

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

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## **Streamlining the format of Ramsar resolutions**

### **Actions requested:**

The Standing Committee is invited to direct the Secretariat on the changes proposed, for application in the preparation of draft resolutions for COP12 and beyond.

### **Background**

1. Ramsar Convention resolutions follow the traditional structure for treaties entered into under international law. Treaties typically begin with a background preamble, followed by the treaty's scope, a definition of terms used and finally the substance of the agreement itself. Ramsar Resolutions start with a background preamble (the reasoning behind the resolution) and then the agreement follows. The paragraphs each start with a verb and together make up one very long sentence.
2. Many Ramsar resolutions serve to enable the Contracting Parties to approve programmes and guidance to support the implementation of the Convention: in these cases the text of the programme or guidance follows as an annex to the resolution.
3. The Ramsar Convention is currently delivered in English, French and Spanish to 168 Contracting Parties. For many of these Parties, and in particular those for whom none of these languages are official national languages, resolutions must be clear and coherent to be understood.
4. They must also be designed for effective implementation, typically by the Contracting Parties in their territory. The operative paragraphs should clearly indicate the actors concerned and the actions they are expected to take. They should indicate the appropriate mechanisms by which Contracting Parties should implement the resolution and measure the effectiveness of their actions.
5. Shorter and clearer resolutions lead to shorter and clearer translations and guidance materials. As with all written documents of the Convention, the length and clarity of the text has a direct impact on:
  - the capacity of any consulted parties to give meaningful input to shape the final text;
  - the impact of the final agreed resolutions; and
  - the cost and potential quality of translations into French, Spanish or other languages.

### **Proposed actions**

6. The Secretariat proposes to provide text which is as clear, brief, coherent, accessible and applicable as possible in all documents, without limiting the authority of the Convention or any necessary complexity in the matters described.
7. It proposes to reverse the position of the background preamble and the substance of the agreement, so that the substance starts at the top of the front page, and the preamble paragraphs follow in a 'Background' section. While the reasoning behind a resolution is important, the actions which it requests are paramount. The background paragraphs are always written as complete and separate sentences. This proposed model is illustrated in the example at Annex 1. The guidance annexed to the resolution would follow as in the current model.
8. It would also be possible to draft a paragraph summarizing the resolution and its purpose, which could be included in a box above the text, as also shown in Annex I. This summary would be approved by the Contracting Parties along with the full text of the resolution.
9. Reflecting the anticipated style of the new Ramsar website, the Secretariat has started to use a new font (Calibri) for correspondence and general communications. However, the Secretariat plans to reserve the original font (Garamond) in future for the text of resolutions and summaries to underline their particular legal status.

## Annex 1

### Proposed new format for Ramsar resolutions

Resolution XI.11 calls for Contracting Parties to promote the conservation and wise use of urban and peri-urban wetlands, and other wetlands affected by urban activities, in accordance with the principles of sustainable urban development and adequate shelter for all. It calls for the *Principles for the planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands* to be widely disseminated to urban planners, and asks the Secretariat and the STRP to develop further practical guidance, including with UN-Habitat. Contracting Parties are asked to help by advising on emerging issues and providing case studies, while Convention bodies are asked to explore initiatives to highlight the wise use of urban wetlands, such as awards and accreditation schemes.

#### Resolution XI.11

#### Principles for the planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands

##### THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

1. URGES Contracting Parties to continue to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands in urban and peri-urban environments, as well as those beyond the urban boundary that are affected by urban activities and developments, as a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals and the Habitat Agenda goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world;
2. WELCOMES the *Principles for the sustainable planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands* annexed to this Resolution, as a contribution to sustainable urban planning and management, and THANKS the Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) for the development of the Principles and UN-Habitat and the Danone Group for their support for that work;
3. URGES Contracting Parties and other governments to act on the Principles, disseminate them in appropriate languages to national and local agencies responsible for planning and managing urban and peri-urban environments, and take steps to ensure that they are applied;
4. URGES Contracting Parties to promote integration of these Principles and the *Integrated Framework for avoiding, mitigating, and compensating for wetland losses* (Resolution XI.9) into national and local planning policies and documents, by increasing awareness of the importance of healthy wetlands as urban water management infrastructure and providers of benefits to urban populations;

5. INVITES Contracting Parties, through their National Focal Points and STRP National Focal Points, to continue to advise the Ramsar Secretariat on evolving issues concerning the management of urban and peri-urban wetlands, and to help the Secretariat and the STRP develop guidance by providing information and case studies;
6. WELCOMES the opportunities for collaboration with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN-Habitat, UN-Water, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs), individual cities, and others, and ASKS the Ramsar Secretariat and the STRP to collaborate further with these bodies and Ramsar Regional Initiatives to foster projects that show how the wise use of wetlands can benefit local urban communities;
7. THANKS the Ramsar Culture Working Group for its efforts to promote the idea of a constructive and positive relationship between human activities and settlements and wetlands; WELCOMES the initiative from France of an award to municipalities that promote wetlands in urbanized areas, to be implemented with the support and participation of the coordinator of the Ramsar Culture Working Group; and ASKS the Convention to consider establishing an accreditation scheme for cities which show strong and positive relationships with wetlands;
8. ASKS the Ramsar Secretariat and STRP, with the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), to help other international and national agencies develop further guidance for specific target groups, including as set out in section 4 of the annexed Principles, that will contribute to the sustainable management of urban and peri-urban wetlands, and to report their progress to the Standing Committee and Conference of the Parties;
9. ASKS the STRP, in the context of its work plan for 2013-2015, resources permitting, to develop further practical guidance for mainstreaming wetland issues into urban planning; and
10. RECOMMENDS that Parties hosting a meeting of the Conference of the Parties include a parallel event for local and territorial governments on the planning and management of wetlands, given their substantial roles in land use and development planning.

## BACKGROUND

11. For the purposes of this Resolution, "urban wetlands" are those wetlands lying within the boundaries of cities, towns and other conurbations; "peri-urban wetlands" are those wetlands located adjacent to an urban area between its suburbs and rural areas. Many other wetlands beyond the immediate confines of municipal boundaries are linked, for instance hydrologically, with urban settlements;
12. Since prehistoric times human settlements have been associated with and dependent upon wetlands for services including food production, water supply, trade and defence;
13. The world has become increasingly urbanized and since the mid-2000s more than 50% of the human population have lived in urban settlements. This trend is placing major and increasing pressure on natural resources within and beyond urban areas;

14. This shift to a predominantly urban human population is predicted to continue at average rates up to almost 1.6% per annum worldwide, with low growth rates in the most developed countries and the highest urbanization rates in less developed and least developed countries;
15. Urban areas can generate a range of negative impacts on the environment, and on wetlands in particular, which can vary in severity and scale and extend well beyond municipal boundaries, with global implications in terms of ecological footprints;
16. Increasingly rapid urbanization in all regions of the world is threatening wetlands in two principle ways:
  - i) the manipulation and direct conversion of wetlands, whether planned or unplanned, to urban areas, is leading to acute problems associated with polluted drainage, direct habitat loss, overexploitation of wetland plants and animals by urban and peri-urban residents, and the increased prevalence of non-native invasive species; and
  - ii) the watershed-related impacts of urban development, including increasing diffuse and point-source pollution, growing demands for water including for agricultural production and energy supply, and growing demands for mineral materials for the development of urban infrastructure;
17. Inappropriate and unsustainable management of wetlands can reduce the resilience of cities to natural hazards such as floods, tsunamis and earthquakes, and compromise the post-disaster recovery of cities;
18. For the prosperity of future generations and the maintenance of wetlands, their biodiversity and their services to people, society must adopt a more sustainable approach to urbanization, recognizing the need to protect the natural resource base that sustains urban areas;
19. Urban and peri-urban wetlands provide a range of ecosystem services, including providing food, improving water quality and ensuring secure drinking water supplies, mitigating natural hazards through the regulation of flooding and reduction of storm surges, and contributing to people's physical and mental well-being by offering rare green space for their enjoyment;
20. With good planning, stewardship and management, cities can be a driving force for sustainable social and economic development for current and future generations, while urban populations offer significant opportunities for community participation in wetland management and restoration in their local environment;
21. Contracting Parties committed in Article 3.1 of the Convention on Wetlands to achieving the wise use, as far as possible, of all wetlands in their territory and to maintaining the ecological character of wetlands included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance;
22. The 10th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP10) in Resolution X.27 asked the STRP to explore collaborative links with UN-Habitat, to promote the social and environmental sustainability of towns and cities in relation to wetlands and water and to prepare guidelines for managing urban and peri-urban wetlands;

23. The Contracting Parties note in Annex 1 to Resolution XI.12 on “Wetlands and human health” the role that wetlands (including urban wetlands) and the implementation of the Ramsar Convention can play in contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; Resolution XI.12 recognizes that the wise use of wetlands results in specific and demonstrable health outcomes and benefits, while inappropriate management of urban and other wetlands can contribute to threats to human well-being;
24. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has highlighted the role of urban areas and their authorities in protecting biodiversity through Decisions IX/28 (2008) on “Promoting engagement of cities and local authorities”, Decision X/22 (2010) on “Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity”, and the Aichi/Nagoya Declaration on Local Authorities and Biodiversity adopted by the City Biodiversity Summit in Nagoya in 2010. CBD Decision IX/28 recognized the rapidly urbanizing global population and importance of water supplies to cities, and urged Parties and other governments to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services provided by urban and peri-urban wetlands under their jurisdiction;
25. UN-Habitat’s Governing Council in Resolution 23/4 (2011) on “Sustainable Urban Development Through Expanding Equitable Access to Land, Housing, Basic Service and Infrastructure” specifically mandated UN-Habitat to promote cities and biodiversity, including wetlands and ecosystem services, as part of its urban development strategy;
26. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) meeting of 2012 recognized that well planned and developed cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies.