

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

48th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 26-30 January 2015

SC48-17

Follow up on Resolution XI.1: Languages of the Convention, visibility and stature, ministerial COP segments, and synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the report on the follow up on Resolution XI.1 and review the attached draft resolution on enhancing the Convention's languages, visibility and stature, and synergies with other MEAs and other international institutions, for consideration by the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Background

1. Resolution XI.1 on *Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat*, in paragraphs 17 and 18, asks the Standing Committee and all Contracting Parties to take the following actions:

“17. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee through an appropriate Working Group representative of Parties to develop strategies that explore:

- a) accommodation of UN languages into the Convention;
- b) elevation of Ramsar visibility and stature, including *inter alia* enhancing high-level political engagement in the work of the Convention at national, regional and global level; the working group will among other possibilities look into establishing a ministerial segment at the COP including the topics to be addressed at this level;
- c) enhancement of synergies with MEAs and other international entities including through Regional Initiatives;
- d) increased involvement in UNEP's initiatives and programs regarding biodiversity-related MEAs to enhance cooperation and synergies between Ramsar and UNEP;

and INVITES all Parties to participate in this group and its discussions including through electronic means where feasible; and

18. REQUESTS the Working Group to provide each Standing Committee meeting with a progress report including any implications such as financial ones and recommendations, and ALSO REQUESTS the Standing Committee to submit a report, including its recommendations, to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.”

2. Standing Committee through Decision SC46-15 approved the following subgroups and defined their memberships and Chairs: Subgroup 1, on accommodation of United Nations languages into the Convention; Subgroup 2, on elevating the visibility and stature of the Convention; and

Subgroup 3, on enhancing synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities.

3. Through Decision SC46-24, Standing Committee asked the Management Working Group to coordinate work on these issues, and to report to SC47 and COP12 on progress.
4. Following discussions within subgroups and the plenary Management Working Group, Standing Committee 47 through Decision SC47-07 decided:

“Concerning accommodation of UN Languages under Resolution XI.1:

- b) to address the longstanding differences in treatment of the three official Convention languages;
- c) to allocate resources from the current budget surplus to fund the costs of translating SC48 documents into French and Spanish;
- d) to instruct the Secretariat to include within all draft core budget scenarios for 2016-2018, prepared for Parties’ consideration at SC48, the costs of translating all SC documents into French and Spanish;
- e) to continue considering translation of additional STRP documents into French and Spanish, based on inputs by the Secretariat and the STRP, with a view to reviewing this issue at SC48; and
- f) to request the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a Resolution in response to Resolution XI.1 for the consideration of SC48, addressing accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, supported by:
 - analysis of legal considerations in relation to the Convention text as well as COP Resolutions including the Rules of Procedure;
 - options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources.

Concerning Visibility & Stature and Synergies

- g) to address these issues within the Strategic Plan Working Group and in follow-up to Resolution XI.1 for discussion at SC48 as appropriate.

Concerning the Ramsar–IUCN Task Force:

- h) to continue the negotiations on improving operations and to report on progress at SC48.”

5. This document presents the progress on these issues, and proposes ways forward for each.

Concerning accommodation of UN languages

6. With regards to items b), c) and d) above, the Secretariat has allocated the resources to fund the costs of translating SC48 documents into French and Spanish, and is including in all draft core budget scenarios for 2016-2018 (Doc SC48-20) the projected costs of translating all Standing Committee documents into French and Spanish for Parties’ consideration.
7. Regarding item e), the Secretariat estimated the cost of presenting additional STRP documents into French and Spanish in document SC47-02, and has proposed in document SC48-18 and its accompanying draft Resolution on the outcomes of the STRP Review Committee that the meetings of the STRP will operate in the three Convention languages and that meeting documents will be made available in these languages, subject to the availability of funding.

8. With reference to item f), the Secretariat has commissioned a legal briefing addressing the accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, and the resulting paragraphs are included in the draft resolution annexed to this document.

Concerning visibility and stature, and synergies with MEAs and other international entities

9. In regard to item g), it was agreed that the Strategic Plan Working Group would address these issues, and the draft of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan in document SC48-19 includes considerations on them. They may be further considered for discussion at SC48 as appropriate.
10. The discussions in Standing Committee and the Strategic Plan Working Group, and reviews of the National Reports received, have identified key elements to increase the visibility and stature of the Convention and synergies with MEAs and others. They are presented in the draft resolution text annexed to this document. These elements are also summarized in the annexed information document prepared by the Secretariat at the request of the Strategic Plan Working Group.
11. The Ramsar Secretariat and UNEP are preparing a memorandum of understanding on areas of common interest, such as improving synergies and the catalytic role of each organization, gaining access to information about the status and condition of wetlands, and enhancing efficient exchange of information and advice.

Concerning the Ramsar–IUCN Task Force

12. High-level meetings are held twice a year which focus on issues requiring attention and potential areas for cooperation. There has been good collaboration and progress on natural heritage and water and wetlands issues, and the Secretariat also appreciates the pro-bono legal analysis of transboundary water conventions carried out by IUCN's legal expert. Further opportunities exist for greater collaboration on GEF, private sector and biodiversity activities, which both sides will take up.
13. The Secretariat notes with satisfaction the support received from IUCN on human resources issues and the assistance given to renovate its offices and place the Ramsar logo on the exterior of the joint headquarters. Greater visibility for Ramsar is still needed.
14. Three issues need further attention: a system is needed to ensure that IUCN consults the Secretariat before putting in place any policies and procedures that affect Ramsar; delivery of financial services needs to be improved; and IUCN has increased charges for services.

Resolution XII.xx (*provisional number*)

Enhancing the languages of the Convention and its visibility and stature, and increasing synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions

1. RECALLING that Resolution XI.1 in paragraphs 17 and 18 instructed the Standing Committee and Contracting Parties to develop strategies that explore the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention, the elevation of the Convention's visibility and stature, including inter alia through enhancing high-level political engagement in its work at national, regional, and global levels, the enhancement of synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other international entities including through regional initiatives, and the increased involvement in the initiatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
2. FURTHER RECALLING that Resolution XI.1 called for the establishment of a working group to develop such strategies and report on its progress to each Standing Committee meeting including any implications such as financial ones and recommendations, and also requested that the Standing Committee submit a report including its recommendations to the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
3. ACKNOWLEDGING the reports of the Management Working Group of the Standing Committee on the above matters and EXPRESSING APPRECIATION for the significant work carried out during the triennium;
4. APPRECIATING the work of the Strategic Plan Working Group in ensuring that the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan presents strategies on these issues for Parties' consideration;
5. NOTING the interest of all Parties in enhancing the visibility and stature of the Ramsar Convention and increasing synergies with other MEAs and with UNEP, and in supporting the development and implementation of the Convention, including inter alia by potentially introducing other official UN languages into its operations;
6. ACKNOWLEDGING that the accommodation of additional languages into the daily work of the Convention could foster the engagement of more Contracting Parties to the Convention;
7. NOTING the expressed interest in accession by a growing number of Arabic-speaking countries to the Ramsar Convention and the increasing interest in implementation of the Convention by Arabic-speaking Contracting Parties;
8. APPRECIATING the range of distinct wetland types such as wadis, sabkhas and oases in Arabic-speaking countries and their underrepresentation among Ramsar Sites in the network, and the presence of organizations and individuals in the region with expertise in the conservation and wise use of wetlands, whose contribution would be beneficial to the further implementation of the Convention;
9. UNDERSTANDING the range of pressing wetlands issues in Arabic-speaking countries, relating in particular to the need for equitable sharing of national and transboundary water resources, in light of the increasing demand from the region's growing population and changes in water availability due to changing rainfall and unsustainable use patterns;

10. RECALLING that the Standing Committee in Decision SC47-07 instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a Resolution in response to Resolution XI.1 for its consideration at SC48, addressing accommodation of the Arabic language into the Convention, to be supported by an analysis of legal considerations in relation to the Convention text as well as existing COP Resolutions including the Rules of Procedure, and options for a phased introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources;
11. NOTING the need to address the longstanding differences in treatment of the three official Convention languages;
12. WELCOMING the Secretariat's progress in preparing a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to enhance collaboration on areas of common interest;
13. NOTING the project undertaken by UNEP "Improving the effectiveness of and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions and exploring opportunities for further synergies" and its results inter alia the sourcebook; and
14. EXPRESSING APPRECIATION for the quality of the cooperation between the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ramsar Secretariat as part of the Ramsar-IUCN Task Force, and progress which they have together made in enhancing support to the operations of the Secretariat and thus the implementation of the Convention;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Concerning accommodation of UN languages:

15. INVITES the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention to develop a strategy outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention which:
 - i. Classifies the language needs of the Convention according to the short-, medium- and long-term work of the Convention;
 - ii. Identifies barriers to effective translation, publishing and interpreting, and actions needed to overcome them including identification of resources needs and sources to accommodate inclusion of additional languages and a review of the relevant Rules of Procedure for Standing Committees and other bodies including the Scientific and Technical Review Panel;
 - iii. Proposes a potential timeline for phased integration of procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones for any UN languages added;
 - iv. Outlines the financial implications of further phased integration of existing Convention languages in line with the scale of existing resources;
16. RECOGNIZES that a phased approach would be needed to integrate any new language into the Convention as an "official" and "working" language, with a related need for identification of sources for gradual increase in funding, capacity and outputs and to address potential resulting impacts on funding for other budgetary items in order to accommodate any new language(s);

17. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee, through an appropriate working group of representatives of the Parties, to monitor the progress made in consideration of the Secretariat's proposal for a phased approach to language integration – including efforts to fully integrate Spanish and French, and report its findings for consideration by the Parties at COP13;

Concerning visibility and stature, and increasing synergies:

NB: There are two different proposals for paragraph 18

18. {REAFFIRMS that the establishment of a high-level ministerial segment in the latter half of the Conference of the Parties (COP) addressing clearly defined topics in support of the agenda of the COP would increase the global, regional and national profiles of the Ramsar Convention};

{NOTING the desire of some Parties to incorporate a high-level political segment in meetings of the Conference of the Parties to improve the visibility of the Convention};

19. INVITES all Parties which are considering hosting meetings of the Conference of the Parties to consider including a high-level ministerial segment in the latter half of the Conference of the Parties (COP) or Regional Meetings addressing clearly defined topics in support of the agenda of the COP or Regional Meetings as a possible means to improve the visibility, political buy-in and impact of the Convention.
20. FURTHER INVITES all PARTIES to work to raise the visibility of the Convention at the national, sub-national, and regional level, *inter alia* through invitations at global or regional levels, invitations to ministers as keynote speakers, or convening of round-table discussions;
21. RECOGNIZING that wetlands related activities also happen within municipal areas, Parties which are considering hosting meetings of the Conference of the Parties are also invited to consider including "Cities and Wetlands" round tables and/or Summits in support of the implementation of the wetland conservation activities within the municipal areas.
22. RECOGNIZING the role of communities in the wise use of wetlands and reliance of such communities particularly in developing countries on wetlands natural resources and the importance of conservation activities undertaken by such communities, urges Parties to take account of, and incorporate traditional knowledge, available in their respective countries in implementing the strategic plan and encouraging the active participation of such communities in the conservation of wetlands.
23. INVITES Contracting Parties to take into account the project "Improving the effectiveness of and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions and exploring opportunities for further synergies" and its results, through *inter alia* the sourcebook, undertaken by UNEP; and CALLS UPON the Secretariat and Contracting Parties to implement its important recommendations towards promoting synergies within the cluster of biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements;
24. ENCOURAGES all Ramsar National Focal Points to increase their efforts to coordinate with their national level counterparts Focal Points of other Conventions, and with all wetland practitioners including Ramsar Site managers, to inform them of Ramsar activities and be informed by them, about processes and issues of common interest;

25. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to activate and develop networking mechanisms, including Ramsar National Wetlands Committees, to ensure collaboration with national ministries, departments and agencies, and global and regional bodies including UNEP, UNDP, WHO, FAO, UNECE and other Regional Economic Commissions of the UN, ITTO, and the Global Environment Fund to enhance the wise use of wetlands;
26. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to continue to implement the *Guidelines for International Cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19) including by establishing cooperative mechanisms for the management of shared wetlands and hydrological basins;
27. URGES Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners and global and regional partners to continue supporting Ramsar Regional Initiatives and applying the *Operational Guidelines 2016-2018 for regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* (annexed to Resolution XII.xx), to foster increased national- and regional-level political engagement and implementation of the Convention;
28. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to regularly report on progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on *Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions* to the Standing Committee;
29. FURTHER INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to continue working to strengthen collaboration with UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, UNECE and other Regional Economic Commissions of the UN, the World Bank, WHO, WMO, FAO, the GEF and others and report on progress to the Standing Committee on a regular basis;
30. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat to work with UNEP on the implementation of their memorandum of understanding and report to the Standing Committee on the progress of the activities concerned;
31. RECOGNIZES that the Ramsar Convention is a biodiversity, as well as a water Convention that contributes to the implementation of sustainable development through the wise use of wetlands.
32. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to implement the *Conceptual Framework for the wise use of wetlands* (Resolution IX.1 Annex A) and the *Integrated Framework for the Convention's water-related guidance* (Resolution IX.1 Annex C), and Resolution XI.21 *Wetlands and sustainable development*, and INVITES the Convention's partners and other interested stakeholders to support implementation of these resolutions as well;
33. REQUEST Contracting Parties to contribute to implementing the Aichi Targets
34. ENCOURAGES Parties and other stakeholders to increase their efforts to integrate wetlands managements plans into integrated water resources managements plans and efficiency plans at basin level, as well as into spatial planning/land-use plans;
35. FURTHER ENCOURAGES the Parties and other stakeholders to increase their efforts to communicate on wetland values in other sectors' strategies, plans and regulations; and integrate them into a basin approach to land-use plans and other relevant local, national and global decisions;

36. NOTES the references to wetlands contained in the proposals of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, and URGES Contracting Parties to include, under their own national targets, priorities for management, restoration and repair of wetlands in line with sustainable development;
37. RECOGNIZES the collaboration between the Secretariat and IUCN and the progress made to evaluate the work already achieved and URGES the Secretariat to update all agreements and guidelines with IUCN in cooperation with the Management Working Group and in line with Resolution IX.24 on improving management of the Ramsar Convention; and ENCOURAGES both sides to collaborate further to continue to enhance the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.