

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

47th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, March 2014

DOC. SC47-14

Report and vision of the Secretary General

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the Secretary General's report and his vision for the Convention and the contribution of the Secretariat.

Background

1. The Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands was appointed during SC46 and started work in Gland on 12 August 2013. This paper and DOC. SC47-02 (regarding the visibility of the Convention and synergies with partners) report on the actions he undertook until the end of 2013. This paper also includes elements of a vision for the consideration of SC47 as an input to the debate on the new Strategic Plan to be drawn up by Contracting Parties, our International Organization Partners (IOPs) and other partners interested in the wise use of wetlands and water.

Secretary General's vision for the future

2. Wetlands and their ecosystems play a vital role for humanity and for nature; they provide our water for drinking, washing and cooking, for agriculture, food, storm protection and flood resistance, and many other benefits. Wetlands therefore have an important economic value, but our wetlands also have cultural, spiritual and recreational value, and are the basis of all civilizations and our beautiful natural world.
3. Despite this, wetlands continue to be degraded or lost due to our increasing demands for land and water for agriculture, economic development, housing and all manner of domestic and industrial uses. Many wetlands have already been lost or degraded, and the rate of this loss could increase as the human population grows past nine billion by 2050 and people in the developing world seek the same living standards as people in developed countries. The pressure on wetlands is intense, but the understanding of the services they bring has not grown at the same rate.
4. While Ramsar Contracting Parties are responsible for their wetlands and their people, the Convention and its bodies should help and support Parties to take best advantage of the global knowledge and communications systems available today. To ensure that wetlands are managed sustainably, stop their loss and restore degraded wetlands so they can continue to provide natural benefits and services, Ramsar bodies including the Secretariat should refocus their approach around four principles:

a. Communications and advocacy for wise use of wetlands

5. Most people simply do not know the importance of wetlands and the threats they face. By reaching out to them with targeted messages, and by using the support of local champions and global ambassadors, we can influence people's preconceptions of wetlands and stimulate their interest and engagement. Finding out that wetlands provide much of their food as well as water, and appreciating that they spend much of their leisure time in wetlands such as beaches, coasts, lakes and rivers, can help people to change their behaviour and invest in their long-term future just as they invest in their children. The Secretariat will set up an awareness-raising campaign using traditional and new media to increase the understanding of specific target groups about wetlands and encourage them to engage in local actions and solutions.

b. Capacity development

6. The Secretariat could provide greater technical support to wetland professionals so that they can do their job better and deliver solutions and capacity development where needed. It can share the Convention's rich knowledge of all aspects of wetlands management around the world, to ensure that wetland managers and others have easy access to a network of professionals and information according to their needs. A global network of wetland experts and regional training centres could provide consistently high-quality assistance and guidance, and regular surveys, online courses, webinars, guides and manuals can be adapted to the regional and linguistic needs of users.

c. Partnerships

7. The role of the Secretariat is to support Contracting Parties and partners and help them achieve the goals of the Convention, but many of these goals simply cannot be achieved by any one country or organization. We need to engage many partners to access the wide range of skills and experiences needed, to help multiply local investments, to spread good practice between countries and regions, and to ensure that investments in wetlands deliver and are seen to deliver the intended benefits. We see potential partners in our International Organisation Partners, in United Nations agencies and other Conventions, local, national and international NGOs, and private-sector companies interested in water and wetlands.
8. The need for partnership also applies with groups that are directly affecting wetlands, in order to achieve their wiser use. We could engage more with partners in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector and in the governance of transboundary aquifers, and could work more with the agriculture sector to promote more efficient water use.

d. Measuring the status and value of wetlands

9. Data is essential to inform action and influence change. For instance, *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) for Water and Wetlands* report, which Ramsar commissioned in 2013, has provided useful information on the economic benefits offered by wetland ecosystems and the costs of their loss and degradation. Further work is needed to help decision-makers to quantify the potential impacts of national and regional developments, and steer their decisions towards the wise use of this natural capital. More and better information on the value of wetlands as 'natural infrastructure' will encourage development that incorporates this natural infrastructure rather than destroying it.

10. The measurement of the economic value of ecosystem services makes it possible to incorporate natural infrastructure solutions into development policies. For example, paying for continuous upstream river basin management can help to ensure the necessary quantity and quality of water for cities and industries downstream. In the Neotropics, the growth of such 'water funds' to guarantee water supplies has been highly successful and highlights the value of wetlands to growing populations which need reliable water supplies. Such ideas should be replicated around the world.
11. To measure the extent to which wetlands have been lost, Ramsar's Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) is assessing with various partners the global state of wetlands. This will provide essential baseline information to prioritize ongoing and future initiatives such as the Ramsar Water Initiative with IUCN. We also need to investigate the status of Ramsar Sites compared to other international protected area designations and look for ways to bring our systems closer in line with the internationally accepted assessment measures such as those used by UNESCO for World Heritage Sites and METT (Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool). In this way, we can better understand the status of our wetlands, their management profile and how to stimulate better practices and wiser use.

Report on actions undertaken by the Secretary General up to the end of 2013

a. The Secretariat

12. The new Secretary General started work on 12 August 2013 and immediately set out a programme to interview all staff, look at their work plans and progress reports, and listen to their comments and understanding of the current situation and their hopes for the future. The analysis also helped indicate opportunities to improve the current situation. The partial lack of organizational systems, planning process, staff feedback mechanisms and measurement of results was evident, and was more apparent than any other trend. Lack of consistency between the approaches of regional teams was also apparent. Significant management inputs will be needed to improve systems and processes and increase the effectiveness of teamwork and so better support the Parties.
13. The degree of loyalty to the Convention and its objectives was high and the number of longer-term staff members demonstrates the continuing support to our work. It was also very pleasing to see that staff were keen to see changes and improvement.
14. Job descriptions were analyzed in the light of the need to adjust tasks to meet the changing circumstances. In addition, with incumbents retiring and one post being vacant, the posts of Partnership Coordinator, Administrative Officer and HR Officer were advertised, while the senior Communications/CEPA Officer needs to be advertised in 2014.
15. In November, two two-day team-building sessions with external facilitation helped to explore the future strategy of the Secretariat and the best ways to incorporate all the different skills and expectations of the staff. The process provided feedback on areas for further improvement and also significantly increased team spirit. It was well facilitated and the variety of activities helped to keep peoples' attention and focus. The whole team saw the sessions as a very helpful process that revealed areas for action in 2014.

b. Hosting arrangements

16. The Contracting Parties at COP11 expressed support for further cooperation between Ramsar and IUCN (Resolution XI.1 on *Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat*). In that light, we held a first joint committee involving managerial, finance, HR, administration, and technical staff of the two organizations. Issues including the office space, legal assistance, IT and telephone services were discussed.
17. At present, the layout of the Ramsar office inside IUCN does not meet the aesthetic and comfort standards for an international convention to work, host meetings and welcome visitors, and staff have been working with IUCN to plan a better layout for these purposes. There is a need to display the work of Ramsar, to have a photographic record of all our COPs and World Wetlands Days, as well as photos of Standing Committee Chairs and Secretaries General, and to highlight current events and products. In all, we aim to show the world the relevance of the Convention as part of the drive to underline to staff and our target audiences the importance of wetlands in the provision of water and other ecosystem services.
18. The office space has been partly improved by the replacement of windows and skylights in 2013, but there is much to do to bring it up to the standards of the building. IUCN has agreed to repair the floor and replace old furniture with more consistent and high-quality products, with costs to be met from IUCN funds. A minimal investment of Ramsar funds will be needed for a dividing wall, new folders, display cabinets and bookcases, where these costs will not be fully supported by IUCN. The work will occur during April, and the preparatory filing and storage of old documents will take place beforehand.

c. Preparation of COP12

19. Discussions have been very fruitful and the situation is currently as described in DOC SC47-05.

d. Building relationships with partners

20. The following paragraphs describe actions taken to engage with key partners and lay the foundations for joint activities to work towards the vision outlined above.
21. The new Secretary General presented his vision for Ramsar to around 90 representatives of permanent missions and international organizations in Geneva in October 2013, at an event convened by the Geneva Environment Network at International Environment House. The Executive Director of IISD-Europe highlighted the great political, economical and biological value of wetlands, and underlined the importance of the mandate of the Convention on Wetlands and its potential for an increased role in the sustainable development debate. The Deputy Head of Global Affairs at the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment warned that any sustainable development goals on water must not be limited to people's rights to water and sanitation, but must also include the wetland ecosystems that deliver our water and manage our water system.

Collaboration with IUCN

22. Meetings were held with the Secretary General, her Deputy and the staff across all different programmes, and with the President of IUCN and the Chair of the Commission on Environmental Law. In addition, there were meetings with IUCN colleagues on marine and freshwater issues and with other regional and sectoral issues, and cooperation is planned on mapping of wetland sites and biodiversity. Plans are being jointly developed for a new Ramsar

Water Initiative, as started by the previous Secretary General, to work on water and wetland issues of mutual interest and secure support for future work.

23. Collaboration is also starting on a joint Republic of Korea / IUCN / UNESCO project on streamlining the management of sites which have two or three protected area designations under Ramsar, the World Heritage Convention and the Man and the Biosphere Programme.
24. The Secretary General raised with the IUCN SG the need for technical and legal analysis of the three global conventions on water and wetlands, namely the Ramsar Convention, the UNECE Transboundary Watercourses Convention (Helsinki, 1992) and the UN Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (New York, 1997). Both the Helsinki and New York Conventions have global mandates that relate to wetlands and water and the latter is highly likely to come into force in the next year. IUCN has agreed to take up the task and the Environmental Law Commission and Environmental Law Centre will carry out the legal analysis, and identify potential gaps and overlaps under Ramsar guidance and involving other related conventions.

Collaboration with other International Organization Partners and international bodies

25. Discussions were held on current cooperation and options for the future with **WWF International's** Director General and the Directors of the Freshwater and Marine Programmes. The discussions helped to cement relations and increase mutual understanding. WWF invited a Ramsar Secretariat staff member to attend the global meeting of the Freshwater team for the first time.
26. The Secretary General attended the global assembly of **Birdlife International** partners in Ottawa in June and met core staff and international partners. Collaboration is underway with a number of national partners and the progress of the joint work plan is to be reviewed.
27. The Secretary General met the Director General of **IWMI** and his staff at World Water Week, and discussed the development of work on agriculture and wetlands, the World Wetlands Day theme for 2014. Agricultural use is a major issue in efforts to increase water productivity.
28. The Secretary General visited the headquarters of **Wetlands International** to participate in a global planning meeting. He was able to discuss current operations and options for future collaboration on wetland issues, with a particular focus on Asia and Africa.
29. Discussions started with **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust** as a result of WWT's long collaboration with Ramsar in wetlands health issues and wetland interpretative centres. WWT has also made an application to become an IOP (see DOC SC47-10) and the Secretary General had the chance to have initial discussions with its Director during his mission to China.
30. The Secretary General met the Executive Director of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (**WAZA**), an organization with significant capacity to communicate with the global audience for zoos and aquaria. It would be hoped that collaboration could develop with a programme of communication about wetlands. In this context, the new planned Freshwater Aquarium in Switzerland will offer a fine location to show the world the benefits of wetlands and potentially showcase other Ramsar issues.

Collaboration with UNECE

31. The Secretariat is interested in collaborating with UNECE so that transboundary issues are addressed consistently and include wetland issues appropriately. The Secretary General attended the UNECE meeting on transboundary waters as UNECE prepares to take the Helsinki Convention to a global stage. UNECE staff and major European countries represented were supportive of this collaboration and our network of contacts around the world will be of assistance to UNECE as it seeks to build the Helsinki Convention's membership.
32. Ramsar will seek to work with UNECE across the Pan-European Region, including in the newer European Union member states where the EU Water Framework Directive is having an increasing impact.
33. As one outcome of the UN-Water meeting in Geneva, the closer collaboration of Ramsar with UNECE and with all the other conventions on international waters was noted and will lead to joint projects and complementary strategies in 2014 and onwards.

Collaboration with UNESCO

34. The UNESCO Nairobi meeting on water security of September 2013 gave a great opportunity to get involved in the planning of UNESCO's next phase of cooperation and support for water issues. Cooperation on economic valuation is already promised, as UNESCO is interested in developing sector-level scenario models to give economists a reliable methodology on which to base decisions.
35. Groundwater issues concern both Ramsar and UNESCO: UNESCO has long experience of groundwater projects and Ramsar is seeking greater consideration of groundwater-dependent wetlands and stronger groundwater governance. We will help UNESCO work with UNDP and the Adaptation Fund to carry out such work and ensure protection of wetlands in such interventions. Ramsar is contributing to the MedPartnership project which involves an analysis of groundwater in protected areas of the Mediterranean, including several Ramsar sites. The Ramsar Secretariat also made a joint presentation with the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education at the International Water Summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE in January 2014. The presentation demonstrated the value of improved groundwater governance and consideration of wetlands in management of resources.
36. Discussions with UNESCO and also IUCN have paved the way for closer collaboration on responses to threats and changes in ecological character to Ramsar, World Heritage and MAB Sites. Ramsar will continue to promote comparable collaboration with UNESCO on practical site management issues as with other conventions. The Korean-funded project (see above at paragraph 23) will help in this regard.
37. UNESCO-IHE, Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Australia and the Secretariat signed an agreement establishing the 'Ramsar Chair for the Wise Use of Wetlands' during the Budapest High Level Water Summit in October 2013. This will provide 20% of a professorial position at CSU. The Chair will support the preparation of technical training material for distance learning for wetland managers and for policy work, and will engage with the STRP. Professor Max Finlayson will fulfil this role for the first three years.

Collaboration with UNEP and other MEAs

38. The SG met the UNEP Executive Director, his Deputy and colleagues in September 2013 to establish areas of cooperation. The very positive discussions are being followed up as described below. The progress on the agreements made and areas for further attention will be monitored.
39. UNEP invited inputs from Ramsar on global issues to consider at the first meetings of its renamed governing body, the UN Environment Assembly. Ramsar will consider ideas and how they might be presented.
40. The Secretariat will stay in close contact with UNEP as we work with other partners to develop proposals for between one and three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that cover the water sectors. We will continue to be involved in debates on the SDGs and push for inclusion of the important roles of wetlands.
41. More and closer cooperation is needed to deal with increasing challenges in land and water use and we are all pleased that the six biodiversity conventions are working ever closer to make more impact. The conventions, and UNCCD as the other convention on land use, will work to ensure better-aligned goals, as we work to achieve Aichi targets together and as Ramsar designs its next strategy for 2016 to 2021.
42. In addition, the Secretariat will collaborate with UNCCD based on the existing memorandum of understanding and previous work with the new Executive Director, on issues such as wetlands found within drylands, and on restoration of degraded wetlands that are of interest to both ecosystem-based conventions.
43. Many public organizations and private sector companies have already made great progress to resolve issues on payment for ecosystem services, for example through water funds, by which downstream water users pay for the management of basin-level upstream wetlands and forests and for the people that take care of these services. We look to combine forces with UNEP, IUCN, WWF and The Nature Conservancy to identify good practices and partners to share their experiences of water and wetland management across regions.
44. The Wetland TEEB report has been very well received, and we are working with the team in Geneva on follow up. We now want to carry out sectoral-level valuations of potential developments affecting wetlands. We hope that the TEEB team will cooperate with us to achieve methodologically strong economic valuations for one or two sites, which could help to convince more economists and policy-makers of the value of wetlands in monetary and non-monetary terms.
45. We will be pleased to contribute to the proposed project to map the gaps between UNEP and the environmental conventions, and to improve the working relations between them. It has been proposed that UNEP will incorporate all the MEA support officers into its core budget and so guarantee that worldwide services will be continuing to help all the MEAs, and we will expand our work with them in Bahrain, Bangkok, Geneva, Nairobi and Panama.
46. We are working with UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) and with the other biodiversity-related conventions, to assess an online system for countries to submit their national reports, and we are grateful to UNEP for its support in this action.

47. We aim to be involved in UNEP-driven debates where appropriate. We have asked for updates on relations with conventions and policy matters, and notices of meetings, announcements and policy papers. We will keep UNEP up to date on Ramsar matters and also forward information of interest to Ramsar audiences.
48. Since we do not have an overall institutional framework for cooperation with UNEP, we will investigate how to cover this with an exchange of letters so that the Contracting Parties can see the active cooperation being backed up by institutional ties.
49. We are investigating the UN Secretary-General's project to assess and measure the effectiveness of MEAs to be managed by UNEP, and will follow up further.
50. We will be pleased to continue working with INFORMEA, the website for all the MEAs, so that the portal does include all relevant information and better serves its users. We will also continue to collaborate with UNEP Grid on the development and implementation of the new system for Ramsar Information Sheets that is being developed.
51. We will continue to collaborate with UNEP-DEPI and UNESCO on groundwater issues, and further our collaboration with UNEP as a GEF Implementing Agency in support of Ramsar Parties seeking to access funds.

Collaboration with UNDP

52. The Secretary General has already started working with UNDP and his ex-colleagues in UNDP to get information on the total portfolio of UNDP projects with relevance for wetlands, and extend the call to other GEF agencies and development banks. In this way, the Secretariat can better inform Parties what funds are already deployed for the wise use of wetlands, and help them get access to more support from these funding systems. We will use the information to help get more wetlands-related people in countries involved in preparing successful project applications for different bodies.
53. We have already received extensive information from UNDP-GEF projects: the scope and extent of the funding available for water and wetlands appears to have been underestimated. We will take on an intern or interns to analyze and present all the GEF data, and establish links so that Ramsar regional teams and relevant UNDP staff can work together on policy and practice issues.

Planned collaboration with other bodies

54. The Secretary General will build links between the Ramsar Convention and major donors, funds, facilities, foundations, multilateral development banks and individuals of high net worth, with the support of the new Partnership Coordinator. He will invest in relations with potential partners including the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, GEF, the Adaptation Fund and others like WRI, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, WWF USA, RARE, the Smithsonian Institution, and will make a mission to Washington and New York in early 2014.
55. The Secretariat will build policy and funding relations with European Union. The intentions of the EU to work on Energy and Agriculture as underlying themes in its plans from 2014 means that wetland issues are very relevant to policy makers and executive functions of the EC. Its provision of aid is also extensive. The EC is unable to accede to Ramsar under the terms of the Convention, and already delivers policy through its Water, Birds and Habitats Directive, but it is

also a very important source of overseas aid, and a partner for probable interventions in transboundary waters with UNECE. Ramsar has already been working with the EC's Joint Research Centre on the GlobWetlands projects, which are mapping wetlands across Africa and are highly valued by participants.

56. The OECD has started to become interested in biodiversity and ecosystem services issues, and has indicated its interest in working with us to ensure wetlands issues are covered adequately within ecosystem services, and we will respond. The quality of its staff and discourse at the Budapest Water Summit was notable.

Planned actions on management effectiveness of protected wetland areas

57. The need to measure the management effectiveness of wetland protected areas worldwide is increasingly clear, and GEF and World Bank projects already have to follow the standards and reporting intervals of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT). The new Ramsar Sites Information System will aim to eventually apply the METT to all sites. A number of Contracting Parties have already signalled their interest in testing this on their Ramsar Sites, and this will aid integration of METT across Ramsar Sites worldwide.
58. In addition, as part of our drive to discover the status of the wetlands of the world and of Ramsar Sites, the Secretariat would like to explore how to carry out an assessment of the management effectiveness of Ramsar Sites in comparison with all wetlands, and Ramsar Sites and other wetlands in comparison with global protected areas overall.
59. Reviewing the increasing number of assessments of the current management effectiveness, and trends in effectiveness over time, of Ramsar Sites and other wetland protected areas will provide a data resource which can contribute to assessing the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention. The results of the review will be relevant to the preparation of the future Ramsar strategy and inform the Secretariat's plans on the RSIS project and research on the state of the world's wetlands.

Annex 1

List of International Meetings attended in 2013

Details of these meetings are included either above in this report, or in DOC SC47-02 in the report on the Subgroup established to elevate the visibility and stature of the Ramsar Convention.

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Dates</i>
BirdLife International World Congress	Ottawa	19-22 June 2013
Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG)	Geneva	2 September
World Water Week	Stockholm	3-6 September
UNESCO Strategic and High-Level Meeting on Water Security and Cooperation, and meetings with UNEP	Nairobi	10-14 September
Meetings with UNESCO, the French Administrative Authority, Danone and the Livelihoods Fund	Paris	7 October
Wetlands International Senior Management Team	Wageningen, Netherlands	16-17 October
3 rd China Wetlands Cultural Festival & Dongying International Wetland Conservation Conference	Shanghai and region	20-26 October
5 th Ramsar France Seminar	St Omer, France	13-16 November
National Workshop on the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands and Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi	23-27 November
Meetings with British Ramsar Administrative Authority and other relevant ministries and institutions	London	2 and 5 December
CEPA Task Force Meeting	WWT London Wetlands Centre	3-5 December
IPBES-2	Antalya, Turkey	8-12 December
UN-Water and SDGs – Finalization of text for Open Working Group	Geneva	16-17 December

Annex 2

Overview of meetings with Contracting Party representatives

Switzerland: Head of the Federal Office for the Environment, and staff. Switzerland has already opened up the debate on water and wetlands and a senior official attended the welcoming event for the SG in International Environment House.

Romania: Regular discussions with the Chair of the Standing Committee.

Brazil: Meeting planned with the new Ambassador to UN in Geneva. Issues already tackled on the increased contribution of Brazil to Ramsar as a result of the new UN rates in 2013. Agreement for changed practice agreed on future announcement of increases.

China: Attendance at China celebrations and national day in Geneva; visit planned to talk with Ambassador on follow up to China Mission.

Costa Rica: Discussions with Ambassador on the continuing situation on transboundary Ramsar Site with Nicaragua where Ramsar Secretariat is acting under the decisions of the International Court of Justice.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva after informal meetings in GEN and UNECE on issues related to Blue Carbon.

France: Directeur de l'eau et de la biodiversité, Head of AA (see above meeting details).

Germany: Contacts taken up with the Permanent Mission in Geneva and discussions already ongoing with GIZ and BMU officials as a result of meetings in last two months.

Iran (Islamic Republic of): Meeting with officials from mission of Iran to UN in Geneva to introduce Iran and role of Ramsar Regional Centre in capacity building. Planning of potential joint mission to Iraq/Iran Southern Marshes discussed to ensure involvement of Iran specialists in mission.

Japan: Minister Maeda, Japanese Mission to the UN in Geneva, and staff (scheduled for 30 October).

Panama: Met Ambassador of Panama, Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva as the ongoing cases on Art 3.1 in Panama are complex and of considerable interest to civil society there.

Republic of Korea: Meeting at Korean Mission and planned meetings with Ambassador. Visit to Korea in late February 2014.

United Kingdom: Meetings with DEFRA (Ramsar Administrative Authority), DFID, Environment Agency, December 2013.

Uruguay: Ambassador of Uruguay, Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva. Meeting covered the arrangements for COP12 and explained the case from Secretariat and the point of view of the Party and led to finalization of second draft proposal from our side.

USA: Informal discussions on the budget successfully concluded and overtures on future cooperation and meeting planned as soon as new US Ambassador to UN in Geneva arrives.