

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

51st Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 23-27 November 2015

SC51-11

Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention

Actions requested:

- Standing Committee is invited to take note of progress with work requested through Resolution XII.8 since COP12.
- On 22 November 2015, the Secretariat is organizing a workshop for the leaders of Ramsar's regional initiatives. An oral report on its results will be tabled at agenda point 14.
- Standing Committee is invited to endorse the proposals of new regional initiatives. An oral report on proposals received is tabled at agenda point 14.
- Written reports on progress of work in 2015 and planned activities of the regional initiatives in 2016, and draft revised Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives will be submitted to the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee.

Introduction

1. At COP7 in 1999, the Ramsar Contracting Parties recognized regional cooperation as an effective way for them to promote and better implement the objectives of the Convention. This triggered the establishment and development of formally established regional cooperation mechanisms which have since been referred to as "regional initiatives". This regional cooperation between Parties at international level is realized in two forms: either through physically established *Ramsar Regional Centres* for regional training and capacity building, or through *Ramsar Regional Networks* that are set up to support regional cooperation.
2. For the past triennium (2012-2015), the Standing Committee endorsed 15 regional initiatives (including four regional centres and eleven regional networks) as meeting the *Operational Guidelines 2013-2015 for Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands* as approved by the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee. An overview of them, and links to their respective websites, are provided on the Ramsar website here: <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-regional-initiatives>.
3. At COP12, the Contracting Parties recalled that regional initiatives are intended as operational means to provide effective support for an improved implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern (Resolution XII. 8, paragraph 1).
4. They instructed the Standing Committee, through Resolution XII.8, paragraph 9, to undertake a review of the *Operational Guidelines* and to adopt the necessary amendments no later than during its 52nd meeting (SC52). To this end, the Secretariat will prepare draft revised guidelines and submit them to the regional initiatives in early September 2015. On 22 November 2015, it is planned that the leaders of the regional initiatives will edit them further during a workshop organized by the Secretariat. These revised draft guidelines will be submitted to SC52 for adoption.

5. In response to paragraph 6 of Resolution XII.8, the Secretariat contacted all Contracting Parties through Diplomatic Note 2015/5 in August 2015, requesting that new regional initiatives to be developed during the 2016-2018 triennium submit information on their objectives, work plan, governance structure and funding sources by 23 October 2015, in order that such information can be submitted to SC51 for possible endorsement of such initiatives as operating in the framework of the Ramsar Convention.
6. Resolution XII.8 (paragraphs 12 and 15) requested the Standing Committee to continue to assess annually the functioning of Ramsar regional initiatives and to determine financial support from the Convention core budget to individual initiatives. The Secretariat will prepare a proposal for SC52 to this end, based on the annual reports on progress with work in 2015 and planned activities for 2016. Established regional initiatives and new initiatives endorsed by SC51 will be invited to submit these documents by the end of February 2016 to be considered for possible support.
7. Resolution XII.8 (paragraph 21) requested the Secretariat to assess the achievements, and analyse weaknesses, strengths and difficulties of regional initiatives, and to formulate recommendations for improving the *Operational Guidelines*. This will be done in cooperation with the initiatives, with the first workshop on regional initiatives on 22 November 2015 providing an opportunity to the leaders of the initiatives to make inputs to the assessment report that will eventually be published on the Ramsar website.
8. During their workshop, representatives from the regional initiatives will also consider, together with the Secretariat, how to publicize their achievements and maintain regular contacts with the Secretariat, as requested through Resolution XII.8 (paragraphs 18-20). The conclusions will be presented orally to SC51.