



13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

“Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future”
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Draft resolution on wetlands in polar and subpolar regions

Submitted by Sweden

Note from the Secretariat

During the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC54), specific comments and suggested amendments to this draft resolution were tabled by several Parties. Many of these interventions raised concerns that the draft resolution covered matters within the mandate of the Antarctic Treaty and Antarctic Council. At the invitation of the Chair, the Standing Committee asked Sweden to chair a contact group to prepare a revised text taking into consideration the comments made. Some Parties remained uncomfortable with references to the Antarctic and the Antarctic Treaty in the revised text. This led the Committee to take the following decision:

Decision SC54-29: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.15 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the amendment tabled by the United Kingdom, supported by Argentina, Australia and Uruguay.

The area and the Contracting Parties this resolution addresses

1. HAVING CONSIDERED the area that the present Resolution addresses, namely the Arctic and subarctic as delineated by the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group, [the Antarctic as delineated by the Antarctic Treaty (the area south of 60°S latitude)] and the subantarctic defined as areas with tundra climate (ET) according to the Köppen climate classification¹ between 45°S and 60°S latitude, except mountain areas without adjacent lowland tundra;
2. HAVING ALSO CONSIDERED that while some measures to mitigate impacts on polar and subpolar areas can take place *ex situ*, for example mitigating climate change, much can be done for the polar and subpolar areas *ex situ*, and so the resolution also addresses all the Contracting Parties; and RECALLING Resolution X.25 on *Wetlands and "biofuels"* and Resolution X1.14 on *Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, that suggest that restoration of peatland can be such one measure;

¹ According to Peel, M. C.; Finlayson, B. L.; McMahon, T. A. (2007). "Updated world map of the Köppen–Geiger climate classification". *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.* 11: 1633–1644. doi:10.5194/hess-11-1633-2007. ISSN 1027-5606.

Polar and subpolar wetland biodiversity, ecosystem services and vulnerability

3. NOTING that various types of wetlands occur in the polar and subpolar regions, many of them having subtypes and biodiversity that exists only in these regions, which are of global importance, and of which several are frozen permanently or during most of the year;
4. AWARE of the diversity and value of wetland ecosystems in polar and subpolar regions and their global connections via the flyways of migratory birds and migration routes of marine mammals;
5. RECOGNIZING the importance of wetlands for their biodiversity, their ecosystem services for indigenous peoples and local communities, and FURTHER RECOGNIZING that their function as carbon sinks and storage is of global significance in the context of climate change, and therefore of global concern;
6. RECOGNIZING that polar and subpolar wetland ecosystems are very sensitive and vulnerable, for example to oil spills that are unusually long-lived and difficult to address in dark midwinters and extremely low temperatures, and that these regions are also among those where climate change will continue to have a large impact; and ALSO RECOGNIZING that land areas adjacent to wetlands in these regions are also vulnerable, for example to long-term vegetation damage recovery that can lead to problems with severe erosion which, following deposition, can damage wetlands;
7. CONSCIOUS that climate change contributes to permafrost and ice thaw that can permanently alter polar wetlands such as palsa mires, as well as to raised sea levels, which will affect intertidal and coastal wetlands, resulting in impacts on feeding habitats for migratory waterbirds and important sites for the reproduction of fish, marine mammals and other aquatic life;

Knowledge and awareness

8. CONSCIOUS that much scientific data is still needed about wetland ecosystems in the polar and subpolar regions, and that knowledge remains relatively poorly assessed, including with respect to the historical evolution, geographic distribution and area coverage of different wetlands types, and their biodiversity, ecological functions, ecosystem services and other important values as well as their vulnerability;
9. ALSO CONSCIOUS of the urgent need for increased knowledge of polar and subpolar wetlands, for effective conservation and wise use;

Protected areas and areas of high conservation value

10. RECOGNIZING that there are protected areas in the polar and subpolar regions and that their total area has increased in the last 25 years and nearly doubled in arctic and subarctic regions; that there is a wide range of management categories, from nature reserves to protection with sustainable use; that the level of protection and governance varies throughout these regions; and that at the end of 2017, there were approximately 80 designated Ramsar Sites in the Arctic and subarctic, and five Sites in the subantarctic;
11. CONCERNED that while progress has been made, there is no analysis of how well the network of protected areas that include wetlands fulfils the criterion of being an “ecologically connected, representative, and effectively managed network of protected and specially managed areas

that protects and promotes the resilience of biological diversity, ecological processes and cultural heritage”;

- [12. RECOGNIZING that even if the Antarctic is not part of any territory of the Contracting Parties, international agreements protecting certain areas in the Antarctic are in place; for example, the Antarctic Treaty and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources;]
13. ALSO RECOGNIZING that CAFF has recognized 97 marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance in the arctic and subarctic², regions where impact from shipping should be avoided or mitigated, and that several of these areas include coastal wetlands;

Threats to wetlands

14. RECOGNIZING the potential threats against wetlands generated by current and possible future development, for example a possible increase in shipping and increased demand for extraction of natural resources, in the polar and subpolar regions;
15. RECALLING that the polar and subpolar regions are significantly affected by climate change, especially in the northern hemisphere, and are among the most rapidly changing ecosystems in the world;
16. RECALLING that wildfires have increased in the Arctic and subarctic, even in the dried upper layer of peatlands;
17. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment notes several changes in the arctic ecosystems, for example rapid northward shifts of northern tree lines as a result of recent rises in summer temperatures, marine species changing their food habits due to lack of prey and breakdowns in food webs, resulting in specimens in bad condition because of a lack of food or having to consume excessive energy in increased foraging;
18. ALSO RECOGNIZING that some red-listed species such as the spoon-billed sandpiper, Siberian crane and arctic fox may be affected by competition from more southern species that are becoming established at higher latitudes, and that invasive alien species also may be establishing and spreading in these regions;
19. RECOGNIZING that the CAFF Arctic Biodiversity Assessment notes declines in some wetland types in the Arctic, and that the Global Assessment on Peatlands Biodiversity and Climate Change adopted by Decision IX/16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity on *Biodiversity and climate change* states that arctic peatlands are vulnerable;

International co-operation

20. RECALLING the memorandum of cooperation signed at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11, Bucharest, 2012) between the Ramsar Secretariat and the CAFF Secretariat; and
21. RECOGNIZING that CAFF is undertaking an initiative on enhancing engagement in relation to the role and functions of arctic wetlands as a resource to support sustainable development and resilience in the Arctic;

² AMAP/CAFF/SDGW. Identification of Arctic marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance. Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) IIc.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Knowledge and awareness

22. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties to obtain sufficient data about polar and subpolar wetlands and to undertake the needed complementary inventories, research and assessment of polar and subpolar wetlands;
23. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to make sure that assessments of polar and subpolar wetlands are made, which may include the state of wetlands, hot-spot analysis for wetland biodiversity, and gaps in the network of protected areas covering their representation and connectivity for the different climate change scenarios in these regions, and how this may affect the wetlands;
24. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to work with the support of the Secretariat to raise awareness of the value of polar and subpolar wetlands and to consolidate existing knowledge for decision-making for their conservation and (sustainable and) wise use, and to highlight the importance of each individual's behaviour to prevent wildfires and off-road driving that may cause damage;

Protected areas and areas of high conservation value

25. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to designate new protected areas in polar and subpolar regions where protected areas with certain wetland types are under-represented in the network of protected areas;
26. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to designate new Ramsar Sites in polar and subpolar regions, [except for Antarctica,] where certain wetland types are under-represented in the network of Ramsar Sites;
27. [ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to designate more protected areas through international agreements in the area covered by the Antarctic Treaty, where there are unprotected wetland biodiversity hotspots;]

Wise use and mitigation of impact on wetlands and restoration

28. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to ensure that restoration measures in wetlands are prioritized and taken to improve the connectivity between suitable habitats, especially for sites of importance for migrating wetland species, and sites with available fresh water in subregions where fresh water may become scarce with continuing climate change;
29. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to ensure that physical planning, development projects and tourism activities take proper care of wetlands in polar and subpolar regions, with, for example, off-road driving being forbidden in areas with sensitive habitats;
30. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with domestic or semi-domestic grazing animals to ensure that the population size of these herds is kept at a level that does not risk wetland populations of wild grazing animals, and that the combined grazing pressure of domestic and wild animals does not risk overgrazing of the wetlands;

31. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to mitigate large-scale erosion problems that may arise or already exist because of different kinds of exploitation, for example roads, off-road driving and extraction of natural resources, through measures that may address both wetlands and terrestrial habitats;
32. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to ensure that measures to eradicate existing and future possible invasive alien species are put into place;
33. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to restore peatlands with large carbon storage, regardless of their climate zone, in order to mitigate climate change in the polar and subpolar regions;

International cooperation

34. CALLS ON the Ramsar Secretariat to consider synergies with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to identify mechanisms and incentives for the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands; and further CALLS ON the Liaison Group of the biodiversity-related conventions to mobilize relevant frameworks, such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to improve the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands;
35. [INVITES the Secretariat to make informal contacts with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat and the Member States in order to find ways of exchanging information about wetlands in the region and possible ways to improve the status of wetland habitat and species;]
36. INVITES the Secretariat to create an ad hoc working group with Ramsar, UNFCCC, CBD, IPBES, the Convention on Migratory Species/Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (CMS/AEWA), the Arctic Council and CAFF, and the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats to work on polar and subpolar wetlands; and

Follow-up

37. URGES concerned Contracting Parties, with the support of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and the Secretariat in cooperation with relevant other multilateral environmental agreements, Ramsar Regional Initiatives, regional organizations, international organization partners and others, to establish an assessment of the polar wetlands and to present reports of the results (one for each hemisphere may also be acceptable) at COP15 in 2024. Short progress reports can be presented at COP14 in 2021.