

Report of the Facilitation Working Group

Friday 2 June 2017

The Facilitation Working Group is co-chaired by Uruguay and the United States and is currently composed of representatives from Australia, Colombia, Finland, Japan, Kenya, Romania, Senegal and Switzerland. The Group is open and was created at SC50 in response to Resolution XII.3 paragraph 58. At SC51 the Group was also asked to assume the duties requested in Resolution XII.4 paragraph 7.b. In this regard, the Group held productive meetings on the margins of SC52 which were summarised in the report and decisions of the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee.

The Facilitation Working Group would like to thank the Standing Committee for entrusting the group to work on Parties' behalf to better facilitate a relationship between the Secretariat and IUCN as well as better functioning of the Ramsar Secretariat.

Over the course of the Group's work, the Secretary General and IUCN Director General were asked many questions about the existing processes in place and about the changes being made and envisaged. The Group would also like to thank both the SG and IUCN DG for facilitating the work of this Group and for the spirit of cooperation with which they approached responding to the questions, and working with the FWG to find the best way forward in managing the Secretariat.

Since we last reported to SC52 we have continued our work, including during an intersessional meeting that the Parties agreed to fund for eligible countries according to Ramsar funding rules in February of this year. Members of the Standing Committee may have seen our emailed interim report, which we asked to be shared with regional colleagues as well. In February we met the SG and the IUCN DG, and further discussed the relationship between the Ramsar Secretariat and IUCN. As indicated in February, we sent our note to the Standing Committee members. We wanted to share how impressed and pleased we were with the SG and the actions she is taking. To this effect we told her directly that she has our Group's full support and trust. We also consider that the new leadership era presents tremendous potential for the Convention to regain its footing and make solid forward progress. In February we also took time to express to the staff our great appreciation for their work, and we encouraged them to embrace change, and reaffirmed our full support for the new SG.

During its meeting on Tuesday prior to SC53, the group discussed the responses from the SG to its most recent set of questions. The Group agreed that the responses from the SG demonstrated that good progress is being made on a number of issues and that the SG is managing the Secretariat in a way that takes Parties' needs into account in a clear and transparent manner. Members of the FWG expressed their support for the direction of the SG's and IUCN DG's work and noted that the discussions have reinforced trust between FWG members and the Secretariat. FWG members also expressed confidence that the SG is taking appropriate actions to address the issues that have been identified, that the SG and IUCN DG have established a cohesive working relationship, and that the Secretariat is on a solid path

towards a new professional and legally and procedurally correct way of conducting the business of the Convention.

The group considered that some issues may need to continue to be monitored, but as we continue to build trust with the SG, the FWG anticipates that it can steadily step back from its closer-than-usual facilitation role, and give the Secretary General space to exercise her role in managing the Secretariat. The Group also agreed that it remains in the service of the Parties and if the Parties wish to give it additional tasks it would be pleased to respond to any further requests.

In conclusion, the FWG considers that it has responded to the mandates from Resolutions XII.3 and XII.4, but also continues to be at the service of Parties if the SC considers there are additional issues to be managed.

The Facilitation Working Group recommends that SC53:

- Take note of the work completed to date by the FWG, the confidence they have expressed in the SG, and the work and changes made thus far to foster strengthened implementation of the Convention, and that as a result of this high confidence and full support, the FWG is stepping back from its closer-than-usual facilitation role;

- Take note of the Working Group's offer to be of continued service to Parties for new tasks, as it steps back from its heightened facilitation role;

- Take note of Decision SC53-04 which has already extended the mandate of the FWG to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance in order to optimise 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; and

- Take note of the proposal by Mexico to clarify the means of communication between the Secretariat, Contracting Parties and the public in Article 3.2 cases.