

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
51st Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 23–27 November 2015

Report and Decisions of the 51st meeting of the Standing Committee

Tuesday 24 November 2015

18:00-19:00

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements were made by:
 - i. **Jorge Rucks**, Uruguay, Chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee
 - ii. **Mark Smith**, on behalf of the Director General of IUCN
 - iii. **Martin Spray**, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, on behalf of Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs)
 - iv. **Christopher Briggs**, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention

Agenda item 2: Admission of observers

2. The **Secretary General** read out a list of observers for approval to attend SC51:
 - i. States that are not Contracting Parties: DPR Korea.
 - ii. Others: Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL); Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia; Ramsar Regional Centre for the Western Hemisphere; UNEP.

Decision SC51-01: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed by the Secretary General.

Thursday 26 November 2015

10:00-13:00

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the revised draft agenda

3. The **Standing Committee Chair** introduced DOC. SC51-01 Rev.5 *Draft Agenda and Programme*), drawing attention to two items proposed for deferral to the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC52): SC51 INF.DOC.05 *Summary of the Meeting of an expert group on indicators for the Ramsar Strategic Plan (2016-2024)*; and DOC. SC51-09 *Progress report on the development of the format for National Reports to COP13*.
4. **Romania**, supported by **Tunisia**, asked that an item be added to the agenda regarding Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation (Resolution XII.10), to enable the Committee to agree the process

for appointing the representatives of the Independent Advisory Committee referred to in the Resolution.

5. The **Secretariat** proposed that the Standing Committee consider the development of a format for on-line national reporting (as referred to in paragraph 12 of DOC. SC51-09).
6. In reply to a question from **Uruguay** asking what problems might arise from deferring this item, the Secretariat indicated that this would delay the start of work to pursue this approach if the Committee agreed to it. The Secretariat noted that it had prepared a presentation on this.
7. Following a short closed session, the **SC Chair** announced that the Committee had agreed that discussion of the remaining items for consideration by the Sub-Group on Finance (e), f), g) and h) in DOC.SC51-01 Rev. 5) would be deferred, and that the meeting would proceed by considering items 4 to 7 of the revised draft agenda.

Decision SC51-02: The Standing Committee approved the revised agenda, subject to the inclusion of items on Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation and on the National Report Format.

Agenda item 4: Matters arising from Decisions of the 49th and 50th meetings of Standing Committee

8. The **Deputy Secretary General** introduced DOC. SC51-02 *Matters arising from the 49th and 50th meetings of the Standing Committee* and outlined the matters arising from those meetings.

Decision SC51-03: The Standing Committee took note of the matters arising from Decisions of the 49th and 50th meetings of Standing Committee as contained in DOC. SC51-02.

Agenda item 5: Matters arising from COP12 Decisions

9. The **Deputy Secretary General** introduced DOC. SC51-03 *Matters arising for the Standing Committee from COP12 Resolutions*, noting that substantive matters in it were addressed under other agenda items and that it was presented for information only.
10. **Senegal** and **South Africa** both suggested that information could have been included setting out what work the Secretariat had done with respect to each item in Table 1 of the document. They considered that such documents might be presented as information documents. **South Africa** added that oral presentation of a document should focus on its most important aspects.

Decision SC51-04: The Standing Committee noted DOC. SC51-03 and asked the Secretariat to take note of the suggestions made regarding format and presentation of meeting documents.

11. The **Secretariat** introduced DOC. SC51-04 *Costs of actions to be taken to implement COP12 Resolutions in the 2016-2018 triennium*, noting that the amount included for Wetland City Accreditation in the fourth column of the table in Annex 1 under Resolution XII.10 was now not considered necessary; it also noted that the budgeted funds for introducing Arabic into the Convention (CHF 250,000) had not been included in the third column of the table under Resolution XII.3.
12. **Switzerland** considered the list of proposed actions to be too long and to contain items that should be part of the regular work programme of the Secretariat. She believed the document should have concentrated on priorities identified by the COP. She also observed that under Rule 14 of the Rules of Procedure, Contracting Parties should be informed by the Secretariat of the

cost implications of proposed resolutions before the COP at which such resolutions were to be considered for adoption.

13. The **United States of America** agreed with Switzerland and asked why Annex 1 of the document did not match Annex 3 of Resolution XII.1. She observed that the document appeared to set out a very highly costed way of implementing COP Resolutions. She further noted that Contracting Parties would expect to be kept informed of the cost implications of draft resolutions while these were being negotiated and finalized.
14. **Canada** further observed that the list of actions was difficult to understand and that the cost of some items appeared overinflated, while others appeared under-budgeted. It was also not clear for some items how the proposed funds were intended to be spent.
15. **Senegal** believed that a new version should be presented to the next Standing Committee. He asked how this document related to the Resource Mobilization Strategy.
16. The **United States of America** agreed with Senegal and considered that the new document should not contain any activities tasked to the Contracting Parties or any that were part of the normal business of Secretariat Staff. All activities identified in Resolutions as to be undertaken subject to the availability or resources should be identified as such.
17. The **Republic of Korea** stated that costs in implementation of Resolution XII.10 should be kept to a minimum.
18. **South Africa** supported the other interventions.
19. The **Secretariat** took note of the comments made and stated that it was committed to finding cost-effective ways of implementing the Resolutions.

Decision SC51-05: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to re-draft DOC. SC51-04 for submission to SC52, taking into account the comments made at the present meeting and any further comments that Parties who had intervened might wish to make.

Decision SC51-06: The Standing Committee urged that the Secretariat ensure that the cost implications of draft resolutions be made available to Contracting Parties in advance of the consideration of the draft resolutions, as called for in Rule 14 of the Rules of Procedure.

Agenda item 6: Video report of the Chair of STRP and consideration of STRP work programme, and update on inputs to IPBES
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20. A video presentation by the **STRP Chair** of DOC. SC51-13 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and draft STRP 2016-2018 work plan* was shared, outlining the formation of the STRP for the 2016-2018 triennium, its proposed work plan drawn up in the 19th Meeting of the STRP in early November, and information and timelines on potential inputs to IPBES.
21. In the video presentation, the **STRP Chair** also drew attention to the issue of peatland fires in Indonesia and outlined the involvement of the STRP in efforts to address this issue.
22. **Switzerland** offered congratulations to the STRP Chair for his report, which she considered detailed and realistic.

23. The **United States of America** noted that the STRP was in the process of reorganizing its structure and methods of working, and congratulated it on its progress to date in this regard. However, she had concerns with the proposed work programme. The proposed total of 25 tasks, while considerably fewer than the number STRP had set itself in the past, was still overly ambitious – in previous triennia the STRP had usually accomplished around ten. It was also unclear why six of these tasks were on one subject (peatlands). There appeared to have been relatively little input from STRP National Focal Points as called for under Resolution XII.5, and it was not evident that the literature review called for in paragraph 50 of the Resolution, which would help further prioritization, had been undertaken. Tasks in the proposed work programme were not clearly aligned to the priorities identified by the Parties or related priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Their target audiences and their utility for practitioners on the ground were not always clearly defined. Given these concerns she did not think that the Committee was in a position to approve the work plan as it stood.
24. **South Africa** welcomed the collaboration with IBPES and suggested further collaboration with the scientific advisory bodies of other Conventions, through existing forums such as the Chairs of the Scientific Advisory Bodies (CSAB) and on areas of common interest such as land degradation neutrality (with the UNCCD), disaster risk reduction (with the CBD) and ecosystem-based adaptation (with UNEP).
25. **Senegal** echoed the comments of the United States of America and South Africa and stressed the importance of taking funding constraints into account. He noted that Parties who had not yet done so should be encouraged to identify dedicated STRP NFPs.
26. **Colombia** noted that Ramsar had limited resources and stressed that priority in STRP’s work should be given to Ramsar priorities.
27. **Indonesia** recorded his appreciation of the STRP Chair’s report and summarized actions his country had taken in response to the issue of peatland fires.
28. The observer from **WWF** reported that it would contribute CHF 22,000 to the cost of item 4.2 *Review and analysis of RAM reports*.

Decision SC51-07: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to present an amended STRP work plan to SC52, prioritizing tasks and reflecting budgetary constraints, taking into account the comments made and seeking further input from Contracting Parties and their STRP National Focal Points.

16:00-18:00

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 9: Report of the Chair of the Management Working Group *and*
 Agenda item 10: Report of the Chair of the Standing Committee

29. The **Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee** read out the following statement on behalf of the Chair of the Standing Committee :

“Report from the SC51 closed meeting:

Based on the recommendation from the Management Working Group:

Decision SC51-08: The Standing Committee took note of the Management Working Group recommendations, and decided to mandate the Standing Committee Chair to share with the Secretary General the conclusions reached by the Standing Committee during its closed meeting.

Decision SC51-09: Based on the decisions taken in this respect the Standing Committee authorized the Executive Team of the Standing Committee to take the necessary steps to implement these conclusions.”

30. The **SC Chair in the name of the Executive Team** then announced that Wednesday 25 November 2015 had been the last day in post for the outgoing Secretary General and thanked him for his commitment to the Convention and wished him well for the future. The Committee had asked Ania Grobicki, the Deputy Secretary General, to fulfil the role of Acting Secretary General as of Thursday 26 November 2015. She had accepted.
31. The **Acting Secretary General** thanked the members of the Standing Committee and of the Executive Team for the trust and confidence placed in her. She stated that the Secretariat was committed to responding efficiently and effectively to the needs of the Parties and looked forward to working closely with the Parties in the implementation of COP12 Resolutions and the new Strategic Plan.
32. The **SC Chair** then asked the Acting Secretary General to state which outstanding items on the agenda she considered most important for discussion during the remaining time available.
33. The **Acting Secretary General** proposed that the Committee address: DOC. SC51-07 *Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium*; DOCs. SC51-11 *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention* and SC51-12 *Proposals for new Ramsar Regional Initiatives*; DOC. SC51-09 *Progress report on the development of the format for National Reports to COP13*; and the issue of Wetland City accreditation. She noted that DOC. SC51-08 *Ramsar Convention Secretariat Annual Work Plan for 2016* would need adjusting in light of the new developments and proposed that consideration of this be deferred until SC52.
34. The Standing Committee agreed to consider in order: the Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium; the report of Ramsar Regional Initiatives and approval of new Initiatives for the period 2016-2018; progress report on the preparation of the National Report Format for COP13; and Wetland City Accreditation.

Agenda item 11: Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium

35. The **Acting Secretary General** introduced DOC. SC51-07 *Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium*, noting that it is a simplified version of a more detailed spreadsheet developed by the Secretariat at a planning workshop held in July 2015, which had reflected the COP12 Resolutions.
36. **Colombia** noted that some indicators were repeated and that not all were clearly related to the targets, for example those under Target 17.
37. **Nepal** observed that Goal 2, Target 5 combined outcomes and activities and believed that it should be rephrased.

38. 36. The **United States of America** observed that the relationship was not clear between this document and others, notably DOCs. SC51-03 *Matters arising for the Standing Committee from COP12 Resolutions* and SC51-04 *Costs of actions to be taken to implement COP12 Resolutions in the 2016-2018 triennium*. It did not appear to take into account all the COP12 Resolutions, nor did it distinguish between ongoing activities and proposed new ones. Some of the proposed indicators were duplicated and it was not clear for some how they related to specific activities, nor was it evident in all cases how they could be used to show whether the Secretariat was succeeding or not in contributing to meeting the targets.
39. **Senegal** also stated that this document should be aligned with DOCs. SC51-03 and SC51-04.
40. **Japan** agreed with the United States of America and believed it should be made clear whether activities were directly based on Resolutions or not.
41. **South Africa** stressed the importance of ensuring that all indicators were measurable and suggested that, under Target 19, all documents should be peer-reviewed prior to distribution.
42. **Switzerland** proposed that realistic milestones be established for each year of the 2016-2018 triennium.

Decision SC51-10: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a revised Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-2018 triennium, taking into account the comments made, for consideration by SC52.

Agenda item 12: Report of Ramsar Regional Initiatives in the framework of the Convention and approval of new Initiatives for the period 2016-2018

43. The **Secretariat** introduced DOCs. SC51-11 *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention* and SC51-12 *Proposals for new Ramsar Regional Initiatives*, and made a presentation summarizing results of a meeting on Ramsar Regional Initiatives that had been held on Sunday 22 November 2015.
44. **Senegal** believed it was difficult for the Committee to endorse an oral report, such as that given concerning the meeting on 22 November. He also considered it would not be appropriate for the Committee to endorse any proposed new Ramsar Regional Initiatives until it had had the opportunity to review all relevant documentation. He suggested that Contracting Parties be invited to submit documentation for proposed new Regional Initiatives by February 2016 to allow these to be assessed at SC52.
45. **Colombia, Switzerland, the United States of America and Uruguay** supported the comments made by Senegal.
46. **The Republic of Korea** asked what the Convention might be able to do to encourage countries to continue hosting Regional Initiatives. He suggested that the hosting costs could be made more visible, for example by recording them as additional voluntary contributions made by the Contracting Party in question.
47. **Suriname**, supported by **Colombia** and **Uruguay**, expressed concern that new Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives were being prepared for adoption at SC52 before the assessment of existing Initiatives had been completed. She proposed the establishment of a

working group to review the current Operational Guidelines and determine how best to produce revised Guidelines.

48. The observer from **MedWet** noted that Regional Initiatives under the Convention had grown considerably in number in the past 10 years. This was a very promising development but also posed potential risks. There was, for example, a lack of clarity concerning the legal status of the Initiatives.
49. **Senegal**, supported by the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and **Uruguay**, stated that any working group established to examine Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives should look in particular at the legal status of Regional Initiatives.
50. **Senegal** and the **United States of America** asked for clarification on the mechanism used to contact Parties about new Regional Initiatives as set out in paragraph 5 of DOC. SC51-11.
51. The **Secretariat** reported that Parties had been contacted both through a Diplomatic Note and the National Focal Points. In response, **Senegal** and the **United States of America** questioned whether it was appropriate for Contracting Parties to be approached through diplomatic missions, the latter cautioning that care should be taken in the language used in any such approaches.
52. **Japan** welcomed the progress in establishing the Regional Initiative for Central Asia, and noted its intention to support this Initiative.

Decision SC51-11: The Standing Committee agreed to establish a new Working Group to examine the implications of the proposed new Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives and asked the Secretariat to support the setting up of this group.

Decision SC51-12: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to complete the assessment of existing Ramsar Regional Initiatives and to develop further the common communications strategy taking into account the comments made at the meeting.

Decision SC51-13: The Standing Committee agreed that a one-day workshop to revise the Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives should be held immediately before SC52.

Decision SC51-14: The Standing Committee agreed that proposed new Ramsar Regional Initiatives be invited to submit relevant documentation against a checklist of requirements to be provided by the Secretariat for consideration by SC52.

Agenda item 13: Progress report on the preparation of the National Report Format for COP13
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53. The **Secretariat** introduced DOC. SC51-09 *Progress report on the development of the format for National Reports to COP13* and sought guidance from the Committee on items contained in the sub-paragraphs of paragraph 10. The Secretariat had been also been looking at the possibility of developing an on-line system for national reporting and sought the approval of the Committee in continuing to pursue this.
54. **Kenya** and **Senegal**, both of whom had experience with the on-line systems developed under CMS and AEWA, reported that these could be user-friendly and urged that the development of an on-line Ramsar system be continued.

55. **Colombia, Japan, Tunisia** and the **United States of America** expressed the need to also retain an off-line version, noting that solely on-line systems could present problems for Parties where there were multiple contributors to the report and where more than one agency was required to clear the report for submission.
56. **Senegal** further urged the Secretariat to include, for completeness, reference to Ramsar Strategic Plan indicators and references in subparagraph i) of paragraph 10 of DOC. SC51-09.
57. Regarding subparagraph ii) of paragraph 10 of the document, the **United States of America** encouraged the Secretariat to consult Parties to determine if there were indicators that Parties had found not useful or difficult to implement.

Decision SC51-15: The Standing Committee asked the Secretariat to amend DOC. SC51-09 on the development of the format for National Reports to COP13, updating it with progress made based upon these comments, and submit the amended version to SC52.

Friday 27 November 2015

12:00-12:30

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 7: Establishment of the Standing Committee Sub-Group on COP13

58. In response to a request from the **United Arab Emirates**, the **SC Chair** asked each region to name its proposed member of the Standing Committee Sub-Group on COP13.
59. The nominations were made by **Australia** (Oceania), **Estonia** (Europe), **Honduras** (Latin America and the Caribbean), the **Republic of Korea** (Asia), **Tunisia** (Africa), and the **United States of America** (North America).
60. In addition, the **United States of America** offered to be an observer of the Sub-Group if this would be helpful to the COP13 host country. Standing Committee members from Africa (**Tunisia**) and Europe (**Estonia**) also stated that additional Parties from their respective regions would be happy to be observers of the Sub-Group.
61. **Uruguay** pointed out that it was normal practice for the host country of the previous COP also to be a member of the Sub-Group.
62. The **Republic of Korea** asked whether a Ramsar Regional Initiative could also serve as an observer of the Sub-Group. **Senegal** and the **United States of America** considered that this would not be appropriate. The **SC Chair** stated that Regional Initiatives and IOPs could help in the work of the Sub-Group through appropriate Contracting Party government representatives.

Decision SC51-16: The Standing Committee agreed to establish a Sub-Group on COP13 with the following composition: Australia representing Oceania, Cambodia representing Asia, Canada representing North America, Honduras representing Latin America and the Caribbean, Romania representing Europe, Tunisia representing Africa, United Arab Emirates (Chair) as host country for COP13, and Uruguay as host country for COP12. Other Contracting Parties could serve as observers of the Sub-Group.

63. The **SC Chair** then suspended the session for 30 minutes to allow the Sub-Groups on COP13 and on Finance to meet.

14:00-14:30

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 14: Report of the Standing Committee Sub-Group on COP13

64. The **Chair of the Sub-Group on COP13 (United Arab Emirates)** reported back on the outcome of the Sub-Group's meeting, recording the appreciation of the United Arab Emirates for the offers received to share experience on logistics, paperless COPs, organization of side events, and raising the profile of the COP. He proposed from 21 to 31 October 2018 as the dates for COP13 and asked the Secretariat to check that this did not clash with other important international environmental meetings. He proposed the Dubai World Trade Centre as a suitable venue, stating that he had confirmed that it was available on these dates.

Decision SC51-17: The Standing Committee noted the proposed dates and venue for COP13 and instructed the Secretariat to check that the dates did not clash with those of other important international environmental meetings.

15:00-18:00

Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

65. Responding to a request from the SC Chair, the **Acting Secretary General** proposed that, of the outstanding agenda items, Wetland City accreditation be first considered, then DOC. SC51.10 *Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions and plan on how to increase cooperation with other MEAs*, and then DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2 *Update on formal agreements and joint work plans of the Ramsar Convention and partners*. Following this, the agenda would proceed as set out in DOC. SC51-01 Rev.6 *Approved Agenda and Programme*.
66. The **Standing Committee** agreed to consider outstanding agenda items in the sequence proposed by the Acting Secretary General.

Agenda item 15: Report on implementation of the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention, and selection of an Independent Advisory Committee

67. The **Secretariat** made a presentation on process and proposals for a timeframe to implement the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention.
68. **Tunisia** thanked the Secretariat for its efforts on this and urged the Committee to support further work on this issue.
69. **Romania** noted that the accreditation procedure set out in Resolution XII.10 required Contracting Parties to submit proposals to the Independent Advisory Committee within one year of the closing of each COP in order to be accredited before the following Conference, whereas the timeframe set out by the Secretariat indicated that the deadline for proposals was January 2017.

70. The **Acting Secretary General** stated that, as the process was new, conditions for submission, including the format for proposals, had not yet been finalized. The Secretariat therefore proposed an extended deadline for proposals for the first triennium only.
71. The **Secretariat** further indicated that it was intended that names of all members of the Independent Advisory Committee would be available by the end of February 2016.
72. The **United States of America** underscored the fact that no core budget was allocated to activities under this Resolution.

Decision SC51-18: The Standing Committee noted the presentation on process and proposals for a timeframe to implement the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention given at SC51 and agreed that the Secretariat could continue its work along the lines indicated in the presentation.¹

Agenda item 16: Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions to the Standing Committee and plan on how to increase cooperation with other MEAs (DOC. SC51-10) with updates on formal agreements and joint work plans of the Ramsar Convention and partners (DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2 Annexes 2, 3 and 4), and on UNEP's options paper on enhancing synergies between MEAs (SC51 InfDoc.04).

73. The **Acting Secretary General** introduced DOCs. SC51-10 *Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions and plan on how to increase cooperation with other MEAs* and SC51-23 Rev.2 *Update on formal agreements and joint work plans of the Ramsar Convention and partners*, and indicated that SC51-10 was essentially for information only, as substantive issues in it were addressed under other agenda items. She drew attention to Annexes 1-4 of SC51-23 Rev.2, noting that Annex 2, the proposed Ramsar – CMS Joint Work Plan to cover the period 2015-2017, and Annex 3, the proposed MoU between Ramsar and UNEP, were updates of existing agreements.
74. The **United States of America**, supported by **Senegal** and **Switzerland**, raised serious concerns with the signing of the agreements in Annexes 2-4 of SC51-23 Rev.2. All three draft agreements contained a large amount of detail and those in Annex 2 and Annex 4 (Memorandum of Cooperation between the Nagao Natural Environment Foundation and the Ramsar Convention Secretariat) had only very recently been made available. It had therefore been difficult to appraise them thoroughly. Nevertheless, it was evident that implementing them could entail considerable work on the part of the Secretariat or other Convention entities. For many of the envisaged activities it was not clear how they were aligned with Ramsar Resolutions or the Strategic Plan, nor how the costs of them would be borne. Some of the activities envisaged were not part of the Secretariat's mandate.
75. Regarding the table setting out the plan to increase cooperation with other MEAs in DOC. SC51-10, the **United States of America** further cautioned the Secretariat not to pursue courses of action that some Contracting Parties might have difficulties with, for example regarding peatlands and climate change, which had been the subject of careful negotiations at COP12.

¹ The presentation is available on the Ramsar web site at http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/presentation_wetland_city_accreditation.pdf

76. **Colombia** proposed that the Secretariat prioritize those agreements in Annex 1 of DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2 that delivered the clearest benefits to Ramsar in helping implement Resolutions and the Strategic Plan.
77. **Senegal** and the **United States of America** stated that particular priority should be given to ensuring that the agreement with Stetson University College of Law, the host institution of the current STRP Chair, was renewed in timely fashion.
78. In response to a question from **Japan** concerning the possibly date of finalization of the proposed MoU set out in Annex 4 of DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2, the **Secretariat** responded that the Nagao Natural Environment Foundation was waiting for comments from the Standing Committee to incorporate into the final version.
79. With regard to the proposed MoU set out in Annex 5 of DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2 (Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment and operation of the Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia), the **Republic of Korea** expressed concern that delay in finalizing the memorandum would lead to the serious difficulties for the Center.
80. The observer from the **Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia** indicated that the draft memorandum reflected the current Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Centres.
81. **Senegal**, supported by **Colombia**, expressed concern regarding the legal standing of such a tripartite agreement, Senegal further pointing out that Ramsar Regional Initiatives were the subject of a newly constituted Standing Committee working group, which should be given time to address the issue before any decision was taken.
82. The observer from **UNEP** stated that the proposed MoU in Annex 3 of DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2 attempted to set out areas of potential cooperation and synergy between UNEP and Ramsar in broad terms and sought guidance from the Committee as to how to move forward.

Decision SC51-19: The Standing Committee decided to defer until SC52 consideration of the new agreements and joint work plans of the Ramsar Convention and partners as set out in Annexes 2 to 6 of DOC. SC51-23 Rev.2.

Decision SC51-20: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to pursue renewal of the agreement with Stetson University College of Law and other necessary renewal processes.

Agenda item 17: Report on CEPA Oversight Panel composition and CEPA Action Plan (DOC. SC51-14 *CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat 2016-2024*) and
 Agenda item 18: Report on preparations for World Wetlands Day 2016 and World Wetlands Themes for 2017 and 2018 (DOC. SC51-15 *World Wetlands Day themes*)

83. The **Secretariat** made a presentation on preparations for World Wetlands Day 2016 and proposed themes for 2017 and 2018.
84. **Senegal**, supported by **Nepal**, noting that the video extract shown concentrated on fisheries, observed that it would be helpful to have one video that encompassed a range of aspects of the 2016 World Wetlands Day “Sustainable livelihoods” theme.

85. **South Africa** asked for the presentation on World Wetlands Day to be made widely available.
86. The **United States of America** suggested that the Wetlands Youth Photo Contest could take place in the month running up to World Wetlands Day rather than starting on that day. She expressed doubts about the suitability of some of the themes proposed for future World Wetlands Days and underlined that any future themes should have a strong Ramsar focus.
87. **Switzerland** also questioned the use of some titles and slogans associated with World Wetlands Day, noting that the Contracting Parties had never agreed to the use of the phrase ‘Wetlands – the Source of Sustainable Development’. She believed World Wetlands Day activities should not focus exclusively on youth.
88. **Switzerland** also regretted that there was not enough time to consider in depth the CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat 2016-2024, contained in DOC. SC51-14. She believed that it was insufficiently focused and not clearly aligned to Resolutions and the Strategic Plan, and that it needed to be reworked, reduced and re-submitted for consideration at SC52.
89. The **Republic of Korea** underlined that national CEPA focal points should be central to the implementation of CEPA.
90. The **United States of America** reminded those present that the Standing Committee working group to oversee the implementation of CEPA was open-ended and that any interested Contracting Parties could join the group.
91. The **SC Chair** invited Contracting Parties to submit detailed comments on the CEPA Action Plan to the Secretariat for incorporation in a revised draft.

Decision SC51-21: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to present for consideration at SC52 a shorter, more focused CEPA Action Plan for the Ramsar Secretariat that was more clearly aligned to Resolutions and the Strategic Plan, taking into account any written comments received from Contracting Parties, and including plans for future World Wetlands Day celebrations.

Agenda item 19: Report of the Sub-Group on Finance
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92. The **Chair of the Sub-Group on Finance (Senegal)** presented the report of the meeting of the Sub-Group. For the 2016-2018 triennium, the group comprised Australia, Estonia, Republic of Korea, Senegal (Chair), Suriname and United States of America as representatives of the Standing Committee, Canada as outgoing Chair of the Sub-Group, and the Secretary General and Finance Officer of the Ramsar Secretariat *ex officio*. It had met on 25, 26 and 27 November 2015, and parts of its meeting had been closed. It had considered the following documents:
- DOCs. SC51-18 *Ramsar financial matters 2014/2015/2016*;
 - SC51-19 *Contracting Parties with outstanding annual contributions*;
 - SC51-20 *Report on efforts to raise funds for COP12 delegates as per Resolution XII.1*;
 - SC51-21 *Report on prioritization of fundraising activities to fund non-core budget activities from all sources, with a view to significantly increasing non-Party contributions*; and
 - SC51-22 *Status of and recommendations for the Small Grants Fund*.
93. Regarding the reallocation of 2014 surplus funds, the Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee direct that the surplus of CHF 495,000 be allocated as shown at Table 1 of Annex 1 to this report.

94. Regarding the 2014 Core Budget, the Sub-Group noted that the Reserve Fund stood at CHF 709,000, representing 14% of core budget income, and recommended that the Standing Committee approve the audited 2014 financial statements as presented in DOC. SC51-18, Annex 1.
95. The Sub-Group reported that as of 15 October 2015, voluntary contributions stood at CHF 1,200,000. Subsequently, the United States of America had made a voluntary contribution of USD 1,150,000.
96. The Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee thank the following Contracting Parties and partners who had provided voluntary contributions in 2015: Australia, Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, Uruguay, CBD, Danone, MAVA, Star Alliance, UNEP-ROWA, WWF.
97. The Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee approve the new 2015 income statement presentation for Swiss statutory reporting requirements as required by Swiss law, as shown at Table 2 of Annex 1 of this report.
98. Regarding COP12 and COP13 finances, the Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee note that Uruguay transferred USD 180,000 (CHF 173,118) in June 2015, and that it thank Uruguay for the prompt payment. Further, the Sub-Group recommended that fundraising for COP12 be discontinued at the end of 2015 and the sponsored delegate deficit of CHF 125,000 be taken from the 2014 surplus reallocation. It also recommended that fundraising for COP13 begin from 2016.
99. The Sub-Group noted that 33 Contracting Parties had outstanding contributions of 3 years or more. As of 15 October 2015 the total amount of outstanding contributions was CHF 1,544,000.
100. The Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee note the current status of Contracting Parties' outstanding annual contributions and encourage the Secretariat to continue to take actions to resolve this and report to SC52.
101. The Sub-Group also recommended that the Standing Committee note the actions of the Secretariat since SC48 to reduce the number of outstanding contributions, specifically:
 - i. Sending reminders and statements via diplomatic and other government channels;
 - ii. Visits and follow-up communication to Geneva-based permanent missions of Parties with outstanding contributions; and
 - iii. Sustained verbal and written reminders to National Focal Points and Administrative Authority contacts.
102. The Sub-Group encouraged Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions to resolve them with the Secretariat.
103. The Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee agree to changes to the COP12 approved 2016 core budget for a variety of line items as indicated in Table 3 of Annex 1 of this report, while noting that the overall budget remained the same.
104. The Sub-Group recommended that the Standing Committee approve the 2016 non-core budget as approved at COP12, as shown at Table 4 of Annex 1 of this report.

105. The **United States of America** stated that some discretion should be exercised in the use of Diplomatic Notes and in direct contacts with Administrative Authorities.

106. The **Republic of Korea** underlined the desirability of establishing a Regional Officer for Asia, noting that several Asian Contracting Parties had expressed interest in supporting such an officer through voluntary contributions. The possibility of combining this role with that of the Regional Officer for Oceania had also been informally discussed.

Decision SC51-22: The Standing Committee adopted the report of the Sub-Group on Finance and the recommendations made in it, and took note of interventions made regarding a possible Regional Officer for Asia. Specifically, the Standing Committee:

- **approved the Sub-Group's proposed reallocation of 2014 surplus funds;**
- **approved the audited 2014 financial statements as presented in document SC51-18, Annex 1;**
- **recorded its thanks to all Contracting Parties and partners that had made voluntary contributions in 2015;**
- **approved the new 2015 income statement presentation for Swiss statutory reporting requirements as required by Swiss law;**
- **regarding COP12 finances, noted that Uruguay transferred USD 180,000 (CHF 173,118) in June 2015 and thanked Uruguay for the prompt payment;**
- **instructed the Secretariat to discontinue fundraising for COP12 at the end of 2015 and take the sponsored delegate deficit of CHF 125,000 from the 2014 surplus reallocation;**
- **instructed the Secretariat to begin fundraising for COP13 from 2016;**
- **noted the current status of Contracting Parties' outstanding annual contributions, and encouraged the Secretariat to continue to take actions to resolve this and report to SC52;**
- **noted the actions of the Secretariat since SC48 to reduce the number of outstanding contributions;**
- **encouraged Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions to resolve them with the Secretariat; and**
- **agreed to changes to the COP12-approved 2016 core budget for a variety of line items, while noting that the overall budget remained the same.**

Agenda item 20: Report back on Ramsar representation to attend the cooperation workshop of the biodiversity-related Conventions

107. The **Acting Secretary General** reminded the Standing Committee that it had been asked, as part of the implementation of Resolution XI.6, to nominate one representative from each of the regions recognized under the Convention on Biological Diversity (namely Africa, Asia and the Pacific, GRULAC, CEE and WEOG) to attend the cooperation workshop of the biodiversity-related Conventions.

108. Committee members reported that the following five nominations had been made according to the CBD regions: for Africa, Kenya; for Asia and the Pacific, Nepal; for GRULAC, Colombia; for CEE, Armenia. WEOG had not decided on a representative and would forward the decision to the Secretariat as soon as one had been made.

Agenda item 21: Date and venue of the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee

109. The **Secretariat** proposed 13-17 June 2016 as the dates for SC52, and IUCN Headquarters as the venue, and also proposed a one-day meeting on Ramsar Regional Initiatives at IUCN Headquarters on Sunday 12 June.

Decision SC51-23: The Standing Committee decided that the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee would be held in Gland, Switzerland, from 13 to 17 June 2016, and that a one-day meeting on Regional Initiatives would be held in Gland on 12 June 2016.

Agenda item 22: Adoption of the report of the meeting

110. In view of the shortage of time, the Standing Committee agreed that the Executive Committee could approve the report of SC51 for adoption on behalf of the Standing Committee. Those with comments on the report for the sessions of 24 and 26 November 2015 were asked to forward these to the Secretariat for incorporation.

Agenda item 23: Any other business

111. It was noted that the panel charged with appointing the new Ramsar Secretary General would meet before SC52.

Agenda item 24: Closing remarks

112. The **Acting Secretary General** thanked the members of the Secretariat and the International Organization Partners for their hard work and support to the meeting.

113. The **SC Chair** thanked the interpreters for their commitment to the meeting, and thanked all the members of the Standing Committee for their contributions.

Annex 1: Tables from Agenda item 20: Report of the Sub-Group on Finance

Contents:

Table 1: Reallocation of 2014 surplus funds

Table 2: 2015 Swiss statutory reporting requirements for presentation of income statement

Table 3: Proposed changes to the COP12 approved 2016 core budget

Table 4: 2016 non-core budget as approved at COP12

Table 1: Reallocation of 2014 surplus funds

Description	SC51
	Actual
Core Surplus	459
Committed:	
ENB (COP12 support)	50
Ramsar Advisory Missions (Nicaragua)	25
Staff provision	94
Subtotal, Committed	169
Core Surplus, Remaining Balance	290
Proposal for Remaining Surplus:	
Sponsor Delegate Support	125
Subtotal, Proposal	125
Core Surplus, Remaining Balance	165
SC51, Nov 23-27, 2015	155
Support for website development	10
Remaining Balance	0

Table 2: 2015 Swiss statutory reporting requirements for presentation of income statement

Income
<i>External Income</i>
Contributions from Contracting Parties
US Voluntary Contributions
African Voluntary Contributions
Project Income
Financial Income
Provisions (income)
<i>Total external income</i>
Transfer between core and projects
Total Income
Expenditure
<i>Operating Expenditure</i>
Communications (Outreach)
Regional Advice, Initiatives and Support
Scientific and Technical Services
Partnerships
Management, Operations and Support
<i>Total Operating Expenditure</i>
<i>Other Income (Expenditures)</i>
Financial Expenses
Provisions (expense)
<i>Total Other Income Expenditures</i>
Total Expenditure
Net Surplus/(Deficit)

Table 3: Proposed changes to the COP12 approved 2016 core budget

Ramsar Combined Budget, 2016	2016	2016	2016
CHF 000'S	COP12 Approved	SC51 Proposal	Variance
INCOME			
Parties' Contributions	3,779	3,779	
Voluntary contributions	1,065	1,065	
Income Tax	225	225	
Income Interest	12	12	
TOTAL INCOME	5,081	5,081	
EXPENDITURES			
A. Secretariat Senior Management	798	605	-193
Salaries and social costs	674	554	-120
Other employment benefits	79	26	-53
Travel	45	25	-20
B. Partnership Coordinator	250	64	-185
Salaries and social costs	188	47	-141
Other employment benefits	52	17	-35
Travel	10		-10
C. Regional Advice and Support	1,342	1,342	
Salaries and social costs	1,201	1,201	
Other employment benefits	56	56	
Travel	85	85	
D. Support to Regional Initiatives	120	120	
Regional networks and centers	120	120	
E. Scientific and Technical Services	212	212	
Salaries and social costs	110	110	
Other employment benefits	2	2	
Travel	10	10	
STRP implementation	40	40	
STRP meetings	50	50	
F. Communications	569	569	
Salaries and social costs	434	434	
Travel	5	5	
CEPA Program	30	30	
Comms, Translations, Publications and Reporting Implementation	100	100	
G. Administration/RSIS/Web	896	981	85
Salaries and social costs	629	629	
Other employment benefits	5	5	
Staff hiring and departure costs	70	120	50
Travel		10	10
Ramsar Sites Information Service (maintanance and develop)	92	117	25
Web/IT support and Development	100	100	
H. Operating Costs	95	95	
General	80	80	
Equipment/Office Supplies	15	15	
I. Standing Committee Services	150	165	15
Standing Committee delegates' support	45	50	5
Standing Committee meetings	10	15	5
SC translation	60	60	
Simultaneous interpretation at SC meetings	35	40	5
J. IUCN Administrative Service Charges (maximum)	540	540	
Administration, Human Resources, Finance & IT services	540	540	
K. Miscellaneous - Reserve Fund	110	388	278
Reserve Fund		278	278
Staff termination & repatriation provisions			
Provisions	50	50	
Legal Services	60	60	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	5,081	5,081	

Table 4: 2016 non-core budget as approved at COP12

No.	NON-CORE FUNDS 2016 – 2018	3 Year Funding Requirement (CHF)	Yearly Funding Requirement
1	Ramsar Advisory Missions for Parties requiring assistance	600,000	200,000
2	STRP 2016-2018 programme of work support	300,000	100,000
3	RSIS, IM/IT (Website) Continuing Development	175,000	58,333
4	Pre-COP13 regional meetings (delegates support and meeting costs for preparatory meetings)	650,000	216,667
5	COP13 (2018) sponsorship to eligible delegates	600,000	200,000
6	Arabic language introduction and translation support	250,000	83,333
7	Small Grants Funds for protection and wise use of wetlands	1,000,000	333,333
8	Regional Initiative Networks and Centres support (priority activities).	150,000	50,000
9	Ramsar CEPA Programme (2016-2021), exclusion of World Wetlands Day	300,000	100,000
10	On-line system for National Reports, reporting and indicators development	175,000	58,333
	TOTAL	4,200,000	1,400,000