

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

“Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future”
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 21-29 October 2018

Ramsar COP13 Doc.8

Report of the Chair of the Standing Committee

Introduction

1. The Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention was established by [Resolution 3.3](#) (Regina, 1987) to oversee Convention affairs and the activities of the Secretariat between ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties. The regional composition, functions, and responsibilities of the Standing Committee and its members are governed by [Resolution VII.1](#) (1999) as amended by [Resolution XI.19](#) (2012), which was itself superseded by [Resolution XII.4](#) (2015). In all matters not specified in Resolution VII.1, the rules of procedure for meetings of the Standing Committee are governed *mutatis mutandis* by the [Rules of Procedure for the Conference of the Contracting Parties](#).
2. The 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties elected a new Standing Committee (SC) to oversee Convention matters during the triennium until the following COP, to take place in the United Arab Emirates in 2018; the inaugural meeting of the new Standing Committee (SC50) elected Uruguay as its Chair and Australia as Vice-Chair. The present composition of the Standing Committee reflects the regional proportions mandated by Resolution XII.4, outlined below:

Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Senegal, Seychelles and Tunisia;
Asia: Iraq, Nepal and Republic of Korea
Europe: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia and Romania;
Latin America and the Caribbean: Colombia, Honduras and Suriname;
North America: United States of America;
Oceania: Australia.
3. The COP12 host country, Uruguay, and the COP13 host country, United Arab Emirates, are also full members.
4. Switzerland (as the host country of the Ramsar Secretariat) participates as a permanent observer. The Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and six official International Organization Partners (IOPs) in the work of the Convention (BirdLife International, IUCN-International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International, WWF International and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)) are invited to participate as observers in the Standing Committee meetings.
5. Countries that are not Contracting Parties but have expressed an interest in joining the Convention, as well as other experts and/or institutions that the Standing Committee may

consider appropriate for assisting in its consideration of particular agenda items, may be also admitted as observers at meetings of the Standing Committee.

6. At its 50th meeting, following the close of COP12 in Punta del Este, the new Standing Committee elected Uruguay as its Chair, Australia as Vice-Chair, and Senegal as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance. Uruguay has been represented in the Chair by Mr. Jorge Rucks.
7. The Standing Committee has been entrusted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties with the supervision of ongoing matters, including financial and budgetary matters, the Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016-2024, increasing the visibility of the Convention, the Ramsar Regional Initiatives and the preparation of COP13 in 2018, as well as consideration of any other relevant matters raised by members and observers.
8. Notice of each meeting of the Standing Committee was distributed to all Contracting Parties through diplomatic notification, and Parties that are not members of the Committee were invited to attend in an observer capacity if they so wished. An increasing number of Parties have attended Standing Committee meetings as observers. The Secretariat prepared all documentation to be considered by each SC meeting in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. The documents were published on the Ramsar website three months in advance of the meetings.
9. The reports and decisions of each Standing Committee meeting have been distributed to all Contracting Parties by diplomatic notes in the three official languages of the Convention. The Standing Committee reports and decisions have also been published promptly on the Convention website.
10. In the present report, only the main issues the Standing Committee has dealt with are highlighted, from mid-July 2015 (the close of the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties) to the end of June 2018.

Overview of the main issues considered and decisions taken

11. The Standing Committee met five times during the period under review:
 - 50th Meeting: immediately after the close of Ramsar COP12 in Punta del Este, Uruguay, on 9 June 2015;
 - 51st Meeting: 23 – 27 November 2015, in Gland, Switzerland;
 - 52nd Meeting: 13 – 17 June 2016, in Gland, Switzerland;
 - 53rd Meeting: 29 May – 2 June 2017, in Gland, Switzerland;
 - 54th Meeting: 23 – 27 April 2018, in Gland, Switzerland.
12. The Management Working Group of the Standing Committee met, in ordinary or closed sessions, prior to the 51st, 52nd, 53rd and 54th Standing Committee meetings to discuss issues within its competences and to report its recommendations to the Standing Committee meeting in plenary.
13. The working groups and subgroups of the Standing Committee met prior to and during the Standing Committee meetings.
14. The following sections provide a summary of the main issues dealt with by the Standing Committee at each of its meetings, and the decisions adopted. The reports of the meetings and

texts of the decisions are available at <https://www.ramsar.org/about/standing-committee-2015-2018-meetings>.

50th Meeting: Punta del Este (Uruguay), 9 June 2015

15. As mentioned above, at its 50th meeting, following the close of COP12 in Punta del Este, the Standing Committee members newly chosen by the Conference of the Parties elected Uruguay as their Chair and Australia as Vice-Chair.
16. In addition, the SC elected the following Parties to the Subgroup on Finance for 2015-2018: Australia (Oceania), United States of America (North America), Estonia (Europe), Senegal (Africa), Suriname (Latin America and the Caribbean), Republic of Korea (Asia) and Canada, as outgoing Chair of the Subgroup. Senegal was elected as Chair of the Subgroup on Finance.
17. The Standing Committee agreed to lead an open ended working group to review resource mobilization and the partnership framework and plan and report back to SC51. It also agreed the establishment of a working group to oversee the implementation of CEPA, and a working group to improve existing management instruments between IUCN, the Standing Committee and the Secretary General.
18. The Standing Committee also nominated the following representatives to serve as the Management Working Group: Romania as outgoing SC Chair for the 2012-2015 triennium, South Africa as outgoing SC Vice-Chair for the 2012-2015 triennium, Uruguay as current SC Chair, Australia as current SC Vice-Chair, Senegal as current Chair of the Subgroup on Finance and Canada as outgoing Chair of the Subgroup on Finance. The Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) for the 2012-2015 triennium was also called to serve while the appointment of the STRP Chair for the triennium 2015-2018 was pending. The Standing Committee welcomed statements by Fiji, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America that they would observe the Management Working Group as interested Contracting Parties.

51st Meeting: 23 – 27 November 2015, in Gland, Switzerland

19. In its first full work meeting after COP12, the new Standing Committee considered the issues raised by the decisions of the 49th and 50th meetings and of COP12.
20. The Standing Committee received the video report of the Chair of the STRP and his consideration of the STRP work programme, and instructed the Secretariat to present an amended STRP work plan to SC52, prioritizing tasks and reflecting budgetary constraints, taking into account the comments made and seeking further input from Contracting Parties and their STRP National Focal Points.
21. The Standing Committee also took note of the recommendations of the Management Working Group, and decided to mandate the Standing Committee Chair to share with the Secretary General the conclusions reached by the Standing Committee during its closed meeting. Based on the decisions taken in this respect the Standing Committee authorized the Executive Team of the Standing Committee to take the necessary steps to implement these conclusions. The Chair of the Standing Committee, in the name of the Executive Team, then announced that Wednesday 25 November 2015 had been the last day in post for the outgoing Secretary General, Christopher Briggs, and thanked him for his commitment to the Convention and wished him well for the future. He explained that the Committee had asked Ania Grobicki, the

Deputy Secretary General, to fulfil the role of Acting Secretary General as of Thursday 26 November 2015, and that she had accepted.

22. Regarding the Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a revised version, taking into account the comments made, for consideration by SC52.
23. Regarding the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Standing Committee agreed to establish a new Working Group to examine the implications of the proposed new Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives and asked the Secretariat to support the setting up of this group. It also instructed the Secretariat to complete the assessment of existing Regional Initiatives and to develop further the common communications strategy taking into account the comments made at the meeting.
24. The Standing Committee agreed to establish a Subgroup on COP13 with the following composition: Australia representing Oceania, Cambodia representing Asia, Canada representing North America, Honduras representing Latin America and the Caribbean, Romania representing Europe, Tunisia representing Africa, United Arab Emirates (Chair) as host country for COP13, and Uruguay as host country for COP12. It agreed that other Contracting Parties could serve as observers of the Subgroup.
25. The Standing Committee also instructed the Secretariat to pursue renewal of the agreement with Stetson University College of Law and other renewal processes as necessary. It decided to defer until SC52 consideration of the new formal agreements and joint work plans of the Ramsar Convention and partners.
26. The Standing Committee asked the Secretariat to amend the document on the development of the format for National Reports to COP13, updating it with progress made based upon the comments made, and submit the amended version to SC52.
27. On the process and proposals for a timeframe to implement the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention, the Standing Committee noted the presentation given and agreed that the Secretariat could continue its work along the lines indicated.
28. The Standing Committee also instructed the Secretariat to present for consideration at SC52 a shorter, more focused CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat that was more clearly aligned to Resolutions and the Strategic Plan, taking into account any written comments received from Contracting Parties, and including plans for future World Wetlands Day celebrations.
29. The Standing Committee adopted the report of the Subgroup on Finance and the recommendations made in it, and: approved the Subgroup's proposed reallocation of 2014 surplus funds; approved the audited 2014 financial statements; recorded its thanks to all Contracting Parties and partners that had made voluntary contributions in 2015; and approved the new format for the 2015 income statement in line with the reporting requirements established by Swiss law. Regarding COP12 finances, the Committee noted that Uruguay had transferred USD 180,000 (CHF 173,118) in June 2015 and thanked Uruguay for the prompt payment. It instructed the Secretariat to discontinue fundraising for COP12 at the end of 2015 and take the sponsored delegate deficit of CHF 125,000 from the 2014 surplus reallocation. It instructed the Secretariat to begin fundraising for COP13 from 2016. The Committee noted the current status of Contracting Parties' outstanding annual contributions, and encouraged the

Secretariat to continue to take actions to resolve this and to report to SC52. Similarly, it noted the actions of the Secretariat since SC48 to reduce the number of outstanding contributions; encouraged Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions to resolve them with the Secretariat; and agreed to changes to the COP12-approved 2016 core budget for a variety of line items, while noting that the overall budget remained the same.

Appointment of the next Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention

30. In accordance with Decision SC51-09, the Executive Team of the Standing Committee led the process of selecting the new Secretary General.
31. In order to ensure a transparent process, on 11 February 2016 the Ramsar Convention Secretariat notified National Focal Points and Heads of Ramsar Authoritative Authorities that the selection process had begun, and invited them to disseminate widely the terms of reference agreed for the position, in parallel with the search process established by IUCN with the support of SRI Executive (SRI) which had been contracted to carry out the recruitment process in accordance with IUCN recruitment policy and the standard international selection process. The vacancy announcement was published between 4 February and 4 March 2016.
32. The Selection Committee was chaired by Mr. Jorge Rucks, Chair of the Executive Team, and made up of a further six members, ensuring a balanced regional and gender representation: Mr. David Papps (Australia), Vice-Chair of the Executive Team 2015-2018; Mr. Abdou Salam Kane (Senegal), Chair of the Subgroup on Finance and member of the Executive Team 2015-2018; Ms. Doina Catrinoiu (Romania), Chair of the Executive Team 2012-2015; Mr. Ahmed Esmaeil Al-Hashmi (United Arab Emirates), COP13 host; Ms. Barbara M. De Rosa-Joynt (United States of America), representative of North America on the 2015-2018 Standing Committee; and Ms. Inger Andersen, Director General of IUCN.
33. After a rigorous evaluation process that included an analysis of candidates' compliance with the requirements established in the vacancy announcement, the preparation of a competency profile and telephone interviews, SRI submitted 16 candidates for the consideration of the Selection Committee. The Committee received CVs, competency profiles and summaries of applications for each of the 16 candidates. Each member of the Committee sent their evaluations to the Chair by email. There was agreement on the six candidates to move to the face-to-face interview phase.
34. The interviews took place in Gland on 9 and 10 June 2016. Between 13 and 17 June the Chair presented to SC52 a recommendation for the appointment of the next Secretary General, after consideration and approval by the Management Working Group.
35. SC52 unanimously selected Ms. Martha Rojas Urrego as the new Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention; she began her term on 22 August 2016.

52nd Meeting: 13 – 17 June 2016, in Gland, Switzerland

36. Following the opening of the 52nd Meeting, the Standing Committee approved the revised agenda, with the inclusion of discussion of progress made by working groups in the item on *Report of the Management Working Group*, and changes in the working programme for this item and those on *Update on partnerships and synergies* and *Update on the process of selection of the new Secretary General*.

37. Regarding the STRP work plan for 2016-2018, the Standing Committee approved it with the exception of task 2.5 *Management of mosquito disease vectors in wetland*, on which it requested informal consultations between the involved countries, and amendments to take into account the comments made at the meeting. On Friday 17 June, the Secretariat reported on behalf of the STRP Chair that the interested Parties had reached agreement regarding Task 2.5 of the STRP work plan, and read out the amended text. The Standing Committee took note of the amendment to the work plan.
38. Regarding preparations for COP13, the Standing Committee took note of the report of the United Arab Emirates of the Subgroup's work. The COP would take place between 21 and 29 October 2018, and progress had been made in developing the MOU between the United Arab Emirates and the Secretariat, though it had not been finalized.
39. On 16 June the Standing Committee met in a closed session, following which the Chair informed those present that a new Secretary General of the Convention had been selected unanimously and had signed the contract with IUCN. The SC Chair thanked the members of the Selection Committee, the members of the Standing Committee and his colleagues in the Executive Team for their contributions to the process. The Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee read out the press release which accompanied the appointment.
40. The Standing Committee approved the National Report format for COP13, following the presentation of the format by the Secretariat and the incorporation of the Parties' comments. It also agreed that the National Reporting format could be made available to all Parties through an online system, together with an off-line option, and requested the Secretariat to present an evaluation for the next COP regarding the use of the online system.
41. Regarding the implementation of the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention according to Resolution XII.10, the Standing Committee approved the composition and membership of the Independent Advisory Committee for Wetland City Accreditation as presented by the Secretariat, and invited the North America and Latin America and the Caribbean regions to appoint members. The Standing Committee also approved the continuation of the work according to the timetable for implementation of the Wetland City accreditation, and requested continued actions to streamline processes and minimize the impact on Secretariat time and resources.
42. The Standing Committee approved the MOUs between the Ramsar Convention and 1) UNEP; 2) the Nagao Natural Environment Foundation; and 3) UN-Habitat on the Wetland Cities accreditation of the Ramsar Convention, amended to take into account the comments made by the Contracting Parties. It also took note of the agreement between the Secretariat and the Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia. In addition, the Standing Committee decided that the Management Working Group should be asked to review all new MOUs and other such agreements between the Ramsar Secretariat and other bodies, at its meeting immediately before the Standing Committee meeting at which the agreements were to be submitted for approval.
43. Following the presentation by the Acting Secretary General of the document on the costs of actions to implement COP12 Resolutions in the 2016-2018 triennium, which incorporated earlier comments made by the Parties, the Standing Committee took note of the amended document and confirmed that the Secretariat should continue to focus on the non-core fundraising priorities identified in Resolution XII.1 Annex 3.

44. After the Acting Secretary General presented a modified version of the Secretariat's 2016 work plan, which had been prepared in response to the request of the Standing Committee and taking into account the comments made earlier in the meeting, the Standing Committee approved it on the understanding that Parties might provide further advice on how to streamline activities. The Standing Committee decided to consider the Secretariat work plan for the 2016-2018 triennium at SC53.
45. After taking note of the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Standing Committee approved the revised CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat for 2016-2018.
46. The Standing Committee decided that the theme for World Wetlands Day 2017 would be "Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction" and that the theme for World Wetlands Day 2018 would be linked to urban wetlands, the exact wording to be decided when the theme for COP13 had been finalized.
47. Regarding the Operational Guidelines on Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Standing Committee adopted the revised Operational Guidelines, submitted to the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee by the Working Group for the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, as "Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention".
48. It also approved the following list of Ramsar Regional Initiatives as operating within the framework of the Convention for the period 2016-2018: 1) Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA), 2) Ramsar Regional Centre – Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA), 3) Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia (RRC-EA), 4) Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (Centro Regional Ramsar para la Capacitación e Investigación sobre Humedales en el Hemisferio Occidental, CREHO), 5) West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WACOWet), 6) Niger River Basin Network (NigerWet), 7) Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands (Iniciativa Regional de Conservación y Uso Sostenible de los Humedales Altoandinos), 8) Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin (Iniciativa para la Conservación y Uso Sustentable de los Humedales Fluviales de la Cuenca del Plata), 9) Caribbean Wetlands Regional Initiative (CariWet), 10) Regional Initiative for the Integral Management and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs (Iniciativa Regional para la Conservación y Uso Racional de Manglares y Corales), 11) East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, 12) Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet), 13) Carpathian Wetlands Initiative, 14) Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet), 15) Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet). The Standing Committee requested the Working Group, in conjunction with the Secretariat, to present at its 53rd meeting a summary report of the issues raised by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives and any proposals related to them.
49. Following the end of the meeting's interpretation provision, the Standing Committee endorsed the four new Ramsar Regional Initiatives named in Doc. SC52-12 and approved an allocation from the Ramsar core budget of CHF 30,000 for each of them, as follows: 1) Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, 2) Regional Initiative for Central Asia, 3) Indo-Burma Regional Initiative and 4) Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin.
50. The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Working Group on Staffing.
51. The Standing Committee subsequently requested the Ramsar Secretariat to develop a strategy, without consultant support, outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention.

52. Regarding preparations for COP13, after the presentation by the United Arab Emirates as Chair of the Subgroup on COP13, the Standing Committee gave preliminary approval for the provisional agenda and instructed that it should be submitted for detailed consideration at its 53rd meeting.
53. Regarding the report of the Working Group on Resource Mobilization, the Standing Committee: 1) adopted the Resource Mobilization Work Plan Framework that had been developed; 2) took note of the Working Group's offer to advise the new Secretary General on the grade level, job description and possible revision of the title for the position currently known as the Partnerships Officer; 3) also took note of the Working Group's offer to advise the person hired to mobilize resources as they develop their first full Resource Mobilization Work Plan to guide their work; and 4) decided to adopt the first full Resource Mobilization Work Plan at a future Standing Committee, SC53 if possible.
54. Regarding the presentation of the report on the activities of the Facilitation Working Group, the Standing Committee noted the Working Group's commitment to continue its efforts. It also took note of its request for a meeting with the new Secretary General, back to back with one of the Executive Team meetings in January 2017, to discuss the matters entrusted to it by the Parties, and took note of the Working Group's invitation to Asia and Oceania to join the Group, which is open to additional Parties.
55. The Standing Committee asked the Secretariat to work with any interested Parties to prepare a paper for its 53rd meeting on the possibility of holding future meetings of the Committee in Geneva, and requested the issue to be included in the agenda of SC53.
56. Among other decisions adopted regarding financial matters, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretary General to propose a 2018 austerity budget to address the increasing amount of outstanding contributions, for consideration at SC53. It also decided that there was no need to change 2016 core and non-core budgets, and confirmed the 2017 budget as approved at COP12.

53rd Meeting: 29 May – 2 June 2017, in Gland, Switzerland

57. Following the opening statements, the adoption of the provisional agenda and the revised annotated provisional agenda, and the admission of observers, the Secretary General presented highlights of her written report. Parties formally welcomed the new Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and other new Secretariat staff, thanked the Secretary General for her report and expressed confidence in and support for the work undertaken to date.
58. The Standing Committee noted the report of the Management Working Group and instructed the Secretariat to conduct a review of all current and proposed cooperative agreements, to report to SC54. The Standing Committee further decided that this review should be conducted on the basis of criteria which could include those suggested by Management Working Group members. Regarding the draft MOU with South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme, the Committee indicated that it should be considered within this wider review of cooperative agreements. The Committee confirmed that the Secretary General could sign the proposed letter of agreement with the International Partnership on Blue Carbon, once the invitation of the Government of Australia had been made available to the Management Working Group.

59. The Standing Committee also 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 Contracting Parties for decision.
60. After considering the recommendations of the Subgroup on COP13, the Standing Committee approved the main theme of COP13 as "Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future", which would also serve as the theme for World Wetlands Day in 2018. The Standing Committee confirmed that the logo of COP13 would be finalized by the host country, taking into account comments made by the Subgroup on COP13. The Standing Committee approved the provisional agenda for COP13 with a minor correction and the addition of the high-level segment, and requested the host country, in consultation with interested Parties and the Secretariat, to further develop plans for the organization of a high-level segment.
61. The Standing Committee decided that the Secretariat, in consultation with the open-ended informal working group on language strategy established by SC52, should take forward intersessionally the matters dealt with in the document on preparation of a language strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The working group was asked to report to SC54 on the outcomes of its further deliberations, including any proposals that might be taken forward to COP13, subject to approval at SC54.
62. The Standing Committee approved the *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat* (document SC53-09) subject to the incorporation of amendments proposed by Parties and implications of decisions to be taken on other items of the current meeting agenda. The Standing Committee confirmed that the integrated nature of the document should be retained and that the core function of the Secretariat related to administration and servicing the governing and subsidiary bodies and of the Convention should be retained as a separate element. It further agreed to include an indication of whether activities were to be covered by core or non-core funding.
63. The Standing Committee took note of the report of the STRP Chair and made a number of recommendations.
64. The Standing Committee took note of the update on Ramsar Regional Initiatives and recommended to the Subgroup on Finance the allocation of CHF 30,000 from the 2017 core budget for RRIIs to each of the four new initiatives covering the Senegal Basin, Amazon Basin, Central Asia and Indo-Burma. The Standing Committee confirmed that the allocation of funds should be considered by the Subgroup on Finance, during its deliberations on the allocation of the 2016 core budget surplus.
65. Regarding the report of the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Standing Committee requested that the Panel continue its work as outlined and confirmed the importance of the specific issues raised in the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel. The Standing Committee also took note of the report of the Secretariat on CEPA-related activities.
66. Regarding the update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands", an open-ended contact group was established which presented its

recommendations in plenary. The Standing Committee approved the report of the contact group and mandated the Secretariat to take forward its recommendations.

67. Regarding the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, following numerous discussions and deliberations, the Standing Committee noted that some Contracting Parties would continue to implement the Operational Guidelines in effect as of COP12, and decided that the Secretariat should prepare a draft resolution on Ramsar Regional Initiatives, in consultation with interested Parties, for consideration at COP13. This work should take account of the information contained in the Working Group's report.
68. The Standing Committee approved the proposed procedures for the COP13 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, subject to incorporation of the amendments tabled by Parties.
69. Regarding progress on implementation of the Wetland City accreditation, the Standing Committee, *inter alia*: confirmed the composition of the Independent Advisory Committee until COP13; welcomed the offer of the Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia to participate in the IAC; agreed that the participation of the Secretary General or her designee in the IAC should be largely symbolic; confirmed that the administrative role of the Secretariat should be minimal; noted the specific proposed amendments to document SC53-16 tabled by South Africa; and agreed an extension of the deadline for the submission of WCA applications until 31 October 2017.
70. The Standing Committee decided that COP13 would take place from 21 to 29 October 2018, and thanked the host country for its proposal to hold a high-level segment, noting the need to take into account the dates of the high-level segment of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
71. Regarding progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on *Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions*, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to continue working actively with the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, as well as with other relevant United Nations agencies, on water-related indicators and in particular indicator 6.6.1 on wetland extent. It requested that the Secretariat explore options for institutional arrangements that include being a leader for indicator 6.6.1 or its sub-indicator on wetland extent. The Standing Committee also requested that the Secretariat transmit to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) the elements of the Ramsar Strategic Plan that are aligned to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, SDGs and the four-year framework of programme priorities (2018-2022) for the seventh replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund.
72. The Standing Committee noted the documents on national targets in line with Resolution XII.2, requested that the Secretariat take into account the comments made, and invited Parties that encountered challenges in using either the National Reporting format or the voluntary online reporting system to advise the Secretariat as soon as possible. It also took note of the document on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance and instructed the Secretariat to take into account the comments made with regard to the structure and content of the report, and to follow up bilaterally with those Parties that had made specific observations on individual Ramsar Sites and/or other elements of the technical annexes to the document.
73. Regarding options for holding future meetings of the Standing Committee in Geneva, the Committee decided that its future meetings would continue to be held in Gland, and welcomed the offer of Switzerland to work with the Secretariat to consider the feasibility of a visit to a Swiss Ramsar Site at a future meeting, without drawing on core budget funds.

74. Furthermore, the Standing Committee approved the report of the Facilitation Working Group and took note *inter alia* of: the work completed to date by the Working Group, the confidence they had expressed in the Secretary General; the Working Group's offer to be of continued service to Parties for new tasks, as it steps back from its heightened facilitation role; Decision SC53-04, which had already extended the mandate of the Group to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance; and 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.
75. Regarding financial matters, the Standing Committee took note of the preliminary core budget results for 2016, the preliminary 2016 balance sheet and the 2016 draft financial statements as of 31 December 2016, and the delay of the 2016 financial statement audit. The Committee also instructed the Secretariat to develop an intersessional proposal on the use of the travel funds and to seek approval of the Subgroup on Finance, as well as to look into the option of participation in IUCN's training courses. It also made decisions on: the use of the 2016 surplus; the preparation of a draft resolution on financial matters to be considered at COP13; and the use of designated reserves for exceptional annual core budget surpluses. The Standing Committee also took note of the replenishment of the reserve to its maximum of 15% of 2016 core budget; the non-core budget and voluntary contributions for 2016; the improvement in the status of outstanding contributions of Contracting Parties; the actions proposed by the Secretariat for 2017 on outstanding contributions; and the cumulative voluntary contributions of Contracting Parties in the Africa region. The Standing Committee further instructed the Secretariat to take steps to undertake a financial/management review of non-core funds; approved the proposal of the Secretariat to change the method of calculating the annual provision against dues receivable from Contracting Parties; and allocated, from the 2017 core budget for Ramsar Regional Initiatives, CHF 30,000 to each of the following new initiatives: Amazon Basin, Central Asia, Indo-Burma and Senegal Basin.
76. Regarding the role of the Secretariat in the management of projects financed with non-core funds, the Standing Committee authorized the Secretariat, on an exceptional basis, to proceed with the project funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) in support of CariWet and to work with the donor to find an interim human-resources mechanism to support CariWet, and invited Parties to identify a sustainable approach and corresponding guidelines in a draft resolution to be submitted for consideration at SC54.

54th Meeting: 23 – 27 April 2018, in Gland, Switzerland

77. At the start of the meeting the Standing Committee adopted the revised provisional working programme and the working method proposed by the Chair and the Secretariat, which had been prepared on the basis of recommendations by the Executive Team to ensure that more complex issues were tabled as early as possible during the meeting.
78. The Standing Committee accepted the report of the Management Working Group and endorsed its recommendations.
79. The Standing Committee instructed the Working Group on Staffing Issues and the Facilitation Working Group to report back to later plenary sessions of SC54, and sought to establish open contact groups and "Friends of the Chair" groups to consider some of the draft resolutions submitted by Parties. In other cases, Parties were requested to submit a revised version of the draft resolutions which they had submitted, taking into account the comments made in plenary

and compiled by the Secretariat. In the case of draft resolutions that had been the subject of only minor comments, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish them for consideration at COP13, with revisions reflecting the proposed modifications.

80. The draft resolutions considered focused on the following themes: peace and the sustainable management of biodiversity in Ramsar Sites; wetlands, peace and security; cultural values, local communities and climate change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands; urbanization, climate change and sustainable wetlands; Ramsar Regional Initiatives; agriculture in wetlands; wetlands in polar and subpolar regions; the List of Wetlands of International Importance; rapid assessment of wetland ecosystem services; conservation and management of small and micro wetlands; Ramsar Advisory Missions; wetlands in West Asia; promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems; World Wetlands Day; promoting the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats; the enhanced protection and management of sea turtle breeding, feeding and nursery areas and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites; gender and wetlands; future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2019-2021; guidance on identifying Wetlands of International Importance for global climate change regulation as an additional argument to existing Ramsar criteria; restoration of degraded peatlands to mitigate and adapt to climate change and enhance biodiversity; matters of Convention governance; and financial and budgetary matters.
81. The Standing Committee approved the reports of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel and the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation. It also noted the Resource Mobilization Work Plan and confirmed that it should be further developed by the Secretariat, taking the Standing Committee's comments and COP13 decisions into account, and a revised text tabled for consideration by SC57. It further took note of and approved the Secretariat's 2018 work plan and endorsed the proposed format of the Secretariat's work plan for the 2019-2021 triennium, subject to account being taken of the points raised by Parties.
82. Uruguay presented a report on the measures taken to gain observer status in the United Nations General Assembly for the Convention Secretariat, given the difficulties that it had encountered in getting accreditation to participate in events within the framework of the United Nations, such as the High Level Political Forum. Although the issue was included in the agenda of the 72nd session of the General Assembly, its consideration was postponed to the 73rd session. The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, in conjunction with interested Parties, to continue exploring options for gaining access to meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and related high-level fora.
83. On the opening of the 27 April session, Uruguay explained that, owing to illness, the Chair of the Standing Committee would be unable to preside over the last day of the meeting. Uruguay therefore asked the Vice Chair, Australia, to preside.
84. Regarding preparations for COP13, the host country presented the progress made and the Standing Committee endorsed its efforts by acclamation. The Committee also took note of the document on *Preparation of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties – Process for review of draft resolutions*; invited Parties with comments on the document to communicate these in writing to the Secretariat; and decided that the Committee should review a revised version at SC55, taking any such comments into account.

85. Regarding the World Wetlands Day themes for the 2019-2021 triennium, the Standing Committee decided that they would be as follows: 2019: Wetlands and climate change; 2020: Wetlands and biodiversity; 2021: Wetlands and water.
86. The Standing Committee also selected the winners of the 2018 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, in the categories of Wetland Wise Use, Wetland Innovation, and Young Wetland Champion, and of a Ramsar Merit Award.
87. Regarding the Wetland City accreditation, the Standing Committee met in closed session to consider the recommendations of the Independent Advisory Committee. It decided that the report of the IAC would be taken forward for further consideration and announcement at COP13, and that the Wetland City accreditation list would be under embargo until then.
88. After receiving progress reports from the working groups on matters of governance, the Standing Committee decided to submit both the draft resolutions (submitted by Switzerland and the Facilitation Working Group) as originally drafted, for consideration at COP13. The Standing Committee noted that both proposals were based on the recognition of a need to review the mechanism for providing governance and guidance for the Convention. The Committee discussed both proposals without reaching a conclusion on how to bring them together. The Committee encouraged interested Parties to continue multilateral discussions on this issue in preparation for COP13 to seek mutually agreeable solutions to achieve a common goal. The Committee also noted that COP13 could benefit from considering these two draft resolutions together. It should be noted that, after consultation by the Parties, the Legal Advisor of the Secretariat had concluded that the Facilitation Working Group was neither precluded from drafting proposals nor from submitting them to the Standing Committee for consideration. In addition, the Standing Committee decided to forward the text of the draft resolution on *Roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee*, as drafted, for consideration at COP13.
89. The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the remaining draft resolutions considered during the session for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the amendment tabled. Regarding the Regional Initiatives, it also instructed the Secretariat to conduct a review of their legal status and the implications for the Convention.
90. The Standing Committee also approved the reports of the Subgroup on Finance and the Working Group on Staffing, and the recommendations therein.

Conclusions and acknowledgements

91. The length of this report, which covers only the key aspects of the work carried out, demonstrates the very rich contributions and active engagement in all aspects of the Convention. They cover what was achieved during the three years between COP12 and the upcoming Conference.
92. The submission of numerous draft resolutions to be considered by the COP at its 13th meeting, and the active participation in the working groups of the Convention, demonstrate the growing importance that the conservation and wise and sustainable use of wetlands have for our States.
93. During this period, we have selected the new Secretary General of the Convention by unanimous accord and welcomed new members to the Secretariat team. The management of the Convention has been put in order and the Secretariat's output has been consolidated in line

with the mandates and guidelines arising from the agreements of the Contracting Parties to the Convention.

94. The Convention has extended its focus to emerging issues of fundamental importance such as wetland cities, a developing area of work that is being further consolidated from the upcoming COP13 onwards. This deepens the commitment of the Contracting Parties to the broadest protection and the wise and sustainable use of wetlands, and to all the benefits that this implies for biodiversity, climate change and the other goods and services that wetlands provide and combine.
95. In a new international scenario and in the face of the 2030 Agenda, the Convention, with the support of the Contracting Parties, has shown its relevance and importance, in dialogue and agreements with the International Organization Partners and with concerned bodies of the United Nations, expanding its reach and presence.
96. We are pleased with our achievements, in the management, mobilization and administration of resources to meet the objectives set by the Convention, and in strengthening its position on the international scene, in line with the mandate given by the Contracting Parties.
97. As Chair of the Standing Committee I would like to thank all the members of the Committee, as well as the observers, other Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners, the STRP, the members of the Ramsar Secretariat and the Secretary General Martha Rojas, as well as IUCN, its staff that has supported us and its Director General, Inger Andersen. The active commitment of all of them and the constructive attitude to the work of the Convention have contributed significantly to the progress of its tasks.
98. Finally, allow me to acknowledge the selfless work of those who, in the States that are party to the Convention, are the fundamental actors for the protection and sustainable use of wetlands, many of them heroes who often face adversity in their day-to-day work. In each of our countries, they make the Convention a reality, and we owe them all our recognition.
99. I cannot forget to thank and extend a special greeting to my colleagues on the Executive Team, Vice-Chairs David Papps and Mark Taylor of Australia, and Abdou Salam Kane of Senegal, also Chairman of the Subgroup on Finance, with whom we worked side by side during the sessions of the Standing Committee, and particularly between its meetings. Our work has always been guided by the principles of **responsibility, transparency, collaboration, efficiency and service to the Contracting Parties**. We hope that the discussions in which we will engage in this meeting of the COP will allow us to consolidate the path we have taken in this period, and renew our commitment to the sustainable management of wetlands, within the framework of the challenges that arise in these times.
100. We wish the new Standing Committee and all the Contracting Parties great success in fulfilling their mission in the new period that is now beginning.

Jorge Rucks
Chair of the Standing Committee 2015-2018