

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

48th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 26-30 January 2015

SC48-24

Regional initiatives operating in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

Actions requested:

Standing Committee is invited to:

- consider the proposal to link Ramsar regional centres virtually and take note of the summary report on regional initiatives 2013-2015; and
- endorse the Draft Resolution on regional initiatives 2016-2018, with any eventual amendments, for submission to COP12.

Background

1. The Ramsar Contracting Parties at COP7 in 1999 recognized regional cooperation as an effective way for them to promote and better implement the objectives of the Convention, and adopted Resolution VII.19 *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention*, Resolution VII.22 on a collaborative structure for the Mediterranean, and Resolution VII.26 on the creation of a regional centre for training and research in the Western Hemisphere. This triggered the formal establishment and development of other regional cooperation mechanisms which have since been referred to as 'regional initiatives'.
2. This regional cooperation between Parties is realized in two forms: through **centres** for training and capacity building, and **networks** which facilitate cooperation between Contracting Parties.
3. Since 1999, the Parties have regularly updated the guidelines which regional initiatives must conform to if they are to be formally recognized as operating under the Ramsar Convention.
4. Through Resolution XI.5 in 2012 (*Regional initiatives 2013-2015 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*), the Parties instructed Standing Committee to annually assess the extent to which the regional initiatives meet the guidelines and actively contribute to the implementation of the Convention, and to allocate annual funding support from the Convention core budget to active initiatives in their start-up phase.
5. In 2013, the Standing Committee at its 46th meeting (SC46) endorsed *Operational Guidelines 2013-2015 for Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* which describe among other things the planning and reporting processes expected of Regional Initiatives.
6. SC48 in January 2015 will be too early to permit reporting of 2014 activities. Accordingly the regional initiatives' 2014 activity reports and their work plans for 2015, and requests for Ramsar core budget funding contributions, will be addressed during SC49 on 1 June 2015.
7. This document responds to the specific Standing Committee Decision SC47-26 of March 2014 asking the Secretariat:

- “a) to prepare an information document with proposals for virtually linking Ramsar regional centres, considering cost implications, and to submit it to SC48 for subsequent submission to COP12; and
- b) to help regional initiatives to develop formal ties with regional conventions so as to strengthen their local rootedness and visibility and to provide improvement to MEA consistency”.

Proposal to link the Ramsar regional centres virtually

8. Ramsar regional centres have shown that the professional training and capacity building they provide can fulfil a significant role in increasing Ramsar implementation in countries covered by their activities. Established regional centres currently cover the Western Hemisphere, West and Central Asia, Eastern Africa and Eastern Asia. Their activities are regularly assessed by Standing Committee, as described above.
9. Enabling regional centres to share their respective training programmes, know-how and education materials would help them to realize their full potential in line with global priorities defined by the Conference of the Parties of the Convention. It would help training programmes delivered on different continents to be more focused, effective and comparable, and give the network of regional centres a stronger identity and increased visibility and authority.
10. As a first practical step, the Secretariat proposes to set up a dedicated portal on the programmes and activities of the regional centres, as part of the Convention’s website. This single gateway to Ramsar-related capacity-building resources will enable users to find the materials, tools and programmes they need more easily. It will help ensure that the capacity building products, programmes and methods of different centres are compatible and complementary, while still being adapted to the specific needs of their region. It will also significantly support the dissemination of Ramsar implementation guidance adopted by the Parties.
11. Setting up such a portal would necessitate some initial investment; it is anticipated that a short-term consultancy would be sufficient to set it up and collect initial information to be shared globally. It is proposed to earmark an amount within the Ramsar core budget line for regional initiatives for this purpose. Afterwards, the regional teams and communication teams at the Secretariat would need to accept an increased burden to ensure the maintenance and updating of content, until the Parties might approve further development of the portal, and the added duty is of concern.
12. The materials on the portal could be accessible for download, translation and adaptation. The consultancy could also entail the development of a clear visual identity for materials published by Ramsar regional centres, and instructions to enable other bodies to use, translate or adapt them without giving the misleading impression that they are official Ramsar materials.

Actions to help regional initiatives to develop formal ties with regional conventions

13. The Secretariat has facilitated the development of formal ties between the regional initiatives and respective regional conventions in order to strengthen their local rootedness, and gain visibility, recognition and institutional and financial support. This process also contributes to increased consistency between multilateral environmental agreements, at

regional and global levels. Such efforts should continue, in particular the development of formal ties with regional water and river basin management agreements.

14. In the Americas, the Ramsar Secretariat signed in 2012 an MOU with the Secretariat pro tempore of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), which includes collaboration on Ramsar regional initiatives such as the Caribbean Wetlands Regional Initiative and the Regional Initiative for the Integral Management and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs.
15. The Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (the Cartagena Convention) and its Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Protocol have engaged in the activities of the Caribbean regional initiative; its MOU with the Ramsar Secretariat is currently being renewed.
16. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) has been endorsed as a member of the High Andean Regional Initiative.
17. In the Europe region, the Ramsar Secretariat has facilitated initial contacts between the Black and Azov Sea Wetlands Initiative (BlackSeaWet) and the Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission (Sofia Convention). These contacts should be further developed and formalized.
18. The Secretariats of the Ramsar and Carpathian Conventions signed an MOU in 2006 which provides a framework for the work of the Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI) and ensures it is fully included into the work plan of the Carpathian Convention. An evaluation of this cooperation is suggested for 2015.
19. In the Mediterranean region, the Secretariat has signed a MOU with the Barcelona Convention. The Mediterranean wetlands initiative (MedWet) maintains working relations with the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) acting as the secretariat of the Barcelona Convention and with its Regional Activity Centres, and notably the Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA). It has also established working contacts with the Union for the Mediterranean. An evaluation of how to develop and formalize this cooperation is proposed for 2015-2016.
20. The Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet) receives project-related support from the Nordic Council. In 2012 the Ramsar Secretariat and the Arctic Council working group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) has signed an agreement which identified NorBalWet as the Ramsar initiative focusing on Arctic wetlands. It is proposed to evaluate the desirability and feasibility for NorBalWet to formalize its ties with both of these regional conventions during 2015-2016.
21. In Africa, the Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA) is cooperating with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) to raise the profile of wetlands within the member countries of both organizations.
22. The Ramsar Secretariat is developing a Memorandum of Cooperation with UNEP's Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region (the Abidjan Convention). The West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WacoWet), the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Western Africa, will implement some aspects of this cooperation.

23. In Asia, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) has a number of international and regional organizations as formal partners as well as participating countries. These 'Inter-Governmental Organization Partners' include CAFF, CBD, CMS, FAO and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).
24. The Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia (RRC-EA) has cooperated closely with regional inter-governmental organizations and is in the process of developing more formal links with them, in particular the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity.

Summary report on regional initiatives 2013-2015

25. There are 15 Ramsar regional initiatives as of the 2013-2015 triennium. They include four regional centres for training and capacity building: in East Africa (established in Kampala, Uganda), the Western Hemisphere (in Panama City, Panama), Central and West Asia (in Tehran, I.R. Iran) and East Asia (in Changwon, R.O. Korea). The Secretariat's role is to help them achieve strategic objectives such as:
 - a) ensuring lasting support from the host country;
 - b) developing substantial technical and financial support from all other countries concerned;
 - c) developing robust, independent and transparent governance mechanisms; and
 - d) developing and delivering a truly international training programme focusing on Ramsar's core objectives.
26. In addition to the four centres, there are 11 networks for regional cooperation in 2013-2015, focusing on the West African coast, Niger river basin, High Andean region, La Plata river basin, the Caribbean, mangroves and coral reefs, the East Asian-Australasian migratory birds flyway, the Mediterranean basin, the Carpathian region, the Nordic-Baltic region and the Black Sea and Azov Sea coasts. Here too, the Secretariat's role is to support efforts to obtain formal recognition and support by all countries concerned, to establish operational and transparent governance structures and to implement annual programmes of work which involve all relevant partners in addition to the Ramsar national administrative authorities.
27. As well as adopting improved Operational Guidelines at its first meeting in the 2013-2015 triennium (SC46, 2013), Standing Committee endorsed these 15 regional initiatives (networks and centres) as fully meeting the guidelines and operating in the framework of the Convention during this period. Each year (at SC46, SC47 and SC49) it is allocating the core budget funds allocated to support the start of those initiatives most in need, based on progress reports received from each of the initiatives.
28. Start-up contributions from the Ramsar core budget have been distributed to operational regional initiatives annually since 2009, that is, during two consecutive triennia. In line with the rules established through Resolution XI.5, the initiatives supported for all this period will no longer be eligible for such funding after 2015.

Proposed actions for 2016-2018

29. The feedback received and the outcomes of the work of the Ramsar regional initiatives clearly show that regional transboundary cooperation can contribute significantly to increased national and local implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

30. Developing robust and lasting structures for regional cooperation under Ramsar therefore remains a significant part of the new Ramsar Strategic Plan. The proposed draft text for a Resolution to be adopted by COP12 below encapsulates these conclusions.

31. The Secretariat intends to continue to provide support to ongoing initiatives after 2015 in line with the Operational Guidelines adopted for 2013-2015. It proposes that COP12 approve the continued validity of these Guidelines for the triennium 2016-2018, and maintain a Ramsar core budget line for new regional initiatives that may be announced by the time of COP12 and looking for similar start-up support. As of September 2014, the Secretariat understands that a number of new regional initiatives may become operational after COP12, focusing on the Amazon basin, the Mekong basin, the Arabian peninsula and the Southern African Development Community area.

Draft Resolution XII.xx

Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

1. RECALLING that regional initiatives under the Ramsar Convention, whether centres for training and capacity building or networks which facilitate cooperation, are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in specific geographic regions, through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern;
2. AWARE that the *Guidelines for international cooperation under the Ramsar Convention* (Resolution VII.19, 1999) provide the appropriate framework for promoting international collaboration between Contracting Parties and other partners;
3. ALSO RECALLING that the Contracting Parties recognized the importance of regional initiatives in promoting the objectives of the Convention in Resolution VIII.30 (2002), and subsequently through Resolutions IX.7 (2005), X.6 (2008) and XI.5 (2012), and endorsed a number of regional initiatives as operating within the framework of the Convention in 2013-2015;
4. FURTHER RECALLING that Resolution X.6 (2008) adopted *Operational Guidelines 2009-2012 for regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* to support the implementation of the Convention, and that these Operational Guidelines as subsequently amended by Standing Committee for the triennium 2013-2015 serve as a reference for assessing the operation and effectiveness of Regional Initiatives, replacing the *Guidelines for the development of Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* annexed to Resolution VIII.30;
5. NOTING that during the years 2013-2015, the Standing Committee approved a number of active regional initiatives as fully meeting the Operational Guidelines, and noted the substantial progress made by many of the initiatives, based on the annual reports which they submitted during those years; and
6. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the experience gained through the operational years of those Regional Initiatives, the application of the Operational Guidelines in selecting and supporting Initiatives, and the conclusions derived from the review of their effectiveness;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

7. REAFFIRMS the effectiveness of regional cooperation, through networks and centres, in supporting improved implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan;
8. APPROVES the continued validity and use of the *Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention*, as adopted for 2013-2015 and published on the Ramsar website, for the period 2016-2018;
9. INSTRUCTS all regional initiatives endorsed by the Convention to submit to the Standing Committee annual reports on their progress and operations, and specifically on their success in fulfilling the Operational Guidelines, and to submit annual plans according to the timetable and format adopted by the Standing Committee;

10. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee to continue to assess annually, based on the reports submitted, the extent to which regional initiatives continue to meet the standards of the Operational Guidelines and contribute to the implementation of the Convention, and to determine the level of support (financial or otherwise) to be allocated to each;
11. EMPHASIZES the importance for regional initiatives to establish governance structures which are transparent, accountable, and representative of all relevant parties including government agencies and non-governmental organizations;
12. AGREES to include financial support in the Convention core budget line “Support to Regional Initiatives”, as listed in Resolution XII.xx on financial and budgetary matters, to support the start-up activities of operational regional initiatives during the period 2016-2018 which fully meet the Operational Guidelines;
13. DECIDES that the levels of financial support from the Convention core budget to individual regional initiatives for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 will be determined annually by the Standing Committee, based on updated work plans to be submitted according to the required format and timetable, and with the benefit of the specific recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance;
14. STRONGLY URGES those regional initiatives that receive initial financial support from the core budget to use part of this support to seek sustainable long-term funding from other sources, particularly during the second triennium in which they qualify for such support;
15. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other potential donors to support regional initiatives, whether or not they are also receiving funding through the Convention’s core budget, and URGES Contracting Parties geographically related to a regional initiative that have not yet done so to provide formal letters of support as well as financial support;
16. INSTRUCTS regional initiatives to describe themselves as an operational means to provide support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention, but to present independent and unique identities to the public and other partners, in order to avoid being confused with the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level or the Ramsar Secretariat at global level, and REQUESTS that the Secretariat support and promote the identities and values of the regional centres and networks and facilitate those efforts to the extent possible;
17. ENCOURAGES the regional initiatives to maintain active and regular contact with the Secretariat, to ensure that the global Ramsar guidelines are applied and that the strategic and operational objectives of regional initiatives are in full harmony with the Convention’s Strategic Plan, and ENCOURAGES the Secretariat to support and advise regional initiatives, according to its means, to reinforce their capacity and effectiveness;
18. URGES scientific and technical bodies and officers of the Convention to apply experiences of regional initiatives in its work;
19. REQUESTS that the CEPA Oversight Panel work with the Ramsar regional centres to identify and advise on the capacity building needs of the staff to optimize their performance;

20. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to create a dedicated online portal on the capacity building programmes of the regional centres as a contribution to a greater and more coordinated implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan;
21. AGREES to include financial support in the Convention core budget line “support to regional initiatives”, as listed in Resolution XII.xx on financial and budgetary matters, to fund the establishment of an online portal on capacity building programmes for all regional centres, and ongoing running costs;
22. REQUESTS that the Standing Committee assess the functioning of Ramsar regional initiatives in relation to the Operational Guidelines and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2021, seeking support from the CEPA Oversight Panel as required;
23. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, international organizations, regional and subregional multilateral agreements, and international river basin organizations to identify, for possible inclusion among regional initiatives, transboundary river basins of global importance;
24. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee to prepare a summary of its annual assessments, which reviews the operations and success of the regional initiatives operating during the period 2016-2018, for Contracting Parties’ consideration at the 13th meeting of the COP.