**DRAFT for finalization during the workshop on 12 June 2016, prior to submission to SC52**

*Introduction (how to proceed?)*

*The structure of these proposed revised Operational Guidelines is based on the proposals made by the members of the working group during “Round 1” of e-mail exchanges (15-22 April 2016, cf. paragraphs 20-21 of the work plan for the group).*

*During “Round 2” (26 April-11 May), seven members of the group submitted the text proposals listed below. Their texts were compiled, combined (where overlapping) and translated without modifying or deleting any substance, and are included in this draft version for revised Guidelines.*

*The members of the working group are now requested to finalize the draft text below.*

*This may need to delete unnecessary repetitions, to re-arrange specific issues in different paragraphs or chapters, to add missing points, or to reformulate specific sentences.*

*Please prepare yourself do this in an efficient way during the workshop on 12 June in Gland.*

*By the end of the workshop (18h00 on 12 June), the group will produce a final text (likely shorter than the compilation below) as its proposal for the revised Operational Guidelines that will be submitted to the 52nd meeting of Standing Committee by the chair of the working group.*

**Operational Guidelines 2016-2024[2018] for Regional Initiatives operating in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands**

**Chapter 1: The aim of Regional Initiatives**

1. The Regional Initiatives officially recognized by the Ramsar Convention are operational means of support for the effective application of the Convention and its Strategic Plan 2016-2024. Ramsar’s regional initiatives improve the visibility of the Convention thanks to international cooperation in areas of common concern, often cross-border issues in the field of wetland and water resource management.
2. Regional Initiatives are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitating and improving the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan. They need the active participation of all the Contracting Parties in the relevant regions. National support for the common work programme of a Ramsar regional initiative is confirmed for each period of the Strategic Plan by means of official letters from the Ramsar Administrative Authorities to the Ramsar Secretariat confirming their active participation.
3. Regional Initiatives under the Ramsar Convention are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its Strategic Plan, as well as to raise the visibility of the Convention in specific geographical regions, through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving all relevant national and regional stakeholders.
4. The geographical regions covered by initiatives are defined in accordance with the needs of the country parties in the region with respect to wetlands. The Regional Initiative can be limited to one of the six regional groups established by the Convention (specified in Resolution XI.19), or can cover several regional groups, or be more restricted if the Contracting Parties in question consider this more advantageous, as long as the Regional Initiative includes more than one country party.
5. Regional Initiatives are intended to develop proposals for the Conservation, Management and Sustainable Use of Ecosystems through an Action Plan that expresses and implements a strategy for that purpose and that promotes the participation of communities located in or near the ecosystems that are the focus of the Initiatives.

**Chapter 2: The scope of Regional Initiatives**

1. Regional Initiatives should be based on a bottom-up approach. As a matter of priority, the support from all Contracting Parties of the specific region covered by the Initiative should be sought from the start. The support of all, or at least a significant number of the Contracting Parties in the region, is needed.
2. Geographical regions to be covered by specific Initiatives are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in the region. In practical terms, a Regional Initiative may correspond to one of the six regional groups established by the Convention (specified in Resolution XI.19), but it may also be more restricted in geographical focus or span several regional groups defined in Resolution XI.19, if the Contracting Parties concerned consider that to be more appropriate.
3. Initiatives that are fully consistent with the aims listed above are different from regional projects. Regional projects are joint activities or programmes proposed by several Contracting Parties for a given geographical region, focusing on specific aspects, often limited in time. Regional projects can be the operational means for delivering specific aspects of Regional Initiatives, but should not be confused with the latter.
4. A Regional Initiative must establish itself as a means to provide support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention, and present itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between its roles and those of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at the national level and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level.
5. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should establish synergies with intergovernmental or international partners operating in the region, particularly with regional conventions, commissions or ministerial councils, to prepare complementary and non-duplicative activities and programmes of work and to establish common systems for financing.
6. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should make optimal use of the Ramsar tools (principally resolutions and their technical annexes, manuals, guidelines or directives, methodologies, etc.). Regional Initiatives should establish regular contact with the Convention’s Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its national coordinators, and other experts in the region to receive the best scientific and technical advice available and to ensure that regional experiences contribute to the work of STRP around the world.
7. The programme of work of each Ramsar Regional Initiative should be aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan for 2016-2024 and focus on meeting the objectives that are most relevant for the region.
8. The programme of work of each Ramsar Regional Initiative involves all relevant national and regional stakeholders in order to achieve significant results for the application of the Convention and its Strategic Plan.
9. Programmes of work of Ramsar regional initiatives should include specific activities in the areas of awareness, communication, education and participatory processes with relevant stakeholders.
10. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should coordinate with intergovernmental and/or international partners that carry out their activities in the region, such as regional conventions, commissions or ministerial councils, among others, to prepare complementary and non-duplicative activities and programmes of work and to establish common systems for financing.
11. Ramsar regional initiatives should implement the resolutions and their technical annexes in their respective regions; it is also advisable that they use the Convention’s methodological and other manuals, guidelines or directives and other instruments.
12. It is favourable for there to be regular contact between regional initiatives and the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its national coordinators, and other experts in the region to generate an exchange of scientific and technical knowledge and practices.

**Chapter 3: Governance of the Regional Initiatives**

1. The development, coordination and functioning of Regional Initiatives is the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders.
2. Regional Initiatives should have their own identity in order to avoid any confusion between their roles and those of the Ramsar Secretariat at the international level, Ramsar Administrative Authorities at the national level, and possibly the potential host institutions.
3. The complementary roles of the coordinating mechanisms of Regional Initiatives and the Ramsar Secretariat, including their respective responsibilities, may be defined in written arrangements, if agreed by all participating Contracting Parties.
4. Regional Initiatives need to become firmly established in their geographical region. They must establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms approved by the administration involved from the Contracting Parties as well as other stakeholders, in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight.
5. Regional Initiatives establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent fashion. This requires the establishment of a governing body for each initiative made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other groups of relevant stakeholders. The governing body meets regularly, guides and monitors the initiative’s programme of work, independently manages the activities of the initiative and publicly provides all its members with relevant information.
6. Elaborating equitable and transparent governance and coordination structures is essential. These structures need to be laid down in a set of operational procedures, based on written, commonly agreed terms of reference, rules of procedure, or operational guidance.
7. The coordination or Governance of the Initiative is carried out by Coordinating Committee, which should be made up of all the member countries of the initiative. Initiatives are coordinated by one or two member countries with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat.
8. In order to establish a coordination body or mechanism, key support from a host country, an International Organization Partner (IOP) of the Convention, or a host intergovernmental organization is essential. This would need a hosting agreement to be signed, in order to provide sufficient independence of operation to the Regional Initiative in terms of staffing, accounting and fundraising.
9. A Regional Initiative must describe itself as an operational means to provide support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention, and present itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of Regional Initiatives, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. Practical means to this end are the adoption of a specific logo, to be used in combination with the Ramsar logo, and the establishment and regular updating of a specific website.
10. The establishment of Regional Initiatives is a process over time. In order to fulfil their aims, Regional Initiatives should establish mechanisms that assure a minimal coordination between the Contracting Parties and other members participating in the Initiative. Coordination functions could be assigned to Contracting Parties or participating institutions on a rotating basis, and such a modality can be reflected in a regionally signed agreement.
11. Regional Initiatives are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitating and improving the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned. They need support from all the Contracting Parties. To be eligible for funding from the Convention, such support must be confirmed through a formal letter by the Ramsar Administrative Authorities acting on behalf of the Regional Initiative concerned, which would ideally be renewed for each period between two meetings of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties (COPs). Sufficient national support by the countries concerned is essential to setting up a minimal operational structure for effective work in the region.
12. The main Regional Councillor of the Ramsar Secretariat of the region in question takes part in the governance body's work for each regional initiative so as to maintain regular links, provide advice and monitor the harmonization between an initiative's work programme and the Ramsar Strategic Plan’s objectives.
13. The governance and the Ramsar regional initiative structures are set out in a series of operational procedures, based on a mission statement, an internal regulation or guidelines established by mutual agreement. These rules of procedures are made public and shared with the Ramsar Secretariat.
14. Regional Initiatives shall inform the Ramsar Secretariat of the establishment of their governing body and submit a list of its composition. Terms of reference, rules of procedure, or other written regulations for the governance and coordination of the Initiative shall be shared with the Secretariat, as well as the minutes and decisions taken by all meetings of the governance body.
15. The Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee shall receive, through the Secretariat, reports on the activities of Regional Initiatives and shall oversee their general policies relating to the implementation of the Convention.

**Chapter 4: Legal status of the Regional Initiatives**

1. Ramsar regional initiatives are either physically established centres that have a regional training or capacity building programme, or international networks for regional cooperation with no physical centre, or a combination of the two.
2. Regional initiatives do not form part of the Secretariat or of any national authority or organization that could provide them with support or hosting arrangements. The Ramsar regional initiatives establish their own legal identity, which specifies their independence, their status and their role.
3. All regional initiatives should support the application of the priorities established by the Contracting Parties for the implementation of the Strategic Plan.
4. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should be approved by the COP and/or the Permanent Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions.
5. When applicable, Ramsar Regional Initiatives will seek to acquire a legal status in keeping with the legal framework of the host country. The Ramsar Secretariat should provide support to this effort.
6. In order to carry out its activities in accordance with the Guidelines, it is sufficient to obtain a legal status in keeping with the relevant provisions of the national legislation of the host country. The Ramsar Secretariat will provide support to the extent possible.
7. When a Ramsar regional initiative is hosted by a national or international institution, a hosting agreement recognises the specific status of the initiative and its operational independence with regard to the host institution, following the format adopted by the Standing Committee.
8. In order to operate, the regional initiatives apply the national laws of their host country for the establishment of their legal status. The national laws of the host country govern the legal status of regional initiatives. All the Contracting Parties must sign an official letter of engagement and official recognition following the format adopted by the Standing Committee.
9. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat sends a note verbale to the Contracting Parties with the format for asking for recognition of the Initiative in the public interest.
10. The initiatives should continue to operate under the legal aspects of existing guidelines in order to guarantee their operability.
11. The development of effective coordination between Regional Initiatives, acting regionally, and the Ramsar Secretariat, acting globally and being responsible to the Standing Committee and the COP, is essential. Regional Initiatives must be governed by a status (legal framework) and this framework must be endorsed by the Contracting Parties. The complementary roles of the mechanisms for coordinating regional initiatives and those carried out by the Ramsar Secretariat, as well as their respective responsibilities, can be defined in the written arrangements if all the Contracting Parties decide to on this.

**Chapter 5: Participation in Regional Initiatives**

1. Each Contracting Party in the initiative must participate actively in the activities included in the initiative’s action plan in accordance with the statutes governing the latter.
2. In order for regional initiatives to achieve significant results it is particularly key to have the active involvement of all the national coordinators of the Ramsar Convention for the relevant Contracting Parties, including those of CEPA/CECoP and of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).
3. The work programme for each of Ramsar's regional initiatives unites all the relevant national and regional stakeholders who act together to obtain significant results in terms of the application of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. Active participation in regional initiatives is assured by the Ramsar or the corresponding national administrative authorities. In terms of active members, it must include the representatives of other ministries, Ramsar’s international organization partners (IOPs), other non-governmental and civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs), university circles, local communities, economic stakeholders and the private sector.
4. Each Initiative should include the participation, from the start, not only of the Administrative Authorities of the Contracting Parties involved with responsibility for the national application of the Convention, but also of all other relevant stakeholders with an interest in and directly or indirectly responsible for wetland issues, including the ministries responsible for environment and water issues, intergovernmental bodies, Ramsar International Organization Partners (IOPs), other NGOs, academia, local communities, the public sector, and economic actors, in addition to the Convention’s other national coordinators and/or focal points.
5. The Ramsar regional initiatives collaborate with the intergovernmental or international partners active in their region, and regional conventions in particular, regional and sub-regional economic commissions and basin organizations, to prepare complementary, non-redundant activities and work programmes and to establish common funding programmes.
6. The basin organizations can host regional initiatives and develop common work programmes with them.
7. Regional Initiatives coordinate with intergovernmental and/or international partners and Ramsar IOPs that carry out activities in the region for the purpose of establishing complementary activities and programmes of work, building synergies and avoiding duplication. They should inform the Secretariat of the collaborations of this type that they establish.
8. With the support of the Ramsar Secretariat and within the framework of the Ramsar Convention, Ramsar Regional Initiatives advance the development of synergies and collaboration among themselves in order to carry out their programmes of work, particularly when located in the same region.

**Chapter 6: Functioning of the Regional Initiatives**

1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives describe themselves as operational structures whose purpose is to ensure the more effective application of the Convention and achieve the relevant aims of the Strategic Plan in the region. They adopt specific logos and use them in combination with the Ramsar logo. They maintain and regularly update websites to be used as public sources of relevant information.
2. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should have their own identity to avoid any confusion between their roles and those of the Ramsar Secretariat, the Convention’s Administrative Authorities at the national level, and possible host institutions.
3. Ramsar’s regional initiatives have their own visual identity in order to avoid any confusion with the role of the Ramsar Secretariat, Ramsar’s national administrative authorities or even the hosting institutions. They adopt a specific logo and use it in association with the Ramsar logo. They have a website that is regularly updated, which serves as a public source of information, with a link on the Convention's website. They can also use the social networks to facilitate CEPA activities.
4. It is the responsibility of the involved stakeholders, and in particular of the Heads of the Adminsitrative Authorities of the Contracting Parties, to develop, coordinate and manage Regional Initiatives. Depending on available human and financial resources, the Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist Regional Initiatives, including through mobilization of additional resources.
5. Each Ramsar regional initiative has its own system for accounting and presenting reports, which is supervised by its governing body, in order to be able to carry out its activities, receive financing, and implement specific projects.
6. Each Ramsar regional initiative has staff who are specifically dedicated to coordinating its programme and providing advice for particular activities or to governing and advisory bodies. The managerial staff are either hired by the initiative’s legal body or delegated by other institutions. Both situations are regulated by written contracts.
7. It is advisable for Contracting Parties that are members of a regional initiative to have personnel dedicated to coordinating the initiative’s programme and offering support to the initiative’s activities.
8. The functioning of a regional initiative is supported by the establishment of collaboration networks, set up in accordance with a clearly defined framework aimed at creating an environment that favours the participation of all the stakeholders at all levels.
9. Effective communication is maintained between the Secretariat and the countries that make it up. Active communication with the focal point members of the initiatives and monitoring the activities of the action plan defined by the Parties for the initiative.
10. The activities of all Regional Initiatives should be based on a concrete programme of work with specific strategic and operational objectives and defined deadlines, the results of which will be measurable. The aims and activities of all Regional Initiatives should be fully aligned with the Convention’s existing Strategic Plan. They should focus on concrete programmes and address the real necessities that are most relevant for the region.
11. The Ramsar regional initiatives make optimal use of the existing Ramsar tools (in particular the Resolutions and their technical annexes, the manuals, guidelines, methods, etc.). The regional initiatives establish regular contacts with the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its national Correspondents and other regional experts in order to obtain the best scientific and technical advice available and to re-inject regional experience into the STRP’s global work.
12. A Regional Initiative should be able to act independently and take responsibility for its work and its communications not only to the host country, but to all the members that make it up, including Contracting Parties and other members.
13. A Regional Initiative should base its operation on the development of networks of collaboration established upon a clearly defined framework, thus creating an enabling environment for the involvement of all stakeholders at all levels.
14. It is advisable for Contracting Parties that are members of a Regional Initiative to have professional staff with specialized expertise in the relevant issues, other than the Ramsar national coordinator, to support the Initiative’s own activities and the coordination of its programme of work.
15. It is essential for the effective functioning of a regional initiative that its members, both participating Contracting Parties and others, meet regularly with the support and guidance of the Secretariat. These meetings must be prepared for in advance and have concrete objectives and results.
16. Regional Initiatives should have a solid technical and scientific footing and support the development of the Convention’s STRP. There must be cooperation and regular contact between Regional Initiatives and the STRP, national coordinators and other appropriate experts and institutions in the region in order to exchange scientific and technical knowledge and practices. Regional Initiatives contribute to the development of the STRP by establishing synergies and collaboration of the STRP with national coordinators and regional members, experts and institutions at all possible levels.Experts and institutions may be recognized as partners of the Initiative.
17. The programme of work of every regional initiative should include specific activities in the fields of communication, education, building awareness and participatory processes with relevant stakeholders, aligned with the application of the existing Strategic Plan. It is favourable for Regional Initiatives to request guidance from the Convention’s CEPA/CECoP Oversight Panel and likewise to inform this Panel of the results of its activities.
18. The Regional Initiatives should aim to develop the capacity to take on the additional role of coordinating and supervising regional projects that are developed under the framework of such Initiatives. Projects and programmes to support the Initiative through actions with a geographically or thematically more restricted focus, often limited in time, are likely to develop increasingly over time. They should be supervised by the coordinating bodies or mechanisms of Regional Initiatives.

**Chapter 7: Relation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Regional Initiatives**

1. A Regional Initiative is not and cannot act as a regional office of the Convention.
2. A Regional Initiative must describe itself as an operational means to provide support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention, and present itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of Regional Initiatives, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. Practical means to this end are the adoption of a specific logo, to be used in combination with the Ramsar logo, and the establishment and regular updating of a specific website.
3. The development of effective coordination and collaboration between Regional Initiatives acting regionally and the Ramsar Secretariat acting globally and being responsible to the Standing Committee and COP is essential.
4. The Secretariat is in regular and active contact with the Regional Initiatives through its regional councillors and provides advice to ensure that the initiatives’ programmes of work and objectives are in full harmony with the Convention’s existing Strategic Plan and that Ramsar’s operational guidelines are applied in the different regions.
5. Subject to availability, the Ramsar Secretariat cooperates with each regional initiative. This cooperation is based on the principle of additional work, in other words‑regional initiatives provide the additional capacity to fill in the gaps that the Secretariat is unable to fill.
6. To the best of its ability, the Ramsar Secretariat supports and lends additional assistance to the Regional Initiatives to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through mobilization of additional resources. This depends on the human and financial resources that are available.
7. The Secretariat maintains regular links with the Regional Initiatives and provides advice so that global Ramsar guidelines are applied throughout the different regions, and so that the strategic and operational targets of Regional Initiatives are aligned with the Convention’s Strategic Plan.
8. Each year, the Ramsar Secretariat sends a report to the Standing Committee on the work carried out by the regional initiatives and on its cooperation with each one, including the information submitted by each initiative in accordance with the model of annual report adopted by the Standing Committee.
9. The Secretariat demands contributions and comments from all the Ramsar regional initiatives when it proposes new programmes and new activities, in a joint effort. The same occurs with the dissemination of key documents in the Convention’s 3 languages. These documents are prepared for the Standing Committee’s meetings and the sessions of the Conference of the Parties.
10. When it prepares the sessions of the Conference of the Parties, the Ramsar Secretariat consults the regional initiatives on their intentions and their needs regarding the organization of activities linked to the COP or the Pre-COP, so that these logistic needs are included in a memorandum of understanding signed with the Conference of the Parties’ host country.
11. The Secretariat's communication team involves Ramsar’s regional initiatives in its work programme and in specific campaigns, including the World Wetlands Day, from the start of its activities. Thus, Ramsar’s message is guaranteed to be spread in a consistent matter across the globe.
12. Regional Initiatives shall inform the Ramsar Secretariat of the establishment of their governance body and submit a list of its composition. Terms of reference, rules of procedure, or other written regulations for the governance and coordination of the Initiative shall be shared with the Secretariat, as well as the minutes and decisions taken by all meetings of the governance body.
13. Regional Initiatives should present the Secretariat with annual reports on their activities as well as annual programmes of work, in conformance with the standard model for the annual report and the format approved by the Standing Committee. These reports must reach the Secretariat far enough in advance for it to inform the Standing Committee and the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties regarding the progress of the Regional Initiatives. Through the Secretariat, the Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee shall oversee the general policies of the Regional Initiatives relating to the implementation of the Convention, and shall take relevant decisions.
14. Periodic assessment and review processes for the Regional Initiatives are necessary and will be coordinated by the Ramsar Secretariat according to specific rules to be approved by the Standing Committee. These assessments should measure the effectiveness of the Regional initiatives in contributing to the application of the existing Strategic Plan in the region and examine their adherence to the operational guidelines adopted by Ramsar at the global level and the approaches approved at the most recent COP.

**Chapter 8: The role of the Contracting Parties in the Regional Initiatives**

1. The role of the Contracting Parties in regional activities is to provide guidelines for the proper management of wetlands. More specifically, having ratified the wetlands convention, the Contracting Parties are called to harmonise wetland policies.
2. The Contracting Parties are responsible to execute the targets established and for the application of both the strategy and the plan of action to reach all these targets. Promote synergies and collaboration in seeking actions conducive to the participation of all national, regional and local stakeholders in developing the initiative.
3. Ramsar’s regional initiatives provide sustainable structural and operational support, facilitating the Ramsar Strategic Plan and allowing it to progress. In order to do this, the active participation of all the Contracting Parties, in the regions concerned, is essential. For each period in the Strategic Plan, national support for the current work programme of a regional Ramsar initiative is confirmed by an official letter sent by the Ramsar administrative authority to the Ramsar Secretariat, confirming its active participation.

**Chapter 9: The role of the Regional Initiatives to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan**

1. The Programme of Work of the initiatives should be fully aligned with the Strategic Plan of the Convention.
2. Each Ramsar regional initiative’s work programme is aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 and focused on the fulfilment of the most relevant objectives for the region concerned and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The Ramsar regional initiatives’ work programme improves the visibility of the Ramsar Convention and the general awareness of its Strategic Plan's objectives. The work programme includes specific activities in the areas of awareness-raising, communication, education and participatory processes with the relevant stakeholders (CEPA). The regional activities ask the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel for advice and send this group a report on the results of their activities.

**Chapter 10: Financing of the Regional Initiatives**

1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives receive institutional support from all participating Contracting Parties and financial support for their activities from the Contracting Parties and other donors, for example through financing provided by specific projects or programs. Equitably spread financial support by all parties concerned is likely to provide a more stable financial base.
2. When possible and/or necessary, Regional Initiatives may have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their governing bodies, in order to carry out their activities, receive financing, and execute specific projects.
3. The Ramsar regional activities generate their own resources and become financially independent after an initial stage. In the longer term, they obtain financial support, fairly distributed, from all the Parties involved and other donors in order to acquire a stable capital base.
4. The Ramsar regional initiatives are looking for sustainable longer-term financing from reliable sources. The initiatives that receive financial support from the Ramsar core budget use part of this support to find long-term financing from other sources, in particular if they receive support from Ramsar’s core budget for more than one period between two sessions of the Conference of the Parties.
5. Substantial support from a host country is especially important if a coordinating office is to be established.
6. Ramsar Regional Initiatives should take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources from a variety of sources, allowing for the development of its activities over the long term.
7. The Ramsar Secretariat assists Regional Initiatives to the best of its ability, mobilizing additional financial resources when necessary.
8. The COP has established a post in its Ramsar core budget for start-up financing of Ramsar regional initiatives that need this, for a limited period of time. The Standing Committee is responsible for allocating these funds each year to the initiatives that request it and which fulfil the criteria set out for each three-year period by the COP.
9. At each of its meetings, the COP establishes a core budget line to support Regional Initiatives over the coming triennium. Based on this global budget, the Standing Committee annually allocates levels of financial resources to specific Regional Initiatives that request financing and meet existing operational guidelines. This annual allocation is based on individual reports submitted to the Secretariat by Regional Initiatives, providing information on the operational capacity and the effective work of the Initiative as well as the urgency of the Initiative’s needs for Ramsar core funding in the coming year. The financial assistance to a Regional Initiative from the core budget line of the Convention is provided for a limited period of time, in principle only for a period corresponding to the interval between two meetings of the COP. Once this period of time is over, the initiative should be self-supporting. Financial support to regional centres that meet the Operational Guidelines can be obtained for a period of up to but no more than six years.
10. The Standing Committee is tasked with making annual allocations of financial resources to the prioritized initiatives that request financing and fulfil the Operational Guidelines. The COP establishes a core budget line to finance the start-up activities of Ramsar Regional Initiatives that require financing for a limited period of time.
11. The funds of the Ramsar Secretariat allocated to the Regional Initiatives will be disbursed at intervals to be determined based on the progress demonstrated in quarterly, semi-annual or annual reports.
12. Financing is covered by the Ramsar Secretariat for a set period of time. Nonetheless, limited resources for the injection of budget allocations by the Convention make permanent availability of funding difficult. The Parties should include sums to meet their national commitments.
13. New Ramsar regional initiatives are not launched until the funding has been obtained for a specified inception stage and for their work programme.
14. A newly established Ramsar regional initiative can ask for start-up funding from the Ramsar core budget for a limited time, in order to cover part of its operating costs. On an annual basis, the Standing Committee determines the level of this funding for each initiative, for its operating costs for the year in question.
15. To be eligible for funding from the Convention, such support must be confirmed in a formal letter from the national Ramsar Administrative Authorities, which ideally should be renewed in each period between two meetings of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties (COPs). Sufficient national support by the countries concerned is essential to setting up a minimal operational structure for effective work in the region.
16. Annual reports of progress and financial status are required from Regional Initiatives requesting funding from the Ramsar core budget. Such reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the annual meeting of Standing Committee.
17. Funds allocated to specific Regional Initiatives should be disbursed at intervals of six months, based on reports from the initiatives on their activities, progress, financial status and plans for future work. These reports should be submitted to the Secretariat for evaluation and the subsequent approval of disbursements.
18. Disbursement of Ramsar funds will be undertaken at six-monthly intervals, based on a short progress report of activities and financial status to be submitted by the beneficiaries to the Secretariat.
19. Supported by the regional initiatives, the Contracting Parties can develop action projects included in the Strategic Plan and benefit from financing from donors within the framework of the regional initiatives.

**Chapter 11: Reporting and evaluation of the Regional Initiatives**

1. Periodic assessment and review processes for the Initiatives are needed and will be coordinated by the Ramsar Secretariat according to specific rules to be approved by the Standing Committee. These review procedures are meant to assure that the Regional Initiatives are operating within the framework of agreed work plans and following the approaches approved by the Ramsar Convention through COP decisions.
2. The regional initiatives that satisfy these conditions and criteria for establishment are approved by the Standing Committee as operating within the framework of the Ramsar Convention for the period between two sessions of the Conference of the Parties with the Ramsar regional initiative status.
3. All networks or regional centres that do not report on their activities to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, outside of a three-year period, will have their status of Ramsar regional initiative functioning under the aegis of the Ramsar Convention withdrawn.
4. The Ramsar Secretariat maintains regular contact with the regional initiatives and receives documents (reports, scientific publications, tools, etc.) on their structure and functioning in order to be able to assess the application of these operational guidelines.
5. Regional Initiatives recognized by the Convention present annual programmes of work to the Standing Committee through the Ramsar Secretariat. In these programmes of work, they report on the progress of their work and their activities in the formats approved by the Standing Committee.
6. Annual reports of progress and financial status are required from Regional Initiatives requesting funding from the Ramsar core budget. Such reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the annual meeting of Standing Committee.
7. The Conference of the Parties or the Standing Committee gives the Secretariat instructions to undertake specific periodic reviews of the functioning and efficiency of the Ramsar regional initiatives. The initiatives answer these surveys transparently and supply all the information required in good time.
8. Regional Initiatives that are recognized by the COP as operating within the framework of the Convention must submit progress reports to the Secretariat, according to a standard format, in time to allow adequate reporting to the next meeting of the COP.
9. Based on the Secretariat’s specific evaluations of the activities and the effectiveness of Ramsar regional initiatives, the COP or the Standing Committee makes decisions on the functioning and operations of the initiatives.