



12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1-9 June 2015

Ramsar COP12 DOC.4

Guidance to Contracting Parties about the operation of COP12

Background

1. This paper provides a briefing for all those involved in the Ramsar Convention's Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) processes and especially for Contracting Parties delegates.

Operation of the COP

2. The 'COP' is formally the "ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)", or in common usage, the "meeting of the Conference of the Parties".
3. The Ramsar Convention operates on a triennial cycle, and the COP meets once every three years. The Conference of the Contracting Parties is the decision-making body of the Convention, and the COP is the key process for Parties to assess progress to date and debate and agree decisions and actions for the future implementation of the Convention, including agreeing upon strategic directions and adopting a Convention core budget for the following three years.

COP Rules of Procedure

4. The 'Rules of Procedure' for the operations of the COP are considered and adopted at the start of each COP. These then govern all COP processes and remain in force until the start of the next COP. The current Rules of Procedure as adopted by COP11 are available at: <http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/rules-cop-2012-e.pdf>. COP delegates are strongly urged to make themselves familiar with the COP Rules of Procedure.
5. Delegates should also be aware that a thorough revision of the current Rules of Procedure has been carried out, and that the amendments approved by Standing Committee for submission to the COP are shown in the information document COP12 DOC.3.

Negotiating and adopting Resolutions

6. The **core business** of the COP is negotiating and adopting Resolutions. This is done through two three-hour plenary sessions each day, running from 10h00 to 13h00 and from 15h00 to 18h00 with interpretation during those hours.
7. Interventions and negotiations during the COP are governed by the Rules of Procedure. Early in the COP, each Draft Resolution (DR) is introduced in plenary session. If there are no objections, or no changes to the text proposed by a Contracting Party, the COP adopts the Resolution, un-amended, at that time, and there is no further discussion of that Resolution.

8. If, however, a Contracting Party objects to the DR or proposes deleting, adding or amending the text, consensus for these changes is first sought in the plenary. If consensus is reached, then the Secretariat prepares and makes available a revised DR (e.g., DR6 Rev.1) for formal adoption later in the COP.
9. If there is disagreement over aspects of the text of a DR, then there are several options:
 - a) If only a few Parties disagree, the COP President may request these **Parties to undertake informal discussions** to seek agreement and report back to the plenary.
 - b) If it is understood that further work is needed on the text of the Draft Resolution, the COP President may request **all interested Parties and observers to form an “informal working group”** to consult together to finalize a new draft text.
 - c) If there is significant disagreement on text among a number of Parties, or groups of Parties, the COP President may call for a formal **“contact group”**, requesting one or more Parties to chair it. It is usually not possible to furnish such groups with interpretation.
10. COP Committees and contact groups meet intersessionally during the COP, i.e., in the morning before the plenary starts, over the two-hour lunch break, and in the evening after plenary (sometimes through the night if necessary!). COP Committees and contact groups continue working (often through several sessions) until agreement is reached and reported back to plenary. It is usually not possible to furnish such groups with interpretation. The Secretariat then prepares a revised DR text for adoption later in plenary.

Paperless COP

11. Through Decision SC47-03, the Standing Committee approved the holding of a “paperless” COP12. In this regard the Secretariat and the government of Uruguay are working in order to have a system that allows a smooth operation of the COP. Further information will be available to participants before the COP.
12. A photocopying service will be available but participants are encouraged to bring with them hard copies of the documents.