of wetlands** – including communities and the private sector.

Different audiences require different guidance, in terms of content, level of detail, presentation, focus etc. While users of wetlands may need more general background information on wetlands, the other three groups each require a distinct set of guidance. Party representatives, who are policy and decision-makers, may need some technical guidance related to turning Convention requirements into policy, reporting back on Convention requirements, policy implementation and strategic decision-making. On the other hand, practitioners and wetland managers may require concrete guidance on how best to manage wetland sites. At the same time, the STRP scientists also target other scientists (yet a very different audience) who might be more interested in a rigorous study of a specific issue related to wetlands.

The research phase highlighted this dichotomy: on the one hand, for some respondents, it was felt that guidance should be directed more at wetland managers, while on the other hand, others felt that it should be directed more at policy-makers. Some interviewees suggested that

generic guidance could/should then be turned into different products to address specific audiences (although recognising resource constraints with such an approach).

It is to be highlighted that whilst there are other potential audiences for Ramsar scientific and technical guidance, such as policy makers in other sectors (e.g. agriculture or water), educators and private sector organisations, (as highlighted in Resolution XI.16) these were not specifically included in this review.

2.2. How is the scientific and technical guidance defined?

Process to define guidance

According to Resolution IX.11 STRP guidance is defined based in part on priorities identified by the Conference of the Parties (COP) and in part by the STRP itself which identifies new and emerging issues (and which it communicates to the Parties via a “technical briefing note” for approval). In addition, the STRP provides guidance to the COP by reviewing draft resolutions related to scientific and technical issues that are put forward by Parties, and at the request of the Secretariat, and provides advice to the Secretariat.

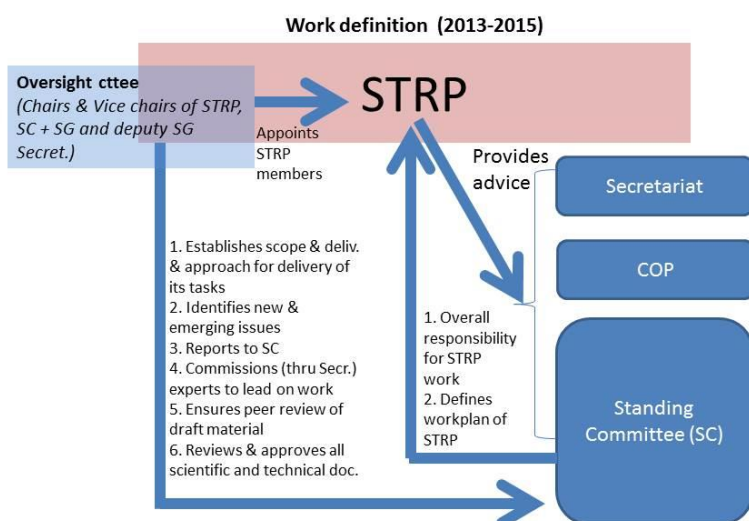


Figure 1: Defining STRP work

Since 2003, the work defined under the STRP is divided into thematic working groups.

A workplan is approved by the Standing Committee every triennium. The 2013-2015 workplan contains over 60 tasks and sub-tasks, categorized by broad themes and undertaken by different thematic working groups. In practice, and in order to reduce conflicts of interest, the STRP members generally do not implement the activities themselves, but rather commission and then review them. In some cases when STRP members undertake the work themselves, those involved do not take part in the review process.

Priorities within the STRP workplan are approved by the COP. Initially, the thematic working groups make suggestions on their priorities, and then report back to the plenary STRP their top actions which are then transposed into the overall STRP priorities. There are nine “highest priority tasks” in the 2013-2015 workplan.

Findings emerging essentially from interviews, confirm that the workplan is unrealistic and inordinately long (while resources are minimal). This emerges essentially from the fact that the workplan is designed to respond to the priorities set by the COP resolution on STRP's work for the coming triennium. As a result, elements of the workplan keep slipping and being postponed to the next triennium, which is a general cause for frustration (and at times, a certain amount of cynicism).

In practice, the STRP workplan for 2013-2015 amounts to an estimated CHF 1,915,000 of which only CHF 150,000 were secured at the time the workplan was adopted (see Resolution XI.17).

Communicating needs for guidance

Policy-makers communicate their guidance needs via the COP which approves the STRP workplan. However, the process for other audiences to communicate guidance is less clear. Indeed, the research phase highlighted a difference of views on the extent to which needs of target groups were effectively communicated and incorporated. Some interviewees reported that they had no opportunity to channel their needs for guidance up to the STRP. Others felt that their needs were well communicated via COP and Standing Committee to the STRP.

In some cases the limited interaction with the STRP NFPs was raised as being a stumbling block for national level stakeholders (and in particular wetland managers) to ensure that their needs were channelled back up to the STRP. In practice, it would seem that much of the workplan to carry out scientific and technical guidance over the triennium is actually developed by the STRP with the COP generally signing off.

2.3. To what extent is the scientific and technical guidance used?

Awareness and use of guidance

In practice, a significant proportion of survey respondents were either not aware of STRP guidance (24%) or either never or rarely used it (50%). From some of the interviews, it also appears that there is a general lack of awareness about the types of guidance tools provided by STRP.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of wetland managers reported that they were not aware of the guidance and therefore did not use it at all. Nevertheless, this figure needs to be taken with caution given the low numbers involved (a total of 7 wetland managers having responded to the survey).

Many interviewees reported that they made use of their national research centres to obtain locally-relevant guidance (also in their own language) which signified that they did not feel the need to use STRP guidance.

Disseminating guidance

Published guidance is essentially disseminated via the website, webinars and workshops. The STRP National Focal Points also have a role to play in distributing guidance locally, although in practice that does not seem to happen much according to this research.

In general, the main gaps with respect to the uptake of guidance were a lack of information and awareness about the existence of the guidance, the language used and the general complexity of the guidance. The key issue raised with respect to dissemination of guidance was language. It was an issue in terms of the actual language of the guidance (English, with only some guidance being translated into Spanish and French), but also in terms of the complexity of the language utilized. Many respondents felt that the language in some of the guidance was unnecessarily complex which excluded non-technical readers. Importantly, it also had an impact on the ability of Parties to have the guidance easily translated.

Responsiveness of guidance to needs

The majority of survey respondents (66%) felt that existing guidance addressed their needs. This figure was lower for just wetland managers, 57% of whom felt that the guidance responded to their needs. According to one survey respondent: *“The STRP is a critical component of the Ramsar Convention. It is important for the STRP to keep an eye on emerging, global issues relating to wetland management”*.

In contrast, generally interviewees (with whom it was possible to delve a little deeper) felt that the guidance that exists is too general. In this respect, the diverse issues associated with different wetland types and different regions were raised repeatedly by interviewees. There were calls for more site-specific guidance.

Both survey respondents and interviewees were asked to outline what were their key needs in terms of scientific and technical guidance. Some of the resulting responses were extremely specific and “scientific” such as for example, managing genetically-modified organisms in and around wetlands. Other examples of specific needs that were expressed were:

1. Valuation of wetland ecosystems
2. Wetlands and extractive industries
3. Minimum requirements for Ramsar site monitoring
4. Wetlands and urbanisation
5. Techniques for wetland restoration
6. Application of 'wise use' principles to wetland management
7. Management of peatlands

A more comprehensive list of perceived gaps can be found in Annex 1 (questions 3 and 17).

Other needs expressed were more technical or practical and related to the management of wetlands or means of implementing the convention. Capacity needs were raised, in particular training for wetland managers in, for instance, monitoring tools.

In most cases, respondents and interviewees called for practical guidance that they could apply either for decision-making or for directly managing wetlands.

2.4. How effective are the content and format of guidance?

Current guidance tends to be provided and disseminated via written documents: handbooks, technical reports, technical briefing notes and resolutions. Guidance to Parties is indirectly

provided by the STRP through its role as reviewer of scientific and technical draft materials that are submitted to Parties, and in raising new and emerging issues.

The majority (36%) of survey respondents used handbooks over other guidance documents. This was followed by resolutions (25%), technical reports (21%) and briefing notes (12%). Interviewees also listed both handbooks and resolutions as the top two tools used. One respondent commented that *“only about 20% of resolutions are relevant to our work”*.

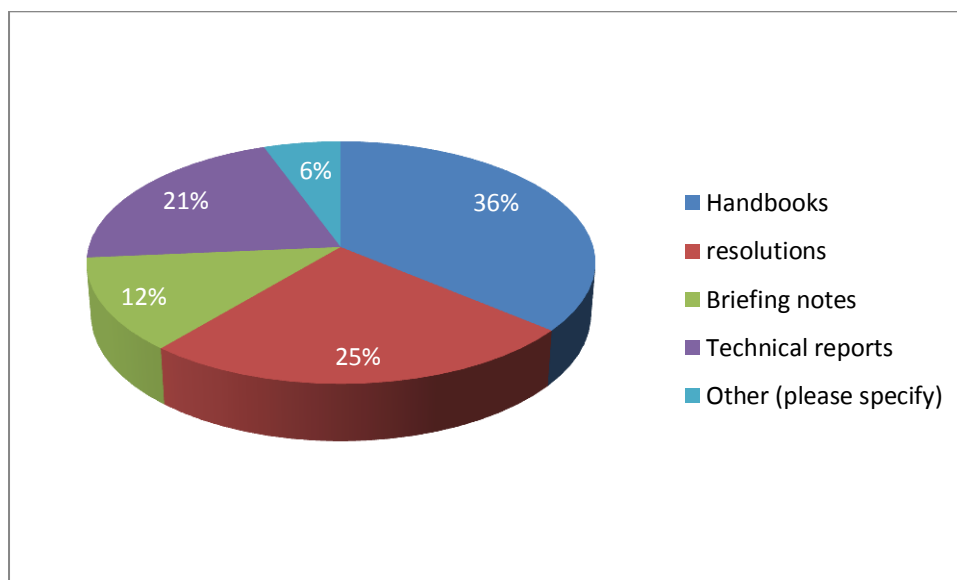


Figure 2: Guidance products

For many interviewees, it was clear that while handbooks were useful, they provided a general framework which then required a significant amount of adapting to local (or national or regional) reality. Thus, in general while handbooks were considered useful, they were also criticized as being too general and rarely directly applicable without significant adaptation.

There were calls for more site-specific expert advice and guidance. In particular, there was a call for more case studies as a means of bringing to life some of the guidance and making it more practical. One interviewee highlighted that there was a need to “modernise” the guidance produced and the overall STRP process.

The relevance of a “signature product” such as the “State of the World’s Wetlands” which is currently being scoped under the 2013-2015 workplan, was raised as being something on which the STRP could focus more of its attention.

Scientific versus technical guidance

The distinction between scientific and technical guidance was generally quite blurred. Some interviewees saw scientific and technical as two sides of the same coin: with the scientific guidance being key to informing technical guidance and policy. Importantly, policy was mentioned frequently as the ultimate aim of this guidance. This probably reflects the fact that the majority of respondents were policy-makers.

A significant majority (68%) of survey respondents reported that they felt that the guidance was neither too scientific nor too technical. The majority (54%) reported using both scientific and technical, while a third (33%) of survey respondents reported using neither.²

For many interviewees, the guidance needed to be rooted in science but then more applicable to policy-making and strategic decision-making.

Modus Operandi

An insignificant majority (53%) of survey respondents reported that they were familiar with the STRP *modus operandi*.

Those that were familiar listed a number of strengths and weaknesses of the current *modus operandi*, but also more generally of the way the STRP operates.

As concerns the strengths of the current *modus operandi*, the following was mentioned:

- It brings together experts from different fields and regions and ensures representation from across different Ramsar regions;
- The fact that there is both scientific and technical information available;
- Sharing of best practices;
- Effective; collaborative; brings together wide range of expertise;
- Addresses the main technical aspects of the Ramsar Convention;
- Open access platform;
- Basic model works well as shown by the wide acknowledgement of the quality of STRP outputs at CoP11.

The following weaknesses of the current *modus operandi* were raised:

- Too heavy and far removed from the reality in the field;
- There is no information provided on when an STRP NFP is not performing is recommended task;
- Too large a work plan for each triennium;
- Not known very well;
- Language of communication with decision makers;
- Not easy to access and find information;
- Pragmatic Conservation/ Education;
- "Over-technical" at times;
- Inadequate financing;
- Limited capacity;
- Inadequate regional representation;
- STRP should focus on key projects - and make sure they are achieved on time;
- Need to refine the tasks of the STRP and increase the involvement of the National STRP Focal Points.

² There are some inconsistencies in survey responses related to the numbers of respondents aware of the guidance, those making use of the guidance and those considering the guidance useful.

3: Analysis of findings

This section provides an analysis of the findings reviewed in the previous section.

Key Challenges identified

While the work of the STRP and its value is widely recognised, there are a number of challenges that have become apparent through this first component of the review. One figure emerging from the survey is particularly telling: *while 60% of respondents felt that the guidance responded to their needs, 74% either never or rarely used it, or were simply not aware of it.* Key challenges therefore, can be summarised as:

Disconnects – there are visible disconnects at different levels: a) between the practical needs of wetland managers and policy-makers and the products emerging from the STRP, b) between STRP national focal points and both wetland managers at one end and the STRP at the other. There is no clear mechanism to collect nationally-relevant (and/or regionally-relevant) requests for scientific and technical guidance related to wetlands and to communicate these needs from the “ground-up” to refer them back to the STRP. Equally, the dissemination of STRP products to target audiences is not as effective as it could be.

Audiences – Ramsar has a diverse audience and this has not been sufficiently reflected in its scientific and technical processes and products.

Language – the technical nature of the language used in STRP guidance as well as the fact that English is the predominant language, have excluded a large number of interested parties from the STRP and its products.

Limited outreach to wetland managers – while there are over 2000 Ramsar sites and an even larger number of wetland managers, this group is not well engaged in the STRP. For example, there is to date no comprehensive mailing list of these managers, and therefore, no means for the STRP to effectively reach this key stakeholder group.³

Breadth of workplan versus resources – the workplan of the STRP is overly ambitious, and yet funding and human resources are extremely limited.

Representation on the STRP – The STRP does not adequately represent the full constituency of the Ramsar Convention. While it is praised for being apolitical, at the same time it may be too remote from its core constituency.

Addressing these challenges

There is a clear and identified need for scientific and technical guidance for implementation of the Ramsar Convention. This role is currently essentially (but not exclusively) played by the STRP which has been praised for the quality of its work and its ability to remain apolitical. The broader challenges that remain relate to making sure that the products

³ It is noteworthy that of the 28 interviewees shortlisted by the Ramsar Secretariat only seven were Ramsar site managers. Of the survey respondents, only 14% (7) were Ramsar site managers.

emerging from the STRP are relevant to their core constituencies, and are practical and useable. In order for this to happen the proposed options below imply some restructuring of the STRP.

Redefining the niche and structure of the STRP

“Hopefully this survey will help to re-prioritise the STRP agenda on themes that are really having an impact on countries and wetlands. I feel that the focus has been on an agenda with limited visibility and global application.”⁴

It could be argued that the STRP currently functions like a global technical working group of wetlands experts, with tangential links to the Ramsar Convention. As a result, the STRP is probably overly ambitious in its work, as reflected by its huge workplan. The direct consequence is that as the workplan does not get achieved, there is less confidence in the ability of the STRP to deliver on its commitments. Furthermore, products, while relevant and technically-sound, do not appear to effectively reach their intended audiences.

There is an opportunity to streamline the STRP, and the provision of Ramsar guidance more generally, so that structures are more directly linked to key audiences. In practice this could mean making a clearer distinction between direct “convention-related” guidance addressing the needs of two key target audiences (i.e. policy-makers and wetland managers) and broader scientific “wetland-related” guidance focused on key and emerging issues, and targeting the wider scientific community.

Two separate groups or sub-groups could thus be formed, one being the more “inward-looking” body and the other, more “outward-looking”. The latter could be purely scientific, while the former may need to better reflect its constituency and include both policy-makers and wetland managers.

Strengthen a regional approach grounded in partnerships as an avenue to expand STRP’s regional and local relevance and reach

Currently, the STRP is sub-divided into thematic working groups. While these tackle important topics, there remains limited cross-fertilisation across the groups.

Since at the very least some issues are more likely to be common (and language as well) in a given region, a more regional approach to guidance may be warranted. This would have the benefit of not only tapping into other resources, but also ensuring regional relevance as well as language. It is further supported by the mention by several interviewees of the existence and value of their own in-country expertise via universities or research centres.

A more regional approach could be achieved through the establishment of specific sub-groups of the STRP that could also focus the guidance on regionally-relevant issues. These groups, grounded in the regions, could also reach out more effectively to regional and local partners.

Such an approach would require a shift from a centralised structure to a more regional and network-based one.

⁴ Provided originally in Spanish: “Ojala que sirva este encuesta para que la agenda del GECT sea priorizada en temas que realmente están impactando a los países y los humedales. Siento que se ha insistido en una agenda de poca visibilidad y aplicación global”

Furthermore, this approach would be in line with COP11, Resolution XI.18 para.24 which “requests the STRP and Secretariat to identify opportunities and mechanisms for holding intersessional regional or subregional meetings of STRP National Focal Points and other wetland experts in order to strengthen regional and subregional scientific networks...”

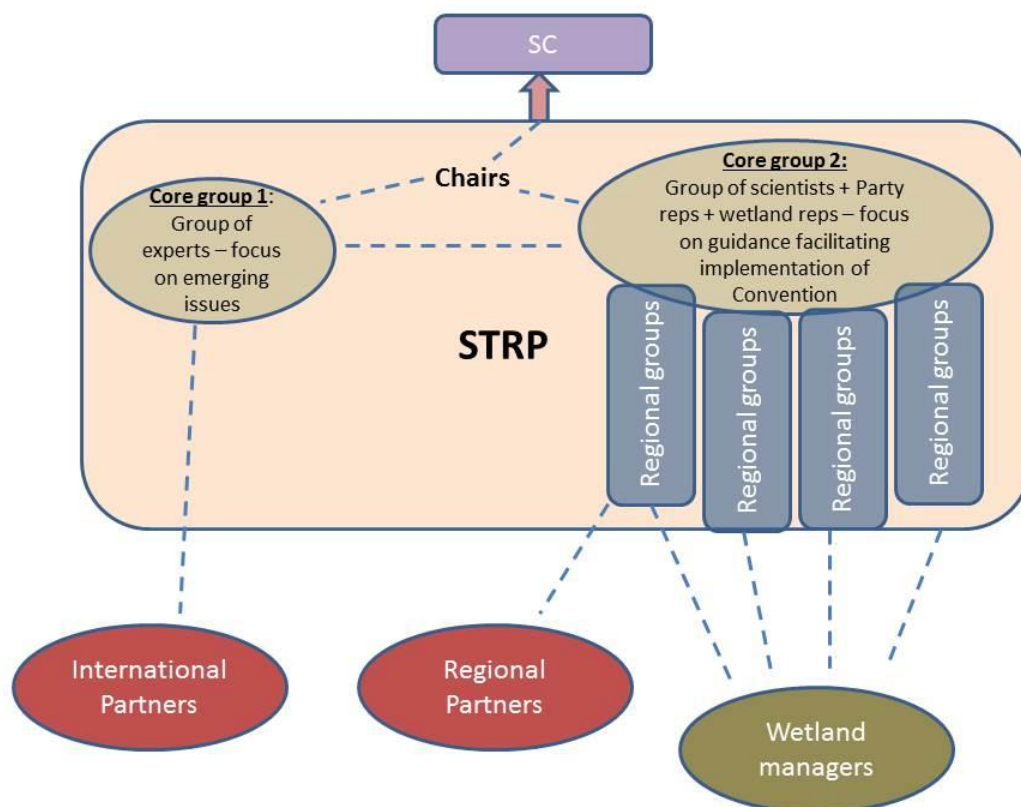


Figure 3: A regional approach with two sub-bodies to the STRP: one more inward-looking (Core group 2) and one more outward-looking (Core group 1). Parties and wetland managers would benefit from better representation in the regional groups under core group 2 while core group 1 would be the lead global, scientific body on wetlands. Outreach to different partners, at different levels, could also be better achieved.

There is a missed opportunity for the STRP to establish stronger ties with diverse regional and/or national research and implementation centres. At regional (and national) levels STRP could establish relevant partnerships that can help to ensure that: a) the work is complementary to theirs, b) other bodies can take on some of the locally-relevant research (and fund it in collaboration with Ramsar/STRP), c) the guidance is developed in the local language(s), d) the guidance is disseminated locally, and local and regional capacities are strengthened. Such an approach would be aligned with the STRP *modus operandi* for 2013-2015 which highlights the importance of “Ensuring continuing national and regional applicability in the work of the STRP”.

While there are calls for more site-specific expert advice and guidance, this may be unrealistic given that there are over 2000 Ramsar sites. Nevertheless, on an opportunistic basis, more

site-based focus for specific guidance could be sought (which could be linked to advisory missions so as to be cost-effective for example).

Categories of guidance and its presentation

It may be useful to distinguish more clearly between four categories of guidance: 1. Reviewing draft scientific and technical materials for approval by the Parties, 2. Guidance that is for Parties to better implement the requirements of the Convention, 3. Maintaining sight of bigger picture and emerging issues, and 4. Guidance that can support wetland managers in their day-to-day management of Ramsar wetlands. A distinction can therefore, also be made as concerns the audience, with the first three types of guidance addressed to policy- and decision-makers and the last, to practitioners. While ultimately it can be argued that science underpins all of the work related to the Convention, as applied by any audience, in practice the type of guidance, its presentation, language and complexity will need to be adapted to different audiences.

In terms of presentation, the use of case studies can be an effective and powerful medium to demonstrate key issues which can be of interest to both audiences. More generally, the same scientific and technical guidance can be “translated” into different content (notably, using different media) for different audiences. Indeed the same core scientific product could theoretically, be turned into four different tools of use to decision-makers, other scientists, users of wetlands and wetland managers. While this requires funding and time, it is essential for the uptake of Ramsar scientific and technical products.

Options could include stricter guidelines concerning the way STRP writes and presents different documents with the audience in mind; or the documents being reviewed and/or edited by the Ramsar Secretariat and/or a communications expert.

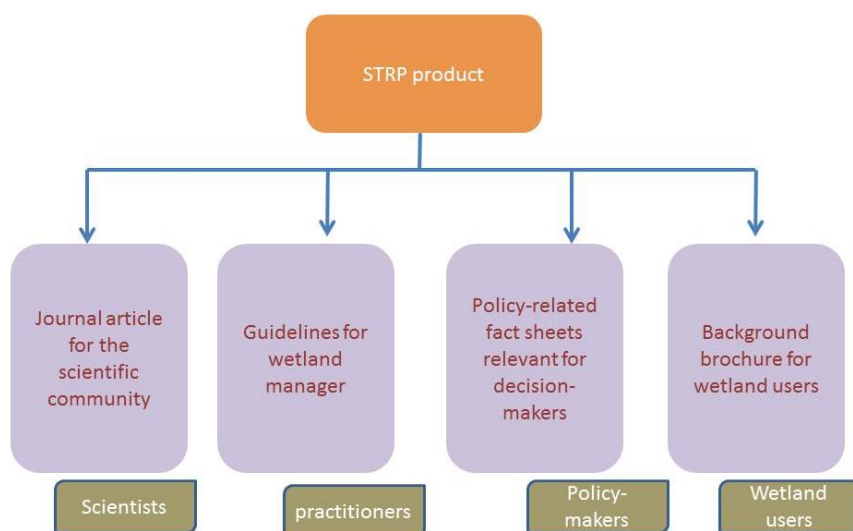


Figure 4: Same guidance for different audiences

Redefining STRP membership and engagement

The current membership of the STRP is composed of scientists acting in their own right. By virtue of having to be English-speakers (as per the *modus operandi* adopted by Res. IX. 11)

the breadth of membership is limited. While there is a requirement to have one person from each region, these are not empowered as “regional representatives”.

The voice of Ramsar wetland managers in-country is not effectively represented on the STRP, despite them being a key stakeholder group and audience for the guidance. There is also a reported lack of engagement by STRP national focal points. One survey respondent for example, specifically highlighted the need to “*strengthen the capacity and role of national STRP Focal Points*”. Some site managers do not know their STRP focal point and some Ramsar focal points have minimal professional exchange with the STRP focal point. As a result, guidance needs do not effectively reach the STRP and vice versa, guidance does not effectively reach a significant part of the intended audience. Membership should be broadened to ensure different disciplines and more effective regional and linguistic representation.

Under the proposed alternative model, regional sub-groups of the STRP could not only operate in the language of the region (or an acceptable common language) but also work on specific regional issues (which are more likely to be common and of relevance than global level issues).

Workplan and funding

The STRP is constrained by the fact that its members are volunteers, and the workplan is an extremely long and unrealistic “wishlist” of elements with no funding attached. As a result there is an implicit understanding that the workplan will never be achieved.

Alternatively, a more practical and accountable approach would be to have a recognised “wishlist” parked somewhere, but then a realistic workplan which would be approved by Parties. This workplan would only contain elements that have funding committed and real names of leaders (or groups of leaders) next to it. As such, there would be some accountability for effective completion of the workplan for a given period. Should new funding or partners come on board for elements in the “wishlist” these could also be submitted as additional elements to the workplan on an inter-sessional basis for example. Reducing the workload of the STRP would help to ensure that what remains in the workplan is actually tackled. Furthermore, elements submitted by Parties could be undertaken directly by STRP members without any conflict of interest.

Expanding the role of the Secretariat

Given the voluntary nature of STRP members, there is a need for a support body that can help to facilitate some of the delivery of the STRP’s work. This role seems to be suited to the Ramsar Secretariat (should it have the resources to do so). It is already engaging with the STRP but could play a more active role in particular with respect to re-developing work produced by the STRP for target audiences, disseminating this work and in capacity building (related to the application of the tools). The Secretariat can also help to maintain momentum, particularly in between meetings.

Monitoring

As one survey respondent noted “*There must be more effective mechanisms to measure the performance/effectiveness of the guidelines and STRP products and services*”. To date, it has been difficult to assess in detail the impact of given guidance. There is a need for feedback loops and means of measuring the impact of guidance that is produced in order to better understand its value and ensure that it is being used, applied and addresses real needs.

Monitoring may be perceived as a costly luxury, but in practice, by working with local partners, it may be a cost-saving venture to ensure that time and money spent in developing guidance in the first place, is well spent. Several options to monitor use of guidance can be envisaged, from full blown surveys of users to simple mechanisms that count for example, product downloads from the website.

In conclusion, there is scope for improving the way Ramsar scientific and technical guidance is defined and reaches its audiences. Tackling this issue requires a number of changes in Ramsar structures and processes. These are further developed in Report 5 under this review.

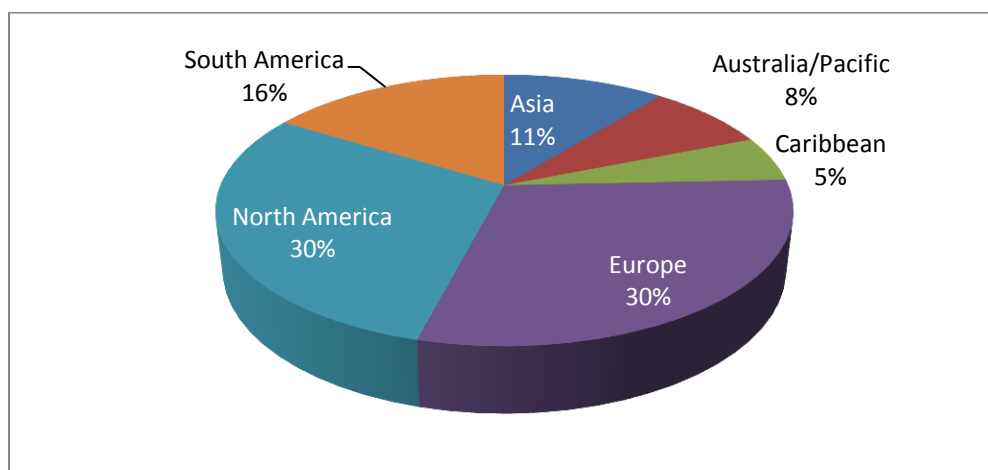
Annex 1: Survey responses

The online survey was sent to 657 e-mail addresses (although there were some duplications and some erroneous addresses) by the Ramsar Secretariat. In total 45 useable responses were received, although not all respondents answered all questions.

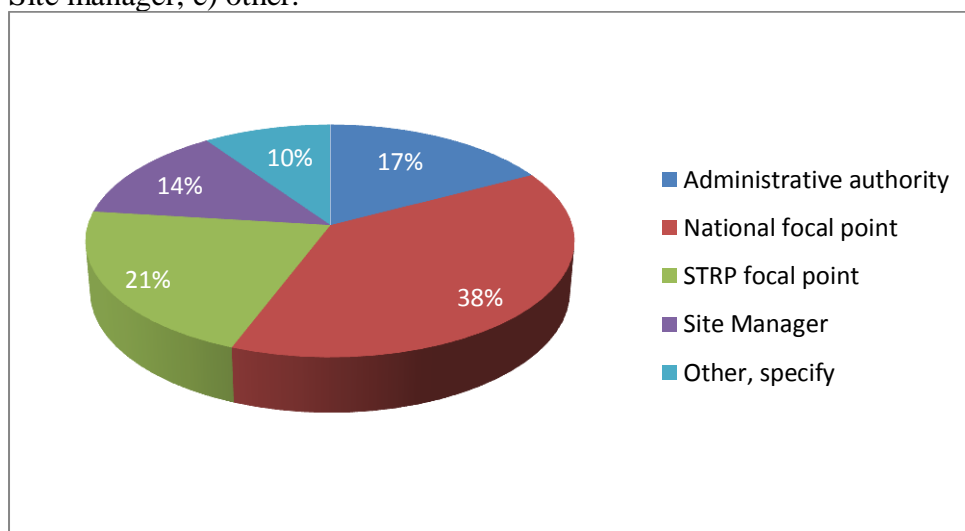
It is noteworthy that a total of 68 people started the survey, but of these only 45 went beyond inserting their names and contact details. This may indicate a number of things: 1. lack of time, 2. that the survey was not relevant to survey recipients; 3. Too many other surveys and demands placed on them at the same time, 4. Lack of reminders, 5. Relatively limited time to complete the survey.

Question 1: Please provide your name and contact details.

Sixty percent (60%) of respondents were either from Europe or North America, with the single largest response group being from the USA.



Question 2: Can you please select which of the following categories you would fall under? a) Administrative authority, b) National Focal Point, c) STRP Focal Point, d) Ramsar Site manager, e) other.



Question 3: How would you describe in a few words your needs in terms of scientific and/or technical guidance?

Specific scientific guidance on:

- Management of salt-water wetlands, certification, identification of keystone species, establishment of a platform for dialogue;
- Surveying, monitoring and evaluation of wetlands, including mapping;
- Climate change and wetlands;
- Valuation of wetland goods and services;
- Study of illegal biodiversity exploitation in and around Ramsar sites;
- Habitat management priorities and shifts in habitat use by species (due to climate change, anthropogenic, or otherwise) ;
- Wetland ecosystem interaction;
- Identifying best water management regimes;
- Arguments for protection and wise use of wetlands;
- Monitoring of wetlands;
- Methodologies for carbon capture;
- Methodologies for strategic environmental impact assessments;
- Methodologies to determine release of GMOs;
- Value addition to wetland products;
- Balancing wetland conservation and development especially extractive industries and urbanisation.

Specific and concrete guidance and training on:

- Implementation of management plans;
- Management of wetlands in mining areas;
- Simple methodology to monitor Ramsar sites;
- Reporting on Ramsar management and informing the development of monitoring, reporting and planning activities;
- Training on the management of protected areas/Ramsar sites;
- Training for site managers, local communities and monitoring tools;
- Building capacity for wetland management eg. wetlands valuation techniques;
- Means of delimiting wetlands at the country level;
- Tested, practical solutions to conservation problems and needs;
- Focus on regional initiatives;
- Reviews and syntheses of best practice guidance in wetland policy and management;
- Cases of good practice in wetland management;
- More inventories in terms of wetlands as systems and also inventories of what is in them.

Specific political, legal and/or technical guidance on:

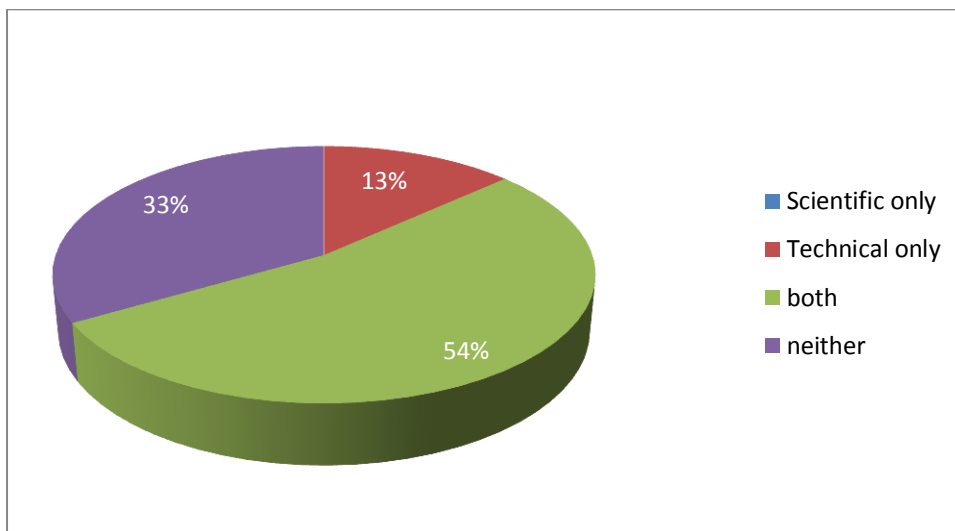
- Elaborating a national plan for wetlands;
- Viability and impacts of some infrastructure in and around wetlands;
- Awareness and perception of people including decision makers towards wetlands;
- Information on wise use of wetlands, legal framework for conservation of wetlands;
- More fora to interact and share science.

Question 4: Are you aware of Ramsar scientific and technical guidance?

A total of 34 (76%) respondents were aware of Ramsar scientific and technical guidance, while 11 respondents (24%) were not.

Question 5: Do you make use of both Ramsar scientific and technical guidance?

None of the respondents used only scientific data, while the majority (54% or 24 respondents) used both scientific and technical guidance. One-third (15) used neither.



Question 6: Does existing scientific and technical guidance address your needs?

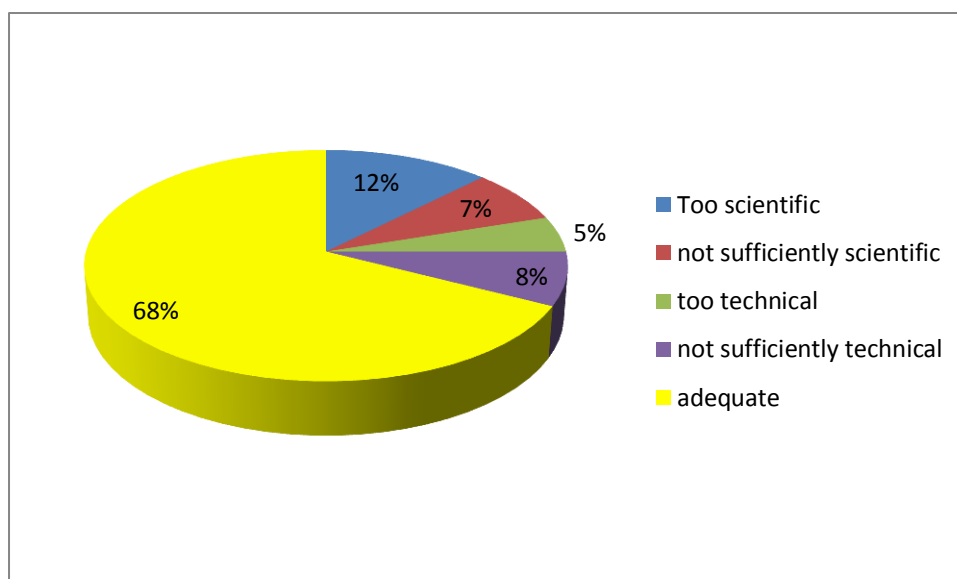
Two-thirds of respondents (30 respondents) felt that existing guidance addressed their needs.

Comments under this question included:

- Printed documentation is easier to read.
- Most of the publications are in English which is not useful to our countries.
- It gives a general overview of expected practices and standards that can be translated to be applied at a state level by our technical staff.
- Guidance needs to be focused on achieving the core components of the Ramsar Convention, e.g. better information on what is meant by the 'wise use' of wetlands, and how different countries are applying this in national legislation.
- Many site managers are not aware of both technical and scientific issues
- It addresses our needs providing general knowledge. Then, we must focus on specific issues and at this point we generally seek advice from local scientific organizations
- We have used this information to define and categorise wetlands.
- Scientific and technical guidance should be more direct and practical.

Question 7: Do you feel that the guidance available is generally too scientific or too technical for your needs?

The majority (68%) of respondents felt that the information was neither too scientific nor too technical, but was just right.



Question 8: Can you easily access and use this guidance?

The majority (73% or 33 respondents) reported that they could easily access the guidance.

Question 9: Are you familiar with examples of guidance (from other conventions or organisations) that you could suggest to improve the way Ramsar guidance is framed and delivered?

The majority (57%) of respondents were not aware of other examples of guidance. For those who were aware, proposed ways to improve Ramsar guidance were:

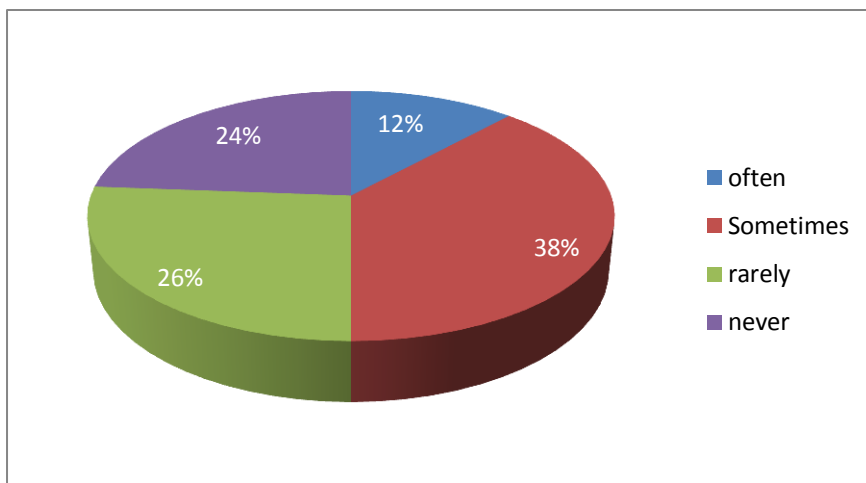
1. to organize some training and workshops,
2. a case study format would be most useful.

Examples of guidance from other conventions that were mentioned were those from the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) manuals and Man and Biosphere Reserves (MAB).

Another example mentioned was documents that are being developed to better understand the ecological importance of habitats and associated species under the European Habitats Directive 92/43/EC, with specific recommendation per habitat type. Something similar could be done per wetland type.

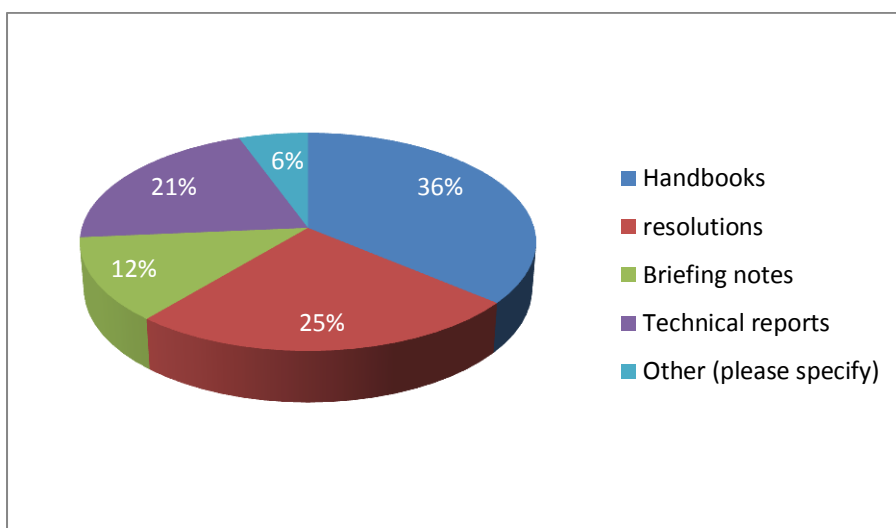
Question 10: Do you use the tools provided by the STRP (and/or Ramsar) to deliver scientific and technical guidance?

Only 12% of respondents (5 in total) reported that they used “often” the STRP guidance, while 38% (16 in total) reported that they used it from time to time and 26% (11) reported that they used it rarely.



Question 11: Which tool(s) do you use most frequently?

The most widely used tools were the handbooks (36%), followed by resolutions (25%) , technical reports (21%) and briefing notes (12%).



Question 12: How would you rate the tools that you use?

The majority (74%) of respondents felt that the quality of the guidance was “good”, with 21% qualifying it as excellent and only 5% rating it as mediocre.

Question 13: Are the tools to deliver scientific and technical guidance to support you user-friendly?

For this question, 31% of respondents reported not to use the tools (which is higher than the 24% reported under question 10 above). Fifty-five percent (55%) reported that they were user-friendly, and 14% that they were not.

Question 14: Is the approach provided to deliver the guidance and tools (i.e. via the STRP website, STRP webinars, the Ramsar Convention website, through meetings or workshops etc.) adequate?

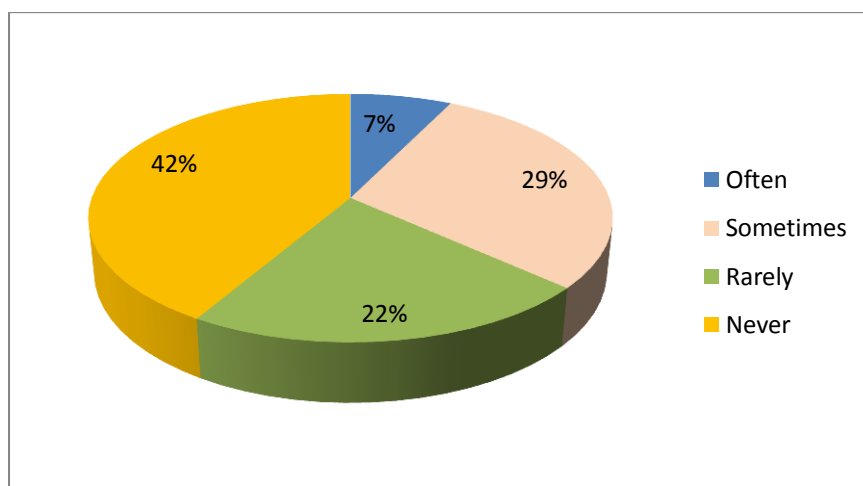
Fifty-six percent (56%) reported that the approach provided to deliver the guidance and tools was appropriate, while 34% did not have an opinion and 10% felt that it was not appropriate. Reasons reported were the complexity of the website, or the fact that they were not even aware of the existence of the guidance or that more active engagement of users of the tools was necessary, rather than a top-down approach. It was also suggested to involve Ramsar Regional Centres and National Focal Points.

Question 15: Are you familiar with the STRP Platform (STRP Portal and Workspace)?

A negligible majority (51%) were aware of the STRP platform.

Question 16: If you answered yes to Question 15, how often do you use the STRP Platform?

Of those respondents that were familiar with the STRP portal, the largest share (42%) never consulted it, 29% consulted it “sometimes”, 22% “rarely” and only 7% consulted it “often”.



Question 17: In your view, what are the three main gaps in terms of responding to your needs for scientific and technical support?

Gaps that were identified by respondents were primarily: more case studies, improved communications, translation of guidance, capacity building, funding, improved collaboration and a regional approach. The following specific gaps in terms of topics were highlighted:

1. Genetically-modified organisms in or near Ramsar sites;
2. Splitting guidance by wetland type;
3. Valuation of wetland ecosystems;
4. Climate change, wetlands as carbon sinks and GHG-exchange;
5. Wetlands and extractive industries;
6. Processes for development of national legislation;
7. Wetland ecosystem interactions, role of microorganism;
8. Minimum requirements for Ramsar site monitoring;
9. Wetlands and urbanisation;
10. Techniques on restoration of wetlands;
11. Application of 'wise use' principles to wetland management;

12. Bio-physical criteria to delimit wetlands;
13. Wetland and agriculture especially paddy rice growing;
14. Techniques on planning of eco-tourism;
15. Strategic environmental impact assessment;
16. Ecological land use planning and connectivity;
17. Identifying environmental limits for maintaining the ecological character of Ramsar sites;
18. Management of peatlands.

Question 18: Are you familiar with the STRP *modus operandi*?

An insignificant majority (53%) reported that they were familiar with the STRP *modus operandi*.

Question 19: What are the main strengths and weakness of the current *modus operandi* of the STRP?

As concerns the strengths of the current *modus operandi*, the following was mentioned:

- It brings together experts from different fields and regions and ensure representation from across different Ramsar regions;
- The fact that there is both scientific and technical information available;
- Sharing of best practices;
- Effective; collaborative; brings together wide range of expertise;
- addresses the main technical aspects of the Ramsar Convention;
- Open access platform;
- Basic model works well as shown by the wide acknowledgement of the quality of STRP outputs at CoP11.

The following weaknesses of the current *modus operandi* were raised:

- Too heavy and far removed from the reality in the field;
- There is no information provided on when an STRP NFP is not performing is recommended task;
- Too large a work plan for each triennium;
- Not known very well;
- Language of communication with decision makers;
- Not easy to access and find information;
- Pragmatic Conservation/ Education;
- "Over-technical" at times;
- Inadequate financing;
- Limited capacity;
- Inadequate regional representation;
- STRP should focus on key projects - and make sure they are achieved on time;
- Need to refine the tasks of the STRP and increase the involvement of the National STRP Focal Points.

Questions 20 and 21:

20. Do you have any suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the STRP ?

21. Please provide us with any final comments

- Improved communications;
- A lighter structure and process;
- More exchange of experiences;
- More intensive and frequent involvement of STRP contact persons in their work would improve practicality of the products;
- Frequent meeting among the STRP focal points at least at regional level;
- Greater involvement by actual practitioners with experience in participative processes and education;
- A more broad-based team may be worth trying;
- Lack of budget;
- Strengthen the capacity and role of national STRP Focal Points;
- It is important for the STRP to keep an eye on emerging, global issues relating to wetland management;
- Strengthen local structure that will facilitate the sharing of expertise;
- Economic valuation of wetlands must be reinforced to ensure that economic decisions do take care of science;
- Ramsar needs to address the requirements created by more participative decision making processes and even promote their adoption through guidance;
- There is no mechanism to assess the performance of the STRP in terms of on the ground results;
- The use of case studies could help in the dissemination of practical, actionable information as well as providing a handle on the on-the-ground performance of the convention itself;
- The STRP needs to be better facilitated to handle its mandate and help to deliver the technical aspects of the Ramsar Convention;
- Regional –level assistance (more decentralised);
- Research agenda more based in real needs of wetlands and countries (rather than global application).

Annex 2: Interviewees for component 1

National Focal Points

1. Pugazhendhi Murugaiyan	Seychelles
2. Habib Abid	Tunisia
3. Walter Regueiro	Uruguay
4. Gordana Beltram	Slovenia
5. Nirawan Pipitsombat	Thailand

Ramsar Site Managers

6. Sebastián Di Martino	Argentina
7. Katsumi Ushiyama	Japan
8. Linda Friar	USA
9. Mazeika Sullivan	USA

Ramsar Administrative Authority

10. Nancy Céspedes.	Chile
11. José Mateo Feliz ⁵	Dominican Republic

STRP Focal point

12. Gloria Santana	Dominican Republic
13. Karen Jenderedjian	Armenia

Other

14. Heather MacKay	South Africa
15. Royal Gardner	USA

⁵ While Mr Mateo started the interview, he then passed me to Ms Gloria Santana, the STRP focal point.