

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
47th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 24-28 March 2014

DOC.SC47-05

Progress with preparations for COP12

Actions requested:

Standing Committee is invited to take note of progress with preparations for the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP12) since SC46, including the signing of the MOU with the Host Country Uruguay and its financial implications, and to:

- i. approve the dates for COP12;
- ii. approve the logo and slogan for COP12;
- iii. approve the theme for World Wetlands Day 2015; and
- iv. propose mechanisms to fill in the financial shortfall in the COP12 budget.

Background

1. During its 46th Meeting in April 2013 (SC46), Standing Committee took Decision SC46-08 to “establish a subgroup on the preparation of COP12. The membership of the Subgroup would comprise one member of the Standing Committee from each region, with the host country, Uruguay, as Chair. Members are: COP12 host country, Uruguay (Chair), Cambodia, Fiji, France, Guatemala, Mexico, South Africa, and Romania (COP11 host country).”
2. Under Decision SC46-22, the Standing Committee:
 - i) “Reiterated its thanks to Uruguay for offering to host COP12; noted with appreciation the progress reported by the Host Country; requested the Host Country and the Secretariat to consider carefully the length and scheduling of COP12, in particular in relation to participation by one-person delegations; and requested the Secretariat to prepare a list of anticipated draft COP12 Resolutions, with the aim of reducing the number to be submitted to COP12;” and
 - ii) “Recognized the concerns and challenges due to the lack of a Ramsar core budget allocation for the preparation and running of a COP; urged the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12 and the Secretariat to resolve the issues of funding; and also urged the Host Country and the Secretariat to continue their negotiations and finalize the hosting agreement, and to report intersessionally to the Standing Committee Subgroup on COP12 on progress made.”
3. Under this agenda item, the Standing Committee will receive reports from the COP12 Host Country and the Secretariat.

4. The Host Country and the Secretariat propose that the Subgroup on COP12 review (a) progress on COP12 preparations and (b) the broad commitments of the MOU which they have signed and the resulting financial situation, for its report to the plenary session of SC47.

Progress on COP12 preparations

5. The Host Country will present its preparations for COP12 and the COP12 logo and slogan.
6. The Host Country and the Secretariat will present an update on their joint progress on the venue and dates for COP12, and the Secretariat will also present updated proposals on the Ramsar Award/Evian Special Prize (further details are in DOC. SC47-06), updated details of the proposed Ramsar regional meetings in preparation for COP12, and the proposed theme for World Wetlands Day 2015. They will also propose ways of closing the gap between current funding and the proposed administrative budget for COP12, and invite the SubGroup on COP12 and Standing Committee to provide input.
7. As indicated by Uruguay, COP12 will take place at the conference facilities of the Conrad Hotel in Punta del Este, which is located 130 kilometres east of Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. Punta del Este is one and a half hours from Montevideo's Carrasco International Airport.
8. The Secretary General and the Senior Regional Advisor for the Americas visited the conference centre in January 2014 and discussed issues relevant to the preparation of COP12 with officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment.
9. After discussions with Uruguay, avoiding any overlap with other global gatherings, and considering the availability of space in the conference venue, it is proposed that COP12 take place from 1 to 9 June 2015. COP12 will thus last nine days, including two initial days for a Standing Committee meeting and regional meetings. Pre-COP days will take place from 29 to 31 May 2015. The Host Country and the Secretariat seek the Standing Committee's approval for the proposed dates.
10. The Senior Regional Advisors have made progress with potential host countries of regional Ramsar meetings in preparation for COP12. These meetings are scheduled to take place in October and November 2014, as follows:
 - Africa: Tunisia / Botswana (to be confirmed), 6-10 October
 - Americas: Brazil / Colombia (tbc), 27-31 October
 - Asia: Cambodia / Kyrgyzstan (tbc), 27-31 October
 - Oceania: Australia (tbc), November
 - Europe: Austria, 20-24 October

Theme for World Wetlands Day 2015

11. Through Decision SC46-19, "For World Wetlands Day 2015, [the Standing Committee] recommended that the theme should be complementary with that of COP12 on the broad theme of 'wetlands and biodiversity', and requested progress to be reported at its 47th meeting." The Secretariat is pleased to propose, after discussion with the COP12 Host Country, 'Wetlands for our Future' as the theme for World Wetlands Day 2015 and as the theme for COP12.

12. This shared theme presents a great opportunity to bring together Ramsar's approaches to securing healthy wetlands for all our futures. Ramsar's Strategic Plan for 2016 onwards, which will be developed over the next two Standing Committee meetings and debated at COP12, will identify the Convention's directions and focus areas for the next two triennia. It is expected to support Parties with a strong focus on wetlands and water, with a focus on ensuring the quality and quantity of water needed to sustain wetlands and the ecosystem services which are vital to people and nature.

Memorandum of Understanding and resulting financial matters

13. Since SC46 in March 2013, and under the leadership of the new Secretary General, the Secretariat has carried out a series of discussions with the Government of Uruguay to agree the terms of the COP12 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). They agreed the final terms of the MOU in mid-December 2013 and signed the MOU on 30 January, during the Secretary General's visit to Uruguay from 27 to 31 January 2014 (Annex I).
14. The agreement on financial terms has been achieved by means of a contribution to the Secretariat from the Government of Uruguay of USD 600,000 (CHF 570,000), while a remaining financial shortfall in excess of USD 350,000 remains to be covered.
15. It is also worth noting that Uruguay is contributing through the 'National Budget for Ramsar COP 12' an additional USD 1,500,000 to be able to fulfill its host country agreements in line with the requirements agreed in the MOU.
16. The three activities for which funding is still sought are:
- i. the pre-COP translation of all papers into French and Spanish (USD 146,316/CHF 139,000);
 - ii. the hiring of a professional logistics coordinator to manage COP12 arrangements in Spanish and English USD 157,895/CHF150,000; and
 - iii. the reporting on the meeting by the IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin team (USD 25,000/CHF23,750).
17. Based on the agreement above, the Secretariat and the Host Country invite the Subgroup on COP12 to discuss and propose mechanisms to help meet the financial shortfall, such as the suggestion below.
18. The Secretariat is assessing the potential benefits and feasibility of delivering a paperless COP12. This would considerably reduce the cost and carbon footprint of the meeting, in line with the spirit of the Ramsar Convention on wise use of natural resources. A paperless meeting could also make it easier for participants to locate documents and allows for faster preparation and distribution of conference room papers. There are a number of recent successful experiences in hosting paperless international environmental conferences; Uruguay recently hosted one (INC5 on Mercury) in the same Convention Centre.