

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
49th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1 June 2015

Report of the 49th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC49)

SC members present: Burundi, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, France, Guatemala, Guinea, Mali, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Romania, South Africa, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay

Permanent Observers present: Switzerland; Birdlife International, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), IUCN – International Union of Conservation of Nature, Wetlands International, WWF International; STRP Chair

Observer Parties present: Argentina, Austria, Bahrain, Canada, China, Colombia, Greece, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Mexico, Paraguay, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela

Additional observers: UNEP

Agenda item 1: Welcoming remarks

1. **The Chair, Romania**, welcomed the participants, noting that the period since COP11 had been a very active and constructive one for the SC, the Contracting Parties, the Secretariat and all others who had worked hard to support implementation of the Convention. She observed that the Convention's mission had broadened and that this called for more collective action and increased awareness-raising. She also stressed the importance of capacity-building. She reminded the Committee that it had proposed four objectives for the Strategic Plan: addressing the degradation of wetlands; conservation of Ramsar Sites; wise use of wetlands; and improvement of implementation. She noted that today was International Children's Day, observing that the Convention was working to maintain wetlands for our children and wetlands for our future.
2. **The Secretary General (SG)** stressed the importance of the coming COP and thanked the Chair of the Standing Committee for her commitment, flexibility and openness. He noted that children needed to understand the role of wetlands in underpinning sustainable development. He then introduced the newly-appointed Deputy Secretary General Dr Ania Grobicki.
3. **The Deputy Secretary General** thanked the SC for being given the opportunity to serve them. With her background in integrated water resource management, she understood that wetlands have a key role to play in the improved management of water resources. She underlined the importance of making links between knowledge, policy and action on the ground, and believed Ramsar could make a positive contribution to the discussions on new Sustainable Development Goals due to take place later this year.
4. **Denmark** asked that the Agenda of the current SC meeting in document SC49-01 Rev. 1. be adopted with the amendment that discussion of Agenda item 6 on Action Plan for

Communications/CEPA be postponed as there had been little time to consider its contents.

5. **The Chair** proposed that consideration of Agenda item 6 be deferred until all other items had been discussed. If there was insufficient time to consider it at the end of the morning session, she proposed that a further session of SC49 be held at 18h00.
6. **Denmark** pointed out that a further meeting of the Management Working Group had been scheduled for that time and asked that another time be agreed for the meeting of the Management Working Group.

Agenda item 2: Report on the arrangements for COP12

7. **The Secretariat** reported that it had been working successfully with Uruguay in preparation for the COP and that the host country agreement had been well executed. Uruguay had put in place expedited visa procedures for delegates from countries where Uruguay had no diplomatic presence with the result that between 120 and 150 special entry permits had been issued. She noted that some delegates had been held up by delayed flights and there was considerable pressure on space at the conference venue as many side-events were planned.
8. **Uruguay** welcomed participants at SC49 and stated that the country had worked hard to overcome any difficulties. Uruguay was only a small country but was very open to the international community. It would do its utmost to make the COP a success.

Agenda item 3: General review of the COP12 Provisional Agenda

9. **The SG** drew attention to the finalized list of topics and anticipated speakers for the plenary “special presentations” on 3-6 June presented in paragraph 3 of document SC49-01bis. He also noted that it was established practice for a short presentation to be read out by a representative of the NGO community during the COP, but that prior approval of the SC was needed for this.

Decision SC49-01: The Standing Committee agreed that a short statement could be read out by a representative of the NGO community at the first plenary session of COP12 on 3 June.

Agenda item 4: Financial matters

- a) **Review of the status of reallocations of the 2014 core budget surplus according to Decision SC48-12, including an updated status of the 2014 core budget**
 - b) **Report of the Secretary General on the use of the Reserve Fund to sponsor COP12 delegates.**
 - c) **Proposal of the Secretariat on how to refill the Reserve Fund 2016-2018 and how to adjust the proposed scenarios annexed to Draft Resolution XII.1**
 - d) **Oral report of the Secretariat on the level of Secretariat support to sponsored delegates attending COP and SC-meetings.**
10. **The SG** introduced document SC49-03. He invited the SC to note the fact that the temporary loan of USD 300,000 from the reserve fund to cover expenses related to the

attendance of sponsored delegates had been repaid. He also invited the SC to decide how the 2014 surplus should be allocated, drawing attention to the table in paragraph 16 of the document indicating the decisions that had been made at SC48.

11. **Finland** sought clarification regarding an apparent discrepancy in figures relating to currency exchange rate gain in the table in paragraph 1 and in paragraph 13 of document SC49-03. They also noted an error in the figure for their contribution for sponsored delegates in Table 3 of the document.
12. **Denmark** observed that it was good to see that donors were prepared to support sponsored delegates and noted with approval that the loan from the reserve fund had been repaid. He expressed concerns that core funds had been used for this purpose but acknowledged that at that time it had been an appropriate use of the surplus funds.
13. **The United States** noted the loan had been made under exceptional circumstances and believed it was important that a precedent was not set. She was also very concerned that core funds had been used to repay the loan and had expected that external funds would have been raised for this purpose.
14. **Canada** asked whether there was any likelihood that further sponsors for delegates might come forward at this point. She asked if it were possible to obtain final figures for the amount spent on sponsored delegates.
15. **The SG** stated that the Secretariat hoped to have more complete figures by SC50. He underlined the considerable expenses incurred by the late cancellation of trips caused by some delegates failing to complete visa application procedures. The level of voluntary contributions by Parties for sponsored delegates had remained relatively constant over the past three COPs but costs had increased. Some Parties that had sponsored delegates in the past had not done so for COP12. Unlike Ramsar, other Multilateral Environmental Agreements had a system whereby costs of meetings were included in the core budget.
16. **Cuba** thanked all those Parties who had funded sponsored delegates and called on those who had done so in the past to resume funding so as not to put pressure on the Convention's budget.
17. Regarding the allocation of the surplus funds, **Canada** as chair of the finance sub-group asked for clarification regarding how much exactly remained unspent, noting that funds had already been spent on or committed to some of the items in the table in paragraph 16 of document SC 49-03. She proposed deferring a decision on the allocation of surplus funds to SC50 when more accurate figures would be available.
18. **The SG** reported that, of the items in the table, CHF 50,000 had been spend on ENB (COP12 Support), CHF 25,000 on a Ramsar Advisory Mission to Nicaragua and CHF 100,000 set aside for staff provision. With the additional CHF 115,000 accrued since SC48, there was now a surplus of CHF 335,000.
19. **Denmark**, supported by Chile, asked that updated figures be provided to the Committee on Finance and Budget. The Secretary General promised to provide these.

Decision SC49-02 The Standing Committee agreed to defer a decision on the reallocation of 2014 surplus funds until SC50.

Agenda item 5: Report on Ramsar Regional Initiatives and allocation of funding for 2015

20. **The SG** introduced Document SC49-02: Allocation of Ramsar core budget funds to regional initiatives operating in the framework of the Ramsar Convention in 2015, inviting the SC to accept the reports of progress in 2014 and work plans for 2015 of the 15 endorsed regional initiatives 2013-2015. He also invited the SC to allocate amounts from the core budget for six regional initiatives as set out in Table 1 of document SC49-02. He noted that there were enough funds to do this along with a small surplus, which could be accrued following normal practice.
21. **Nepal** announced the development of a regional initiative in south-east Asia, intended to be hosted by the IUCN Asian regional office in Bangkok. The relevant Parties would be seeking endorsement of the initiative at SC51.
22. **The Kyrgyz Republic** announced the development of a regional initiative covering Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz Government had offered to host the Secretariat of the initiative and provide office space and staff. They too would be seeking endorsement of the initiative at SC51, before which they would submit a work plan and request for start-up funding.

Decision SC49-03 The Standing Committee agreed to the allocation of funds from Ramsar core budget line D as set out in column F of Table 1 in Document SC49-02.

Agenda item 6: Report on the Action Plan for Communications – CEPA (COP12 DOC.26 Communication / CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat 2016-2021)

23. **The Secretariat** gave a presentation outlining current and future strategies for the CEPA Action Plan, agreed at SC48, in the context of the 4th Strategic Plan. This was based on information contained in DOC. 26 Communications / CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat 2016-2021: Consultation Draft.
24. **Finland** congratulated the Secretariat for providing this material. She wondered why the word “communication” effectively appeared twice in the document’s title, as the “C” in CEPA already stood for communication. She also sought clarification on the budgetary status of items listed under section 10 onwards. Were items marked as ‘core funds’ already included in the proposed budget or was this merely a proposal that they be so? **Canada** echoed this, and specifically questioned the designation of COP12 and COP13 activities under section 10d as core-funded.
25. **The Secretariat** confirmed that the first ‘communication’ would be removed from the document’s title.
26. **The SG** noted that the designation under section 10d was in error, and that this should read non-core funds.
27. **Japan** asked for clarification regarding proposed actions under Corporate identity/ branding in section 10a of document COP12 DOC.26.

28. **The Secretariat** responded that the way the logo was used and briefs produced differed between Parties and that it was important to try to use the same templates in order to improve branding and raise awareness of the Convention.
29. **The United States** recalled that Parties had previously emphasized the importance of focus groups to discuss proposed communications yet this Action Plan implied that strategies had already been decided. She asked if this was the case, or was it in fact a set of maybes, aiming to stimulate debate. She also asked what message the SG intended to convey at a meeting of a hundred high net worth individuals the United States had helped organize for 16th June.
30. **The Secretariat** replied that the report was intended to stimulate debate and raise awareness, and that she was seeking input from Parties. She noted that the SG had been provided with many concept notes that could be used at the meeting on 16th June.
31. **The SG** drew attention to issues already agreed with STRP, particularly the need to build a network of wetland professionals. He noted the great importance of wetlands for sport and recreation but observed that good data on valuation were lacking. He sought guidance from the Parties as to which communications issues should be prioritized.
32. **Finland** asked that wherever wise use of wetlands was referred to, conservation should also be mentioned, in keeping with the spirit of the Convention. She also wondered whether the proposed branding of wetlands as the "source of sustainable development" had previously been discussed in any forum.
33. **The Secretariat** said they would add references to conservation. The phrase "the source of sustainable development" had not been previously discussed, but she had come up with this as a possible strapline or umbrella concept for the Convention, which currently lacked one.
34. **Denmark** observed that, as he understood it, DR XII.9 was a programme. The action plan presented here was trying to implement the programme. This present meeting would be the only opportunity to discuss the action plan which would be expected to be overseen by SC51. He suggested that priorities were needed and that Parties should give guidance on these when the CEPA programme was discussed in Plenary.
35. **The Secretariat** believed it would be very helpful to have guidance. She noted that some activities had already started and was confident the action plan was achievable.
36. **The SG** noted that if there were no major increase in the budget then core funds for communication would not greatly increase and that non-core funding would have to be sought for some of the proposed activities.

Agenda item 7: COP12 Rules of Procedures

37. **The SG** noted concerns previously raised by Denmark regarding the current requirement that the SC approve all Draft Resolutions (DRs), including those submitted by individual Parties, before they could be submitted to the COP. He read out the

findings from a legal consultation indicating that under the current Rules of Procedure all DRs, whether submitted by the SC or by Parties, should be treated in the same way.

38. **Denmark** thanked the Secretariat for providing this interpretation of the Rules of Procedure and indicated that they would be proposing that the rules be changed so that the Standing Committee would no longer have the power to change or veto DRs submitted by Parties.
39. **Finland** asked for a list of DRs with the dates when they had first been submitted to the Secretariat and when they had been made available to the SC. The Secretariat agreed to provide this.
40. On a suggestion from the Chair, **the SG** agreed to post with the other SC49 documents an electronic copy of the legal opinion he had read out.
41. **Denmark** proposed that the COP be invited to adopt the Rules of Procedure as used at COP11, rather than adopt the modified version proposed by SC48 as presented in document COP12 Doc. 3. He further proposed that a contact group be established during the present COP to work on revised Rules of Procedure to be put forward for adoption at the end of the COP for use at future COPs.
42. **The United States** suggested that Parties might adopt the existing Rules of Procedure at the start of the COP and establish an informal working group to work rapidly on their revision with a view to adopting revised Rules of Procedure for the remainder of the COP.
43. **Argentina, Chile, France** and **Uruguay** were all of the view that it would be difficult to change the operating Rules of Procedure part-way through the current COP and instead supported Denmark's proposal, although **Chile** cautioned that it might be difficult to complete the work during the meeting.
44. **The Chair** proposed that Denmark and the United States meet informally and propose possible membership of a Working Group on the Rules of Procedure but stressed, in response to a comment by **Argentina**, that the group would be open to all Parties.

Decision SC49-04 The Standing Committee agreed to forward the unmodified Rules of Procedure as used at COP11 for adoption by the Contracting Parties for use at COP12.

Decision SC49-05 The Standing Committee decided to establish a Working Group on Rules of Procedure which would meet throughout the COP, at specific times and a venue to be provided as soon as possible by the Secretariat. The Working Group would complete as much as possible of its work electronically.

Agenda item 8: Nomination of COP12 President and Vice-Presidents

45. **Uruguay** introduced the proposed candidates for President and Alternate President and gave brief biographical details. **The SG** requested that these references be submitted to the Secretariat.

46. **The SG** suggested that, taking into account geographical distribution, official languages, and Parties that have held these positions in previous COPs, the regional Vice-Presidents for CoP12 should come from North America and Oceania. **The United States** reported that it was pleased to have been selected as Vice-President. **Fiji** as representative for Oceania stated that it was not yet in a position to nominate a Vice-President.

Agenda item 9: Appointment of the COP12 Credentials Committee

47. The Secretariat had received the following nominations for the Credentials Committee:

Africa: Professor James Njogu (Kenya)
Asia: Nirawan Pipitsombat (Thailand)
Europe: Wolfgang Pelikan (Austria)
Neotropics: Fernando Thourte (Argentina)
North America: Talia Cruz (Mexico)
Oceania: Margriet de Poorter (New Zealand)

48. In response to a request for clarification from **Chile**, **the SG** noted that regional consultations had been conducted electronically prior to CoP12 and the nominations had resulted from these.

Agenda item 10: Establishment of COP12 Committees and contact groups

10.1 Committee on Finance and Budget

49. **Finland** reminded the SC that as outgoing Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, she continues to be a member of the group.
50. **Canada** clarified that DR XII.1 on financial and budgetary matters would not be presented under Agenda item XIII on the financial report for 2012-2015 but under Agenda item XV on consideration of Draft Resolutions.
51. **Switzerland** noted that the Committee on Finance and Budget was open-ended and that any Party could participate. She asked the Secretariat to supply the Committee with a list of all consultants who had worked at the Secretariat during the past year, the dates of their employment, source of funding and brief job descriptions.
52. **The United States** seconded Switzerland's request adding that they intended to join the Committee and encouraged other Parties also to do so.
53. **The SG** reported that such a list had been provided at SC48 and an updated list would also be available at COP12.

10.2 Establishment of contact groups

54. **The SG** summarized the role of the contact groups and drew attention to the proposed schedule for their meetings as set out in document SC49-01bis, noting that contact groups would need to complete their work no later than 18.30 on Saturday 6th June in order to give time for the Secretariat to finalize, translate and post any revised Draft Resolutions for circulation to delegates on Monday 8th June for final plenary approval.

55. **Finland** reported that the EU member states believed there was a need for a contact group on DR XII.2, the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2021. **France** believed there was a need for contact groups on DR XII.5: Proposed new framework for delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance, and DR XII.10: Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation (RWCA). **Switzerland** proposed a contact group on DR XII.7 on Resource Mobilisation, **the United States** proposed one on DR XII.9 (CEPA) and **Argentina** one on DR XII.15: Evaluating and ensuring the effective management and conservation of Ramsar Sites.
56. **South Africa** proposed that contact groups for Resource Mobilisation and the Strategic Plan could be merged.
57. **The SG** observed that facilities at the meeting could not support the six contact groups now proposed (on DR XII. 1, 5, 9, 10, and 15 and a joint group on DR XII 2 and 7).
58. **South Africa** also expressed concern about the number of contact groups as many sponsored delegations comprised only one person. She proposed waiting to see how discussions in plenary developed on any particular Agenda item before deciding whether a contact group would be necessary, and asked that no more than two groups run concurrently.
59. **The United States** proposed that each contact group hold a preliminary meeting to determine whether there was enough work for the group to go forward.
60. **Denmark** and **the Republic of Korea** suggested that establishment of contact groups be discussed at the Regional Meetings with a view to setting priorities.
61. **The Chair** agreed and asked that members of the Standing Committee report back on the results of these discussions. At the later session Chile and Denmark reported that both their regions needed more time to look at the DRs and the proposed contact groups and would do so at the regional meetings the following day.

Agenda item 11: Agenda of the 50th Meeting of the Standing Committee

62. Following a suggestion from Finland, it was agreed to add items regarding the report of the Management Working Group and the reallocation of 2014 surplus funds to the agenda for SC50.

Decision SC49-06 The Standing Committee agreed the agenda for SC50 set out in paragraph 11 of SC49-01bis with the addition of items on the report of the Management Working Group and reallocation of 2014 surplus funds.

Agenda item 12. Thanks to Standing Committee members of the triennium

63. The outgoing **Chair** thanked the SC members and all those who had worked with her for their support, understanding and commitment, noting that she had learnt a lot about wetlands, the Ramsar family and the Ramsar spirit in a short period. She exhorted all participants at the meeting to stick with the Ramsar spirit.

Agenda Item 13. Any other business (Information on UAE concerning the hosting of COP13)

64. The **United Arab Emirates** announced that, following approval by the Cabinet of Ministers of the United Arab Emirates government, the country could now confirm its offer to host COP13 in 2018. The SC thanked the United Arab Emirates by acclamation.
65. At the end of the meeting **the SG** referred to the agenda of SC50 and noted that a new version would be posted with the requested additions. He informed the SC that the paper listing the dates of arrival of the DRs with the Secretariat was now available online (48/16) as was a paper outlining the relationship between Ramsar and UNFCCC that had been prepared by the legal advisor (49/04).