



## The Seventh Oceania Regional Meeting of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

6 – 8 March, 2017

Nadi, Fiji

### FINAL REPORT



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## **1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS OF THE MEETING:**

The Seventh Oceania Regional Meeting of the Ramsar Convention was held in Nadi (Fiji) from 6th to 8th of March 2017. It provided a platform for the Contracting Parties of the Oceania region to review the progress of the national and regional implementation of the Ramsar Convention since the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) in June 2015, and to discuss and share experiences relating to issues, priorities, successes and challenges they currently face concerning the conservation and wise use of their wetlands. The meeting also aimed to initiate the process of building regional contributions in relation to the Draft Resolutions that are expected to be presented at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP13), which will take place in October 2018 in Dubai (UAE).

## **2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING:**

By bringing together Ramsar Contracting Parties and wetland stakeholders from across Oceania, the meeting had the following specific objectives:

- a) To identify the Oceania region's needs and strategically plan on how to secure financial and technical support to address their needs to effectively implement the Ramsar Convention;
- b) To investigate opportunities to promote cooperation on the conservation of coastal wetlands including blue carbon ecosystems. This is so as to ensure the conservation and wise use of coastal wetlands and their resources, and that the carbon sequestration and storage functions of blue carbon ecosystems are recognized and promoted at all levels;
- c) To investigate opportunities to promote the role of culture, traditional knowledge and practices in supporting livelihood and the conservation and wise use of wetlands;
- d) To discuss options for establishing and running a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania (RRI-Oceania) to build capacity and strengthen regional cooperation for effectively implementing the Ramsar Convention in the region; and
- e) To discuss and outline the production of a Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) tool to promote wetlands in Oceania that will be used as a decision support tool for policy makers in Oceania as well as for awareness raising of the general public.

## **3. KEY OUTCOMES AND WAY FORWARD:**

The meeting has successfully covered all of the agenda items and the key outcomes are as follows:

### **3.1. Promoting the conservation of coastal wetlands and blue carbon ecosystems:**

It was concluded that blue carbon was a relatively new concept for many of the Parties in the Pacific and the sessions on blue carbon were very useful in terms of understanding the science behind it and the relevance to the Ramsar Convention's implementation. The sessions also provided useful information on mechanism and tools available to the countries. Parties in the Pacific also felt that information sharing and consultation with other departments in their respective governments, in particular with climate change focal points, will be needed. Parties noted that they will appreciate further assistance in the space of awareness raising, experience sharing, building the case, better coordination with other international processes as well as welcome pilot projects on blue carbon.

Taking this forward, a two-step process was agreed:

1. An information document and information session on the benefits of blue carbon projects to coastal wetland management – to be presented in the margins of Ramsar Standing Committee Meeting 53 to explore/build support for a possible Draft Resolution on blue carbon for Ramsar COP13. Australia

is to work with partner organizations including Conservation International and SPREP, and Ramsar Secretariat to develop the document.

2. **If** sufficient support is identified, to develop a Draft Resolution which could include the following:
  - a. Raising Awareness - Encourage Parties and support the Ramsar Secretariat to raise awareness of the services provided by coastal wetlands especially for sustainable development, climate change mitigation and adaptation through their role in blue carbon, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity conservation;
  - b. Engage the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) - Seek for the STRP to examine alignment of Ramsar work with the work, tools and methodologies of the leading climate change fora and how they might advise or support Ramsar Contracting Parties around pilot projects/case studies.

The Draft Resolution, if pursued and when ready, is to be sent to the Parties in Oceania for comment and feedback.

### **3.2. Setting up a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania (RRI-Oceania):**

Australia and New Zealand expressed in-principal support for setting up the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania. Parties in the Pacific wished to take the proposal back to their governments for consultation before committing to any firm decision.

In the meantime, the proponent (Hunter Wetlands Center Australia (HWCA)) will look into developing a more concrete proposal based on the preliminary feedback from Parties as well issues and needs identified from the meeting and resubmit it for consideration at pre-COP13 meeting for Oceania. The proposal will outline what form an RRI-Oceania will take and what major activities it could focus on. The proponent was also advised to work with partners, namely, IUCN Oceania Regional Office and SPREP, and identify what support they can mobilize.

### **3.3. Capacity building needs in the Pacific and how to address the needs:**

Capacity building was identified by Parties as a priority area, hence was extensively discussed (refer to item 4.13.1). It was concluded that the Ramsar Secretariat will take note of the discussions, explore possible cooperation with partners such as JICA, IUCN Oceania Regional Office and SPREP, make linkage with the proposed Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania, and put forward a capacity building plan for the region taking into consideration resourcing and timeframes.

## **4. SESSIONS OF THE MEETING:**

### **4.1. Opening remarks:**

Joshua Wycliffe, Permanent Secretary for Local Government, Housing and Environment of Fiji, stressed that wetlands are still seen as wastelands and development is continuing at a great speed impacting wetland areas. He added, "We don't see the benefits of conservation until impacts hit us. It is hard to balance development and conservation. My ministry faces so many pressures from fast development and clearly sees the need to make the economic case for wetland conservation and change the mindset of developers as 'eco' stands not only for economy but also for ecology." The Permanent Secretary praised the work at Upper Navua Conservation Area, Fiji's only Ramsar Site, and added that the government will work to designate more Ramsar Sites, such as Cakaulevu (Great Sea Reef). The Permanent Secretary also highlighted the importance of wetlands for local communities including their unique cultural values that lay the foundation of wetlands resource use in Fiji and in the wider region. He also stressed the role of coastal wetlands in

carbon sequestration and storage, and the potential for carbon trading which again highlights the need to think long-term instead of rushing to have short-term gains.

Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, expressed her hope for the meeting to provide an opportunity for the Parties in Oceania to reflect on the successes and challenges, to renew and strengthen existing partnerships, build new friendships and develop new ideas for projects and programmes to support the needs of the Parties in the region. She thanked the Government of Fiji and IUCN Oceania Regional Office for the new base of the Ramsar Regional Officer for Oceania (ROO) and extended her gratitude to SPREP for generously hosting the ROO at their Headquarters in Apia for some eleven years. While highlighting the importance of water and wetlands for local communities, the Secretary General acknowledged these ecosystems as a source of culture, spirituality, economy and security for local communities across Oceania region, and mentioned the strong connection between Māori and wetlands as an example. She also praised the Republic of the Marshall Islands for the ongoing implementation of Reimaanlok ('Looking into the future'), community-based National Conservation Area Plan. The Secretary General described the emerging science and policy work on blue carbon – carbon sequestered and stored by coastal wetlands such as tidal flats, mangrove swamps and seagrass beds - and encouraged the wetland community to promote the linkage between climate change mitigation and wetlands amongst other important benefits wetlands provide.

## **4.2. Presentation: Update from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat on the key developments since COP12 (June 2015), outlook and priorities:**

Martha Rojas-Urrego (Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention) gave an overview of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024. She shared reflections on challenges as well as opportunities to improve the implementation of the Strategic Plan as moving forward to the Ramsar COP13. Despite being one of the most productive ecosystems and despite its fast rate of degradation and loss the value of wetlands is still not sufficiently recognised. Wetlands are still seen as wastelands, breeding ground for diseases, and continue to be lost due to land conversion for agriculture and urban development. Thus, the Secretary General noted, promoting the value of wetlands should be at the forefront of all our efforts. For example, how many people know that value of coastal wetlands is higher than that of tropical forests? Increasing the visibility of wetlands (and Ramsar Convention) will enable broader outreach to partners as well as other key policy objectives, which in turn will lead to improved access to funding opportunities and enhanced implementation. At the same time, it is important for the Secretariat to strengthen servicing of the Parties by taking measures to enable improved implementation on the ground. Again, reinforcing current efforts on resource mobilization and partnership with key international mechanisms such as SDGs, CBD, UNFCCC and others is at the forefront of the Secretariat's agenda.

## **4.3 Country presentations:**

**4.3.1. Australia:** *(Mark Taylor, Assistant Secretary, Wetland Policy and Northern Water Use, Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, Department of the Environment and Energy):* Australia joined the Convention in 1975 and has designated 65 Ramsar Sites covering 8 million ha. The Sites are managed through cooperative arrangements with states/territories, site managers and NGOs. A suite of national guidelines is available to assist Ramsar Convention's implementation.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: Ongoing update of Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs), Ecological Character Descriptions (ECDs) and management plans for its 65 Ramsar Sites; Ramsar Convention's Article 3.2 assessments; One new Ramsar Site nomination in process.

Wetland Policy: National Ramsar Implementation Plan under development.

Wetland CEPA: Research as part of National Environment Science Program; WWD activities.



Others areas: Conservation of wetlands in large catchments (Murray-Darling Basin, Great Barrier Reef), restoration of wetlands.

*Key challenges* include development pressures ranging from growing population along coasts to mines, ports and tourism activities. Changing climate impacting on extreme weather events, changing weather patterns and sea level rise affects ecological character of wetlands and in particular Ramsar Sites. Resourcing for wetlands is another challenge that highlights the need to strengthen linkages with other relevant agendas, which in turn will leverage increased funding opportunities.

*Moving forward*, Australia will explore such linkages along the significant roles wetlands play in climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction.

**4.3.2. Fiji:** (*Sarah Tawaka, Senior Officer, Resource Management Unit, Department of Environment*): Fiji joined the Convention in 2006 and has designated one Ramsar Site, Upper Navua Conservation Area (615 ha). A National Wetland Steering Committee has been established and meets biannually (the Committee reconvened in January 2017 after a year-long break). Three wetlands (Great Sea Reef, Nasoata Mangrove Island and Lake Tagemoucia) are under consideration for Ramsar listing.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: The management plan for Upper Navua Conservation Area is being prepared by a consultant. For Nasoata Mangrove Island, a proposed Ramsar Site, the Department of Environment considers extending the initially proposed boundary to cover the surrounding tidal flats and designate it as a representative of Fiji's mangrove ecosystems.

*Key challenges* include development pressures resulting in wetland loss and degradation partly because wetland values and benefits are not recognized at all levels of government. Lack of human resources, in particular, lack of technical expertise within the Department of Environment (Ramsar Administrative Authority) hinders progress in general.

*Moving forward*, Fiji will further the Ramsar Site nominations, follow up on the management of Upper Navua Conservation Area Ramsar Site, and develop a directory of priority wetlands for Fiji.

**4.3.3. Kiribati:** (*Marii Marae, Senior Environment Officer, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development*): Kiribati joined the Convention in 2013 and has designated one Ramsar Site, Nooto-North Tarawa (1,033 ha).

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: A community-driven management plan was drafted for a mangrove area on North Tarawa that includes the Ramsar Site. The plan is currently being translated into English. Also, a Community Constitution was developed and put in place to provide legal support for the implementation of the management plan. Major activities undertaken include continuation of mangrove planting programme since 2007 (to date 30,000 mangrove seedlings have been planted, however no data on survival) and turtle conservation programme at the site.

Wetland Policy: The new NBSAP (submitted Jan 2017) includes actions on wetland issues such effective management of the existing Ramsar Site as well as identification and designation of new Ramsar Sites.

*Key challenges* for managing the Ramsar Site include lack of awareness of the importance of the Site combined with loss of traditional practices leading to destructive activities by landowners such as cutting of mangroves as well as unregulated resource harvesting by outsiders, in particular, those coming from overcrowded capital city, South Tarawa. The Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development (Ramsar Administrative Authority) lacks necessary funds and human resources to monitor and address these threats.

*Moving forward*, Kiribati will finalize the management plan for the mangrove area on North Tarawa that includes the Ramsar Site and ensure effective implementation of the plan. Another priority is documenting cultural-historical values as well as other important ecosystem services mangroves on North Tarawa provide, in particular the services that directly benefit livelihoods, and use the information as a showcase for raising awareness. Setting up/establishing baseline data for the Ramsar Site is equally important. Designation of more Ramsar Sites is another priority. Capacity building along conservation, monitoring and

management of Ramsar Sites is needed. Government staff also needs to develop skills on fundraising and proposal development, which in turn help them identify and secure financial and technical resources for their work.

**4.3.4. New Zealand:** (*Wendy Jackson, Senior International Adviser, Department of Conservation*): New Zealand joined the Convention in 1976 and has designated six Ramsar Sites covering 56,639 ha. National implementation is guided by an overall policy framework based on freshwater and estuarine management. Treaty of Waitangi and associated obligations are an important aspect of the national implementation that resulted in increased focus on Mātauranga Māori activities related to wetlands. Partnership with NGOs and industries is another pillar that supports national implementation.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: Launching of National Guidelines for the assessment of potential Ramsar wetlands. Wetland CEPA: Holding of National Ramsar Symposium in 2015 and National Wetland Restoration Symposium in 2016; Launching of “Estuary Hub” - interactive web resource; Marking of WWD. Other areas: More funding for projects related to culture and wetlands within the context of Treaty of Waitangi; Passing of a bill that guarantees Whanganui River a legal personhood; Launching of a new handbook, “the Voice of Wetland”, that highlights a range of practices undertaken by Māori tribes to improve the health and wellbeing of their wetlands. Continued partnership with industries such as “Living Water” partnership with Fonterra (\$20 million funding over 10 years) is another key achievement.

*Key challenges* include difficulties with resourcing and coordination of actors involved in wetland management, in particular, freshwater management. Competing priorities pose challenges to balancing economic development and wetland conservation.

*Moving forward*, New Zealand will focus on advancing new Ramsar Site nominations, updating Ramsar Information Sheets and maps for its existing Ramsar Sites and continuation of Arawai Kākāriki restoration programme that covers two Ramsar Sites. A new wetland centre is underway south of Hamilton to reinforce on-going CEPA work. Department of Conservation’s 2025 Freshwater Strategic Goal aims at restoring 50 freshwater systems from mountain to sea.

**4.3.5. Palau:** (*Yalap Porfirio Yalap, Education Programme Coordinator, Palau Conservation Society*): Palau joined the Convention in 2003 and has designated one Ramsar Site, Lake Ngardok Nature Reserve (500 ha). At this meeting, Palau was represented by a staff member of Palau Conservation Society that manages Palau’s Ramsar Site amongst other mandates.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: Sustainable financing of Lake Ngardok Nature Reserve resolved through Palau’s Protected Areas Network Fund. Two ecologically significant sand flats (Northern Peleliu Lkes and Eastern Babeldaob) have been identified as potential Ramsar Sites by non-government actors. There is a proposal to develop parts of Northern Peleliu Lkes for tourism and it is predicted that such development will negatively affect the ecologically sensitive parts of the site. Palau Conservation Society is conducting awareness raising activities targeted to local communities at Northern Peleliu Lkes with plans to nominate it as a Protected Area and/or Ramsar Site.

Wetland CEPA: Ongoing community awareness activities at Lake Ngardok Nature Reserve; Marking of WWD.

*Key challenges* at the Ramsar Site level include poor synergy between Palau’s Ramsar National Focal Point, CEPA and STRP Focal Points, and Lake Ngardok Nature Reserve management.

*Moving forward*, priorities include setting up a National Ramsar Committee to enable improved coordination between actors involved in wetland management.

**4.3.6. Papua New Guinea:** (*Benside Thomas, Manager, Terrestrial Protected Areas, Conservation and Environment Protection Agency*): Papua New Guinea joined the Convention in 1993 and has designated two Ramsar Sites, Tonda Wildlife Management Area (590,000 ha) and Lake Kutubu (4924 ha). Two more

wetlands are under consideration for Ramsar listing. These are Sepik Wetlands and Kikori River Basin that includes Lake Kutubu.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: The Component 3 of a 5-year GEF 6 project on Sustainable Financing of Protected Area Network of Papua New Guinea will aim at building management capacity and financial sustainability of six protected areas including the two existing Ramsar Sites and Sepik Wetlands, a proposed Ramsar Site. Wetland Policy: Protected Areas Bill is under development following the launch of the Protected Area Policy that covers Ramsar implementation. Establishing of Donor & BiEA/MEA Coordination Unit within the Conservation and Environmental Protection Authority (CEPA) to solely focus on these obligations was another achievement.

Other areas: Ongoing awareness raising and partnership building with oil and gas industries on conservation and environmental sustainability.

*Key challenges* include inadequate funding for conservation work and lack of capacity within CEPA to effectively monitor all protected areas including Ramsar Sites. There is no in-country expertise on Ramsar, hence Ramsar Information Sheets and management plans for the existing Ramsar Sites are long outdated and the new nominations are delayed. Insufficient level of support from NGOs and communities hinders progress in general. Competing land uses between oil and gas mining, forestry and conservation pose challenges.

*Moving forward*, Papua New Guinea will update Ramsar Information Sheets and maps for the existing Ramsar Sites and finalize preparatory work for designation of the two new Ramsar Sites. Another way forward is to develop a National Wetlands Action Plan in line with the Protected Area Policy. Developing MoUs/MoAs for wetland conservation with mining, logging and other extractive industries is important too.

**4.3.7. Republic of the Marshall Islands:** (*Lani Milne, Chief of Coastal, Land and Conservation, Environmental Protection Authority*): Marshall Islands joined the Convention in 2004 and has designated two Ramsar Sites, Jaluit Atoll Conservation Area (690,000 ha) and Namdrik Atoll (1,119 ha). There are two more wetlands under consideration for Ramsar listing. These are Lib Island and Mejit Island. Much of conservation work in Marshall Islands is undertaken in the context of Reimaanlok ('Looking into the Future') – community-based National Conservation Area Plan, developed in 2008. The document is currently under review. According to a recent review of Reimaanlok implementation, Namdrik Atoll has successfully completed signing-off of the community-based resource management plan while Jaluit had difficulties due to constant change in leadership.

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: Effective management of Namdrik Atoll through community-based initiatives.

Wetland policy: Protected Areas Network legislation was signed into law and is expected to support Reimaanlok activities, and enable increased funding and improved stakeholder coordination. In addition, suggestions to include Ramsar implementation issues in the ongoing review of Reimaanlok were put forward.

Wetland CEPA: Marking of WWD.

*Key challenges* of managing the Ramsar Sites include distance between atolls and lack of logistical resources to visit the Ramsar Sites, which in turn leads to insufficient monitoring and lack of outreach activities.

Although there is increased interest among communities to designate islands and atolls as Ramsar Sites the Environment Protection Authority) doesn't always have capacity to support these initiatives. Limited options for alternative livelihoods and complex land tenure systems hinder conservation efforts at grassroots level. At the national level, the main issues are lack of baseline data to inform policy and practice. Lack of capacity to enforce laws poses challenges.

*Moving forward*, Marshall Islands will prioritize designation of new Ramsar Sites and revival of community engagement at Jaluit Atoll. Strengthening of monitoring of the existing and future Ramsar Sites is important and will be done through building strong relationships with local governments including traditional leaders. Inclusion of Ramsar activities into Reimaanlok update is another way forward.



**4.3.8. Samoa:** (Elizabeth Kerstin, Principal Forestry Research and Development Officer, Ministry of Natural Resources and Development): Samoa joined the Convention in 2005 and has designated one Ramsar Site, Lake Lanoto'o (470 ha).

*Key achievements since COP12 include:*

Ramsar Sites: O Le Pupu Pue National Park was officially nominated as Samoa's second Ramsar Site and documentation for listing is under preparation.

Wetland Policy: Mainstreaming wetland conservation into the new NBSAP, 2<sup>nd</sup> National Environment Sector Plan and National Action Program to Combat Land Degradation and Mitigate the Effects of Drought 2015-2020.

Wetland CEPA: Marking of WWD

Other areas: Initiating development of national wetlands inventory; On-going monitoring and removal of crown of thorns.

*Key challenges* include absence of technical and administrative support from Ramsar Secretariat, in particular, with regard to following up the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2014 and annual contributions. Limited funding for wetland related activities affects implementation in general. There is no follow-up on previous plans and commitments such as the Regional Wetlands Action Plan and Ramsar Sites; prioritization exercise.

*Moving forward*, Samoa will complete the national wetlands inventory, finalize documentation for Ramsar listing of O Le Pupu Pue National Park, and nominate new sites. It is important to put in place a standard monitoring mechanism to allow early detection of changes in the ecological character of Ramsar Sites. With regard to wetland CEPA, priorities include strengthening community engagement in wetland activities and continued efforts to raise awareness on the values and benefits of wetlands. Securing more funding for wetland related work will boost Ramsar implementation in general.

**4.3.9. Vanuatu:** (Donna Kalfatak, Principal Biodiversity and Conservation Officer, Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation): Vanuatu is in the process of joining the Convention. Recent progress includes updating of 1993 Vanuatu National Wetland Inventory in 2014 and identifying Lake Letas Community Conservation Area as the accession site. In 2015, a national NGO, "Eco-lifelihood Development Association", with funding from Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund implemented a project at Lake Letas to raise awareness on potential threats to the site, prevent introduction of Tilapia, and support community consultation and documentation for listing the lake as a Ramsar Site. To date, landowners and the provincial governments have sent letters of support for designating Lake Letas as a Ramsar Site, Ramsar Information Sheet is at the final stage of review (internally), and briefing for the Council of Ministers has been drafted.

#### **4.4. Presentation: Review of the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands 2011-2013 (RWAP):**

The first Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific was adopted in 1999 by 26 member countries and territories of SPREP. In 2010, a workshop was organized to review the progress of the 1999 Action Plan and develop new priorities and recommendations. Attended by 13 Pacific Island countries and territories, the workshop led to the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands 2011-2013 with 5 goals with 20 key priorities ([here](#)).

Warren Lee Long (Coastal and Marine Adviser, SPREP) presented on major progress made along the goals and targets of the Action Plan. These include training and assistance to Pacific Island countries and territories on:

- Implementing the Ramsar Convention's Strategic Plan nationally;
- Ramsar Site designation and management planning;
- National wetland inventories and updates, monitoring and rehabilitation;
- Wetland manuals and guidelines; World Wetlands Day and other CEPA activities;

- Coordination of regional inputs to Ramsar COPs (holding of Oceania Regional Meetings and pre-COPs, assistance with National Reports to COPs).

Warren Lee Long highlighted the need to review the Action Plan to ensure alignment with the new Ramsar Strategic Plan, new SPREP Strategic Plan and new Regional Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas. Increased synergies with SDGs and other biodiversity related MEAs should be sought. The Action Plan 2011-2013 is heavy and long, thus needs to be reformulated to an overarching regional strategy (simple) and action plan for the strategy (detailed) together with a resourcing strategy for implementation.

Suggestions to make the next regional plan/strategy more relevant, actionable and successful included:

- Human capital: Active network of wetland champions; active partnership between regional organizations;
- Wetland CEPA: Raising awareness on the value of the Ramsar Convention and wetlands within society and political levels through innovative and effective communication strategies;
- Resourcing: Engaging with private sector in wetland wise use and management as a financing option, work with economic development agencies, explore innovative investment models.

Contracting Parties encouraged efforts to minimize bureaucratic and reporting burden. There were comments from a number of Oceania Contracting Parties that the Action Plan created another list of obligations difficult to resource for, that any review should look to build off their existing Ramsar obligations to avoid this.

### **Conclusion:**

No specific action was sought by Contracting Parties at the time of the discussion. However, Samoa noted in the country presentation (refer to item 4.3.8) that there was no follow-up on the implementation and review of the Regional Wetlands Action Plan 2011-2013.

One of the breakout groups considered the RWAP as an avenue to address region wide priorities (refer to item 4.12). The Group advised that, if the RWAP 2011-2013 is reviewed, it should be developed in a way that avoided adding another source of reporting/action items for Ramsar Contracting Parties. It should rather be built up from a review of existing national targets followed by a review of those targets for linkages to develop region wide priorities as this would assist national implementation of Ramsar rather than compete with it.

## **4.5. Promoting the conservation of coastal wetlands and blue carbon ecosystems:**

Lew Young (Senior Regional Adviser for Asia-Oceania, Ramsar Secretariat), in his presentation, stressed the importance of coastal wetlands and the role the Ramsar Convention plays in the conservation of these ecosystems. Worldwide, 938 Ramsar Sites (42%) contained various types of coastal ecosystems. Data compiled from Ramsar Sites Information Service (rsis.ramsar.org) reveals that over 90% of the coastal Ramsar Sites provide various types of cultural services that include scientific and educational (77%), recreation and tourism (77%) and spiritual and inspirational (56%). Many of the Sites were reported to provide food for people and (37%), wetland non-food products (45%) and play roles in hazard reduction (49%) and erosion protection (30%). In the Pacific, coasts and associated resources are the lifeline of national and local economies as well as a source of culture and spirituality. Despite this, there are eight Ramsar Sites in the Pacific out of which only four are coastal. Lew Young also introduced a brief analysis of Oceania Parties' NBSAPs and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to demonstrate

how Ramsar Convention's efforts to conserve coastal wetlands will contribute to other international agendas. The analysis revealed that all NBSAPs<sup>1</sup> except for Papua New Guinea include targets and activities specific to the conservation of coastal ecosystems. No reference to coastal ecosystems and blue carbon has been made in the Parties' NDCs apart from Fiji and Kiribati recognizing the role mangroves play in reducing vulnerability.

Jennifer Howard (Marine Climate Change Director, Conservation International), in her presentation, focused on the emerging science of carbon sequestration and storage capacities of coastal blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, tidal flats and seagrasses). These ecosystems are highly efficient carbon sinks, sequestering carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere and oceans at significantly higher rates per unit area than terrestrial forests. The carbon deposits accumulated within these systems are stored both in the plant biomass above ground (tree trunks, stems and leaves) and below ground (root systems and rhizomes) as well as in carbon-rich soils. Unlike terrestrial ecosystems, carbon stored in the soils below ground can remain there for very long time periods (up to millenia). For example, coastal habitats store up to 50 times more carbon in their soils per unit area than tropical forests. Coastal habitats cover less than 2% of forested area yet the emissions from their loss annually are equal to 10% of all tropical deforestation.

However, with increasing population and development along coastlines, these valuable ecosystems are being degraded and lost. Worldwide, up to 1 million hectares are being destroyed each year and in the last century, 67% of global mangroves and about a third of global tidal marshes and seagrass meadows have been lost. In light of these threats, the major question was whether blue carbon approach can leverage better resourcing for, management and restoration of coastal wetlands.

The Oceania Contracting Parties were, therefore, requested to consider putting forward a Draft Resolution for Ramsar COP13 to highlight the need to scale up efforts to conserve coastal wetlands including blue carbon ecosystems due to the wide range of critical benefits they support including carbon sequestration and storage. Such a Resolution would aim to make strategic linkages between Ramsar Convention and other international agendas, in particular, climate change agendas and ensure to highlight the potential of blue carbon to leverage better resourcing for, management and restoration of coastal wetlands.

### ***Discussion:***

Samoa pointed out a precedent for blue carbon accounting of mangroves in the Pacific. Details to be obtained from the report of Mangrove Ecosystems for Climate Change Adaptation and Livelihoods project (MESCAL, implemented by IUCN Oceania Regional Office between 2009 and 2013). SPREP mentioned that carrying out national blue carbon inventories is an important first step. An upcoming project by SPREP and IUCN will look into carrying out national blue carbon inventories in the Pacific countries with abundant mangroves, Seagrasses and tidal marshes.

The Ramsar Secretariat considered strengthening linkages between blue carbon and national climate change commitments. Countries can now include coastal wetland related actions in their commitments to the UNFCCC Paris Climate Agreement (Nationally Determined Contributions). Countries can also include coastal wetlands in their national accounting of greenhouse gas emissions using IPCC guidelines, and there are now methodologies specifically designed for developing carbon market projects based on conservation and restoration activities in coastal wetlands.

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<sup>1</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> NBSAPs for Fiji, Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea are not available.

Fiji expressed caution about heavy commitments by the countries in the Pacific to various international and regional processes. Hence, the possible Draft Resolution needs to be highly relevant, strongly linked to or enable fulfillment of, if possible, the existing commitments the countries are tied to.

Familiarity with blue carbon concept and science behind it was limited in general and the Parties needed time to find out more.

### **Conclusion:**

Taking this forward, it was agreed that a number of options and preparatory steps should be explored and these include organizing a side event at Ramsar COP13, a possible Draft Resolution to increase awareness of the carbon sequestration as an ecosystem value of wetlands, and requesting the STRP to review if Parties and STRP activities align with the work, tools and methodologies being developed on the international fora leading on climate change and blue carbon.

## **4.6. Promoting culture, livelihoods and wetlands:**

Mariam Ali (Manager, Culture and Livelihood Programme, Ramsar Secretariat) talked about culture in the context of Ramsar Convention, and shared experiences and cases where culture is integral to the management and conservation of wetlands including Ramsar Sites. The role of culture is recognized and reinforced in Target 10 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 that provides a framework for *“the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities relevant for the wise use of wetlands and their customary use of wetland resources be documented, respected, subject to national legislation and relevant international obligations, and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the Convention, with a full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities at all relevant levels.”*

The Parties are also encouraged to designate the wetlands that support exceptional cultural values including traditional practice and knowledge relevant to wise use as well as forms of interaction on which the ecological character of wetlands depends.

Mariam Ali also updated the Parties on the current activities undertaken within the MAVA grant for Culture, Livelihoods and Wetlands (2015-2018). Key achievements include setting up a Ramsar Culture Network, conducting Rapid Cultural Inventories in selected regions, releasing newsletters and featuring the role of women in the management of wetlands on international arena through a side event “Women & Wetlands” at IUCN World Conservation Congress in Hawaii in September 2016.

Mariam Ali also pointed out that the existing COP decisions relevant to culture date from some time ago, much has moved on since then, and proposed to the Contracting Parties to take into consideration inviting COP13 to consolidate and update this area of work in a new Resolution, including the importance of traditional management in addressing sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk reduction.

Marshall Islands presented a case study on ‘Mo’ – traditional conservation sites. ‘Mo’ sites can cover certain parts of land, a whole island, or a reef area, and are no-take zones and set aside to conserve food resources such as crabs, fishes and other marine animals used for food. Designation of ‘Mo’ sites is made possible due to customary land ownership system. ‘Mo’ sites can be used for special occasions and church functions with the permission from respective Paramount Chiefs. Some of the ‘Mo’ sites are still recognized today although the degree to which the rules are observed varies and the delegate from Marshall Islands highlighted the need to re-activate the ‘Mo’ system amongst other traditional ways of sustainably managing resources. The Step 4 of the Reimaanlok implementation process recommends

local knowledge and use of resources be collected and documented while the on-going review of Reimaanlok has potential to reinforce the role of traditional management in island and atoll conservation plans.

Kiribati presented several cases where application of traditional practices contributes to the conservation of certain species. For example, certain species of turtles and sharks are regarded as totems. On Tamana Island, only traditional canoes are allowed for fishing which is a form of encouraging sustainable fisheries. Coastal protection is undertaken through 'te buibui', which is a technique that involves building a brush structure from local materials including branches, palm fronds and coconut fibre string that then catches sediment and allows for coastal dunes and beaches to rebuild. The delegate from Kiribati stressed that applicability of these traditional practices is limited as they are subject to a number of inherent factors. As such, efforts to replicate the practices need to be carefully designed.

### ***Discussion:***

Kiribati and Marshall Islands raised concerns over loss of cultural values and traditional practices in their respective countries. Fiji and Marshall Islands pointed out the difficulties with documenting traditional knowledge such as stories, traditional medicines etc. as it is not always easy to obtain information from villagers and sometimes special permission is needed to access such information. On the other hand, villagers are also proud about their heritage and happy to share names of places and stories. Australia noted that the key is to treat local communities, their culture and traditions with respect, willingness to understand and openness.

Despite the difficulties, there are ongoing efforts to integrate culture into conservation. Samoa recognizes the importance of traditional use of trees and plants for medicinal purposes and encourages planting of the relevant tree species. In Fiji, nomination of protected areas involves assessing and documenting of the cultural values and knowledge at the sites. In New Zealand, Mātauranga Māori is closely linked to the conservation of water and wetland ecosystems.

New Zealand urged further efforts to reinforce the role of culture in the conservation and wise use of wetlands to recognize that culture is not static and evolves and changes.

Australia noted that Australia incorporates cultural values into on-ground management and the wise use of Ramsar listed wetlands; noted a number of Australian Ramsar Sites where this is occurring. Australia also noted that the Ramsar Convention is the primary tool for the conservation and management of ecological values of wetlands of international importance and expressed concerns over use of cultural aspects as a driver for conservation; that other conventions (World Heritage Convention) have cultural values as a focus.

### ***Conclusion:***

No follow up action was sought by Contracting Parties. However, one of the breakout groups (refer to item 3.12) proposed additional work be carried out on traditional knowledge/culture. Contracting Parties are already doing culture work and one way to highlight that work is for the Secretariat to develop a report for COP13 capturing the ongoing efforts to integrate traditional knowledge/culture into Ramsar Convention's implementation. The Group also suggested reviewing the existing country reporting and nomination process for Ramsar Sites so as to have a stronger focus on traditional knowledge/culture dimensions of Ramsar Sites. The Group suggested reconsidering the case for a new Resolution on culture to be presented for Ramsar COP13. However, there was no follow-up discussion on the suggestions made due to limited time and other higher priority agenda items.

#### 4.7. Setting up a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania:

Stuart Blanch (CEO, Hunter Wetlands Center Australia (HWCA)) gave an overview of the Hunter Wetlands Center Australia, introduced the background and rationale for the proposed Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania and invited the Parties to provide feedback.

Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) are intended to support improved implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in specific geographic regions. There are 19 Ramsar Regional Initiatives operating across the world. None of them involves Oceania Contracting Parties except for East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), to which Australia is party. The key operational requirements are:

- Ownership: Work with and for all contracting parties in their region to improve delivery of Ramsar objectives; and
- Accountability: Establish governance and financial structures which are transparent, accountable and report annually directly to Ramsar Standing Committee on their progress and operations, and specifically on progress in implementing the Operational Guidelines of the Ramsar Convention for RRIs.

The main questions posed were:

- What are the needs of the Oceania Parties to implement the Ramsar Convention (such as education and training, wetland management, communications, networking etc.)?
- How the proposed RRI could support to address these needs?
- How should the RRI create synergies with the Ramsar Regional Officer – Oceania role, and not divert resources from this role?
- How could the RRI support the implementation of the *Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific Islands*?
- What structure would the RRI take? Possible options include but not limited to Ramsar Regional Center, Oceania Wetlands Partnership and Wetlands Resource Center (or a combination of the three) – with a secretariat base in a selected location (the options include Hunter Wetlands Center Australia, IUCN ORO and SPREP).
- Would Parties support development of a draft proposal for a RRI-Oceania for further discussion by Parties prior to COP13?

Stuart Blanch also proposed the following issues be considered:

- If an RRI is established, how can we ensure two-way learning between wetland managers and policy experts in Oceania?
- How should development of an RRI proposal learn lessons from experiences of other RRIs? For example, establishing other RRIs have apparently required substantial resources and bureaucracy but not always led to better wetlands outcomes across a region.

#### **Discussion:**

Several Parties pointed out that there are no wetland education centers in the Pacific. Secretariat encouraged the proponents to find a niche considering their strength in wetland education. Stuart Blanch emphasized that Australia and New Zealand have expertise with setting up and running wetland education centers and that expertise can be made available if the Pacific Parties are interested to set up wetland education centers.

Regarding specific needs, Marshall Islands was interested in having increased capacities to work with communities, and conduct trainings and capacity building activities for communities. Stuart Blanch indicated that capacity sharing is an important area and can take different forms such as mobilizing expertise from Australia and New Zealand but also encouraging experience sharing and learning between Pacific Island nations.



New Zealand urged Parties to look at all models as well as linkages with other mechanisms such as the Pacific Climate Change Center at SPREP. In terms of exploring linkages with existing projects and initiatives, Palau mentioned possible coordination with Palau International Coral Reef Center and IUCN pointed out the possibility for the RRI to complement or build upon the Pacific Mangrove Initiative under which Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu as well as IUCN, SPREP and UNDP are committed to implementing the Pacific Mangrove Charter. Also, USP set up a database for biodiversity information which is housed at the regional herbarium at USP and needs continued funding to be maintained and updated.

New Zealand also urged to look at sustainability, in particular, long-term financial capacity and how other RRIs have resolved the issue. Australia agreed that funding is critical. IUCN pointed out GCF and GEF as possible funding avenues and expressed interest in exploring these as well as other funding opportunities jointly with the RRI.

Since setting up a RRI will require significant amount of work, Stuart Blanch proposed the light version of such initiative be considered and piloted till COP13, subject to funding and capacity. That would involve implementing projects on priority areas of capacity building and in thematic areas such as blue carbon.

Australia and New Zealand expressed in-principal support for the RRI. Australia also encouraged other Parties to indicate whether they support the proposal and would like the proponent to take it further.

#### ***Conclusion:***

It was concluded that the Parties (except for Australia and New Zealand) will need to take the proposal back to their governments for consultation before committing to any final decision.

It was agreed that the proponent would develop a more concrete proposal (~2-page) based on the preliminary feedback from the Parties as well issues and needs identified from the meeting and resubmit for consideration. The proposal should ideally outline what form the RRI will take and what activities it can carry out and what budget it will require. The proponent was also advised to work with partners (IUCN, SPREP) and identify what support they can mobilize.

The proponent agreed to work further with Parties and partners, and prepare a more concrete proposal for future discussion.

#### **4.8. Presentation: Introducing the International Partnership for Blue Carbon:**

David Loubser (Vanuatu Country Manager, Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change, SPREP) who is the focal point for SPREP at the International Partnership for Blue Carbon made a presentation introducing the Partnership and encouraging the countries to join. Launched at Paris UN Climate Change COP21 in 2015, the Partnership aims at raising awareness about the importance of blue carbon ecosystems, exchange knowledge and accelerate practical actions. The Partnership has 20 members so far.

#### **4.9. Presentation: JICA's work on the conservation of wetlands:**

Reiko Iitsuka (Natural Environment Team, Forestry and Nature Conservation Group, Global Environment Department Global Environment Department, JICA) gave an overview of JICA's work on conservation of wetlands. JICA supports technical cooperation, loans and grants as well as trainings through Japan's Official Development Assistance. Strategic themes include sustainable forest management for climate

change adaptation and mitigation, sustainable natural resource management for livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation. Reiko Iitsuka also introduced two ongoing projects that the Ramsar Parties may find relevant to the meeting discussions. One aims at sustainable management of coral reefs and island ecosystems in light of climate change impacts in Palau (2013-2018) and the other focuses on comprehensive assessment and conservation of blue carbon ecosystems and their services in the coral triangle (2017-2022).

JICA also supports training courses and the courses most relevant to the Ramsar Convention are

1. Sustainable use of wetland resources for local benefits (wetland management at the central and local levels, practices of wise use of wetlands);
2. Eco-tourism for nature conservation officials (planning and implementation of eco-tourism);
3. Integrated basin management for Lake Environment (water quality management, concept of waste water treatment).

These training opportunities are normally offered to government officials and can be tied to Ramsar Convention's capacity building objectives in the region.

#### **4.10. Developing a CEPA tool on Wetlands of Oceania:**

Given the prior discussions that highlighted the need to scale up current CEPA work to improve the visibility of Ramsar Convention and promote the value of wetlands globally, nationally and locally this session focused on what CEPA tools will be most useful for the Pacific region.

Fiji stressed the need to put in place tools to raise awareness of private sector and investors about the value of wetlands so there are more efforts to balance conservation and development. At the national level, case studies on good practices for the management of wetlands and Ramsar Sites in Oceania will be helpful. At Ramsar Site level, Palau highlighted that CEPA programmes and materials such as brochures and posters are normally very helpful. Also, signboard at each Ramsar Site is a good way to raise the visibility of the Convention.

A targeted publication on wetlands of Oceania, possibly with a thematic basis (e.g., disaster risk reduction, health benefits), could be instrumental for the Parties in securing funding support for specific wetland activities.

#### ***Conclusion:***

It was concluded that posters featuring various types of wetlands of Oceania and the important ecosystem services they provide be produced with inputs from Parties and distributed to Ramsar Sites, schools and other key target groups (subject to funding).

#### **4.11. Analysis of challenges and priorities for the national implementation of the Ramsar Convention:**

Solongo Khurelbaatar (Regional Officer-Oceania, Ramsar Secretariat) provided an overview of common challenges and priorities.

Below is a table showing the common challenges:

Parties/ Challenges	Australia	Fiji	Kiribati	New Zealand	Palau	PNG	RMI	Samoa
Resourcing (financial)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of human resources		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Development pressures	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Lack of in-country technical expertise		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Lack of awareness on wetlands values (various levels)		✓	✓				✓	✓
Insufficient coordination between stakeholders				✓	✓		✓	
Complex land tenure						✓	✓	
Lack of baseline data		✓					✓	
Absence of support from IOP's and Ramsar Secretariat						✓		✓
Climate change impacts	✓							
No follow-up on previous plans and agreements								✓

Below is a table showing the common priorities:

Parties/ Priorities	Australia	Fiji	Kiribati	New Zealand	Palau	PNG	RMI	Samoa
Further nomination of Ramsar Sites under consideration	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Improve management and monitoring of existing Ramsar Sites		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Secure funding – GEF, GCF and other opportunities	✓		✓				✓	✓
Initiate designation of new Ramsar Sites			✓		✓			✓
Update RISs for existing Ramsar Sites				✓		✓		
Build partnership with private sector, local government etc.	✓					✓	✓	
Develop/review national wetland inventories		✓	✓					✓
Continue awareness raising activities			✓					✓
Improve policy framework for wetland conservation						✓	✓	
Capacity building (managing and monitoring Ramsar Sites)			✓				✓	
Capacity building (fundraising, proposal development, project management)			✓					
Document ecosystem services of existing Ramsar Sites			✓					
Document cultural-historical values of existing Ramsar Sites			✓					
Wetland center				✓				
Wetland restoration				✓				
Setting up a National Ramsar Committee					✓			

#### 4.12. Breakout session:

The breakout session was aimed at further prioritization of the priorities and challenges identified in the previous sessions and shown in tables under 4.11. The participants broke into three groups and had focused discussions along the following four questions. The Group 3 included International Organization Partners and other partner organizations. The Group focused only on Question 3 and identified those priorities which would benefit from a regional approach and which their organizations could directly support.

1. Which are the three priority issues that need to be addressed for improved implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Oceania region?
2. Do you have experience of successful case studies that address these issues?

3. Which of these issues can be addressed through a regional approach?
4. Are there any particular issues that should be brought to COP13 for policy guidance?

	<b>Group 1 (Parties)</b>	<b>Group 2 (Parties)</b>	<b>Group 3: IOPs and other partners identified priorities that would benefit from a regional approach and which their organizations could directly support:</b>
3 priority issues	<p>1. Manage the existing commitments well (documentation to support new Ramsar Site nominations, reporting, building the case for funding and partnerships)*</p> <p>2. Identify opportunities to strengthen resourcing through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accessing funds 9GEF, GCF)</li> <li>- Partnership with NGOs/CSOs</li> <li>- Build the case within own governments)*</li> </ul> <p>3. Capacity building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technical assistance to build expertise for new Ramsar Site nominations, monitoring and reporting etc.</li> <li>- Trainings</li> </ul> <p>*Support from Ramsar Secretariat and Regional Officer – Oceania is important</p>	<p>1. Funding support (partnership, awareness raising, economic valuation of wetlands)</p> <p>2. Technical support (capacity building, guidelines, wetland survey manual, technical support from IOPs)</p> <p>3. Collaboration with other conventions (efficiency in reporting, synergies, mainstreaming)</p>	<p>1. Development of national wetland inventories that would be then compiled into Oceania directory</p> <p>2. Capacity building along</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ramsar processes</li> <li>- Management of Ramsar Sites</li> <li>- Writing proposals</li> </ul> <p>3. Blue carbon partnership to enable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inventories</li> <li>- Finance mechanisms</li> <li>- Develop blue carbon project in Pacific Islands</li> <li>- CEPA on blue carbon</li> <li>- Multi-agency engagement/collaboration (for example, between fisheries, environment and forest agencies)</li> <li>- Expertise from Australia, New Zealand, USA etc.</li> </ul>
Successful cases	<p>1. Building partnership with private sector (New Zealand's example of partnership with Fonterra); Lessons learnt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need to be a tough negotiator</li> <li>- Be clear about the outcomes you want</li> <li>- Be clear about risks</li> <li>- Know the language of private sector</li> </ul> <p>2. Building partnership with scientific and research bodies</p>	Conservation of sites which qualifies under other mechanisms, e.g. IBA	
Opportunities for regional cooperation	<p>1. Network and information sharing but may not lead to immediate results*</p> <p>2. Look at synergies with other obligations (Sendai Framework; Samoa Pathway, Climate Change Strategies)</p> <p>3. Look for opportunities to link wetlands with Pacific/Oceania priority agendas such as a side event at the UN Oceans Conference</p>	If the RWAP 2011-2013 is reviewed, it should be developed in a way that avoided adding another source of reporting/action items for Ramsar Contracting Parties. It should rather be built up from a review of existing national targets followed by a review of those targets for linkages to develop region wide priorities (this would assist national implementation of the Ramsar	

	(June 2017, New York)  *Try not to burden Parties with extra work	Convention rather than compete with it).	
Issues for COP13	1. Climate change impacts, e.g. blue carbon (STRP to build toolkits on blue carbon inventory, sequestration) 2. Additional work on traditional knowledge/culture: - Countries are already doing culture work; Secretariat to gather information on on-going TK/culture work - Develop a report for COP13 on TK/culture - Review the existing country reporting and nomination for Ramsar Sites - Reconsider the case for Draft Resolution on culture for COP13	Carbon sequestration and storage function of wetlands as one of the ecosystem services	

#### 4.13. Focused discussion:

Due to limited time, the session continued with a plenary that, in line with Parties' prioritization, discussed in details capacity building needs in the Pacific and how to address the needs as well as scaling up the conservation of coastal wetlands through blue carbon approach:

##### ***4.13.1. Capacity building needs in the Pacific and how to address the needs:***

New Zealand facilitated the plenary. The major issues raised are summarized below:

**Whom to train:** The importance of identifying primary target groups was highlighted repeatedly. New Zealand stressed that national trainings are likely to reach out to a critical mass of trainees while regional trainings may risk the trainees being posted to another position after the training. Fiji highlighted the need to consider different training needs at different levels (e.g., at community and field level the focus should be more on technical skills while at the national level the focus should be on making policies, raising and managing funds). Australia reminded that capacity building is not only about providing trainings but also making resources such as guidance documents available. Similar opinions were echoed by Marshall Islands who mentioned that Reimaanlok is a good example of such guidance documents.

**In what areas:** No Ramsar capacity building activities in Oceania before. Australia suggested trainings on a thematic basis: e.g. a), scientific and technical, b) management and c) partnerships and fundraising. Vanuatu was interested in trainings on wetland inventory and filling out Ramsar Information Sheets. Ramsar Secretariat underlined the importance of building capacity along economic valuation of wetlands as well as strengthening linkages with other processes/sectors. Ramsar Secretariat also stressed the need to make case studies of best practices available to the Parties.

**Resources required:** Kiribati urged to consider timeframe for implementation and resourcing of funds to make this happen. Fiji also reminded that resourcing is critical. USP shared a model previously used by SPREP (providing funding) and USP (running trainings). The same model can be used to build capacity on wetland issues.

**Conclusion:**

It was concluded that the Secretariat will take note of the discussions, explore possible cooperation with partners such as JICA, IUCN Oceania Regional Office, SPREP and USP, make linkage with the proposed Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania and put forward a capacity building plan for the region taking into consideration resourcing and timeframe.

**4.13.2. Scaling up the conservation of coastal wetlands through blue carbon approach:**

Australia facilitated the plenary. The major issues raised are summarized below:

Potential actions identified include:

- Ramsar Convention to encourage and support the Parties in carrying out national wetland inventories so that the Parties know where the potential blue carbon sites are;
- Task the STRP to develop tools and resources about recognizing the role of blue carbon in climate change; however, first need to ensure that STRP has the technical skill to provide inputs into blue carbon work;
- Seeking synergies with other conventions and processes on blue carbon discussions; Ramsar Secretariat to talk to key actors in climate change sector about value of carbon sequestration and storage in wetlands; Fiji is the President of UNFCCC COP23 and so a good opportunity to raise the profile of blue carbon; Request participants to take this message back to their capitals.

The possible Draft Resolution will:

- Make reference to the impacts of climate change and the roles wetlands play to mitigate these impacts in the region;
- Be compatible with national policies;
- If the Draft Resolution goes ahead then it would need an Information Document about the role of blue carbon in climate change mitigation. Therefore, proponents could start off the Draft Resolution with awareness raising, and request the STRP to review alignment of Ramsar Secretariat and Contracting Parties' work with the tools and methodologies of the leading international fora on climate change.

Useful resources at the regional level include USP's work on REDD+ and findings of MESCAL project's studies on blue carbon content of mangroves.

**Conclusion:**

It was concluded that blue carbon was a relatively new concept for many of the Parties in the Pacific and the sessions on blue carbon were very useful in terms of understanding the science behind it and the relevance to the Ramsar Convention's implementation. The sessions also provided useful information on mechanism and tools available to the countries. Parties in the Pacific also felt that information sharing and consultation with other departments in their respective governments, in particular with climate change focal points, will be needed. Parties noted that they will appreciate further assistance in the space of awareness raising, experience sharing, building the case, better coordination with other international processes as well as welcome pilot projects on blue carbon. Taking this forward, a two-step process was agreed:

3. An information document and information session on the benefits of blue carbon projects to coastal wetland management – to be presented in the margins of Ramsar Standing Committee Meeting 53 to explore/build support for a possible Draft Resolution on blue



carbon for Ramsar COP13. Australia is to work with partner organizations including Conservation International and SPREP, and Ramsar Secretariat to develop the document.

4. If sufficient support is identified, to develop a Draft Resolution which could include the following:
  - c. Raising Awareness - Encourage Parties and support the Ramsar Secretariat to raise awareness of the services provided by coastal wetlands especially for sustainable development, climate change mitigation and adaptation through their role in blue carbon, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity conservation;
  - d. Engage the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) - Seek for the STRP to examine alignment of Ramsar work with the work, tools and methodologies of the leading climate change fora and how they might advise or support Ramsar Contracting Parties around pilot projects/case studies.

The Draft Resolution, if pursued and when ready, is to be sent to the Parties in Oceania for comment and feedback.

## 5. ANNEXES:

Agenda of the Meeting:

Day/time	Content	Chair	Notes
<b>Day 1 (March 6)</b>			
0830 – 0900	Registration		
0900 – 0910	Opening remarks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joshua Wycliffe, Permanent Secretary for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Fiji;</li> <li>- Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention Secretariat.</li> </ul>	Fiji	
0910 – 0915	Prayers	Fiji	
0915 – 0930	Introduction of participants; Group photo.	Fiji	
0930 – 0945	Presentation: Update from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat on the key developments since COP12, outlook and priorities (Martha Roajs-Urrego)	Fiji	
0945 – 1030	Country presentations: Update from the Contracting Parties on the key developments since COP12, outlook and priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Australia</li> <li>- Fiji</li> <li>- Kiribati</li> </ul>	Fiji	15 min each (10 min presentation, 5 min Q&A)
1030 – 1045	<i>Coffee break</i>		
1045 – 1230	Country presentations <i>cont.</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New Zealand</li> <li>- Palau</li> <li>- Papua New Guinea</li> <li>- Republic of the Marshall Islands</li> <li>- Samoa</li> <li>- Solomon Islands</li> <li>- Vanuatu</li> </ul>	Fiji	15 min each (10 min presentation, 5 min Q&A)
1230 –	<i>Lunch break</i>		

1330			
1330 – 1345	Presentation: Review of the Regional Wetlands Action Plan for the Pacific (Warren Lee Long, Coastal and Marine Adviser, SPREP)	Samoa	
1345 – 1500	Preparing for COP13: Promoting the conservation of coastal wetlands and blue carbon ecosystems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation and background information (Lew Young, Senior Regional Advisor for Asia/Oceania, Ramsar Convention Secretariat);</li> <li>- Blue carbon ecosystems (Jennifer Howard, Marine Climate Change Director, Conservation International);</li> <li>- Discussion and feedback;</li> <li>- Identify champions and the way forward.</li> </ul>	Samoa	(15 minutes/presentation)  Facilitator: Lew Young
1500 – 1520	<i>Coffee break</i>		
1520 – 1535	Presentation: JICA's work on the conservation of wetlands (Reiko Iitsuka, Global Environment Department, JICA)	Samoa	
1535 – 1650	Preparing for COP13: Promoting culture, livelihoods and wetlands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation and background information (Mariam Ali, Manager, Culture and Livelihoods Programme, Ramsar Convention Secretariat);</li> <li>- Presentation on the role of traditional knowledge and practices in the conservation and wise use of wetlands in Oceania (TBC);</li> <li>- Discussion and feedback;</li> <li>- Identify champions and the way forward.</li> </ul>	Samoa	(15 minutes/presentation)  Facilitator: Mariam Ali
1650 – 1800	Developing a CEPA tool on Wetlands of Oceania	Samoa	Facilitator: Lew Young
1830h	Welcome dinner reception		
<b>Day 2 (March 7)</b>			
0900 – 0915	Summary of the discussions of the first day	Papua New Guinea	Chairs of the first day's sessions (Fiji and Samoa)
0915 – 1030	Setting up a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Oceania: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation and background information (Stuart Blanch, CEO, Hunter Wetlands Center – Australia;</li> <li>- Discussion and feedback.</li> </ul>	Papua New Guinea	Facilitator: Hunter Wetlands Center – Australia
1030 – 1050h	<i>Coffee break</i>		
1050 – 1230	Presentation: Key issues from the country presentations (Solongo Khurelbaatar, Regional Officer for Oceania, Ramsar Convention Secretariat); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Break out session to address the key issues identified;</li> <li>- Report back from the break out session.</li> </ul>	Papua New Guinea	Facilitator: TBC
1230 – 1330h	<i>Lunch break</i>		
1330 – 1500h	Follow-up discussion on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What concrete actions do we need to take?</li> <li>- What resources do we need?</li> <li>- Where do we get the resources from?</li> <li>- Who takes the lead?</li> </ul>	Palau	Facilitator: TBC

1500 – 1520	Coffee break		
1520 – 1730	Follow-up discussion <i>cont.</i>	Palau	Facilitator: TBC
1730 – 1800	Closing remarks and commitments by all stakeholders (tour de table)	Palau	
Day 3 (March 8)			
AM	Regional workshop for the Pacific on Ecosystem-Based Disaster Risk Reduction:  Ramsar National Focal Points from <i>Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Palau and Papua New Guinea</i> and representatives of the environmental ministries of <i>Solomon Islands and Vanuatu</i> will attend this 2-day technical workshop.	IUCN Oceania Regional Office	Please see the workshop agenda
PM	Joint field trip	IUCN Oceania Regional Office	Details are TBC
Full day	Field trip to Upper Navua Conservation Area Ramsar Site	Solongo Khurelbaatar	Optional, more information and RSVP with Solongo Khurelbaatar

Participants' list:

#	Country	Name	Agency	Email	Notes
1	Australia	Bethanie Adams	Assistant Director and Australian National Focal Point on Ramsar Convention Matters, Wetlands Section, Department of the Environment and Energy	<a href="mailto:Beth.ADAMS@environment.gov.au">Beth.ADAMS@environment.gov.au</a>	
2	Australia	Mark Taylor	Assistant Secretary, Wetland Policy and Northern Water Use, Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, Department of the Environment and Energy	<a href="mailto:Mark.Taylor@environment.gov.au">Mark.Taylor@environment.gov.au</a>	
3	Fiji	Joshua Wycliffe	Permanent Secretary for Local Government, Housing and Environment	<a href="mailto:singhsk@govnet.gov.fj">singhsk@govnet.gov.fj</a>	Day 1
4	Fiji	Sandeep Singh	Director, Department of Environment	<a href="mailto:singhsk@govnet.gov.fj">singhsk@govnet.gov.fj</a>	Day 1
5	Fiji	Sarah Tawaka	Resource Management Unit, Department of Environment	<a href="mailto:sarah.tawaka@govnet.gov.fj">sarah.tawaka@govnet.gov.fj</a>	
6	Kiribati	Marii Marae	Senior Environment Officer, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development	<a href="mailto:mariim@environment.gov.ki">mariim@environment.gov.ki</a>	

7	New Zealand	Wendy Jackson	Senior International Adviser, Department of Conservation	<a href="mailto:wjackson@doc.govt.nz">wjackson@doc.govt.nz</a>	
8	Palau	Yalap Porfirio Yalap	Education Programs Coordinator, Palau Conservation Society	<a href="mailto:yyalap@palauconservation.org">yyalap@palauconservation.org</a>	
9	Papua New Guinea	Benside Thomas	Senior Programme Officer, Conservation and Environment Protection Authority	<a href="mailto:benside.thomass@gmail.com">benside.thomass@gmail.com</a>	
10	Republic of the Marshall Islands	Lani Milne	Chief of Coastal, Land and Conservation, Environmental Protection Authority	<a href="mailto:lanimilne@gmail.com">lanimilne@gmail.com</a>	
11	Samoa	Elizabeth Kerstin	Principal Forestry Research and Development Officer, Ministry of Natural Resources and Development	<a href="mailto:elizabeth.kerstin@mnre.gov.ws">elizabeth.kerstin@mnre.gov.ws</a>	
12	Vanuatu	Donna Kalfatak	Principal Biodiversity and Conservation Officer, Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation	<a href="mailto:dkalfatak@vanuatu.gov.vu">dkalfatak@vanuatu.gov.vu</a>	
<b>#</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Notes</b>
13	Conservation International	Jennifer Howard	Marine Climate Change Director	<a href="mailto:jhoward@conservation.org">jhoward@conservation.org</a>	
14	Hunter Wetlands Center Australia	Christine Prietto	Ramsar CEPA Focal Point for Australia	<a href="mailto:christine.prietto@gmail.com">christine.prietto@gmail.com</a>	
15	Hunter Wetlands Center Australia	Stuart Blanch	CEO	<a href="mailto:ceo@wetlands.org.au">ceo@wetlands.org.au</a>	
16	IUCN	Fipe Tuitubou	Programme Support Officer, Oceania Regional Office	<a href="mailto:Fipe.TUITUBOU@iucn.org">Fipe.TUITUBOU@iucn.org</a>	
17	IUCN	Lilian Sauni Fay	Manager, Water and Wetlands Programme, Oceania Regional Office	<a href="mailto:Lilian.SAUNI@iucn.org">Lilian.SAUNI@iucn.org</a>	
18	IUCN	Mason Smith	Acting Regional Director, Oceania Regional Office	<a href="mailto:Mason.Smith@iucn.org">Mason.Smith@iucn.org</a>	
19	IUCN	Radhika Murti	Senior Programme Officer, Disaster Risk Reduction, Global Ecosystem Management Programme	<a href="mailto:Radhika.MURTI@iucn.org">Radhika.MURTI@iucn.org</a>	
20	IUCN	Sereana Narayan	Communications Assistant, Oceania Regional Office	<a href="mailto:Sereana.Narayan@iucn.org">Sereana.Narayan@iucn.org</a>	
21	JICA	Reiko Iitsuka	Natural Environment Team, Forestry and Nature Conservation Group, Global Environment Department	<a href="mailto:iitsuka.Reiko@jica.go.jp">iitsuka.Reiko@jica.go.jp</a>	
22	The Pacific Community (SPC)	Elise Huffer	Social Development Adviser - Culture	<a href="mailto:EliseH@spc.int">EliseH@spc.int</a>	Day 1

23	Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	Lew Young	Senior Regional Adviser for Asia and Oceania	<a href="mailto:young@ramsar.org">young@ramsar.org</a>	
24	Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	Mariam Ali	Manager, Culture and Livelihood Programme	<a href="mailto:ali@ramsar.org">ali@ramsar.org</a>	
25	Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	Martha Rojas-Urrego	Secretary General	<a href="mailto:ROJAS-URREGO@ramsar.org">ROJAS-URREGO@ramsar.org</a>	
26	Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	Solongo Khurelbaatar	Regional Officer for Oceania	<a href="mailto:khurelbaatar@ramsar.org">khurelbaatar@ramsar.org</a>	
27	SPREP	David Loubser	Vanuatu Country Manager, Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change	<a href="mailto:davidl@sprep.org">davidl@sprep.org</a>	Day 1
28	SPREP	Fred Patison	Solomon Islands Country Manager, Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change	<a href="mailto:fredp@sprep.org">fredp@sprep.org</a>	Day 1
29	SPREP	Warren Lee Long	Coastal and Marine Advisor	<a href="mailto:warrenl@sprep.org">warrenl@sprep.org</a>	Day 1
30	University of the South Pacific	Marika Tuiwawa	Curator, South Pacific Regional Herbarium, Faculty of Science, Technology, and Environment	<a href="mailto:tuiwawa_m@usp.ac.fj">tuiwawa_m@usp.ac.fj</a>	
31	WWF-Pacific	Rusila Savou	Climate Change Officer	<a href="mailto:rsavou@wwfpacific.org">rsavou@wwfpacific.org</a>	
32	Independent	Kelera Macedru	University of the South Pacific	<a href="mailto:keleram@gmail.com">keleram@gmail.com</a>	

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