

Ramsar Regional Initiatives: An assessment of their achievements by 2015

1. COP12 requested the Ramsar Convention Secretariat (through Resolution XII.8.21): “i) to assess the achievements of regional initiatives in delivering technical, administrative and collaborative benefits to the Parties in their regions, as well as their effectiveness and efficiency, ii) to analyse weaknesses, strengths and difficulties of regional initiative implementation and management, and iii) to formulate recommendations for improving the Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention;”.
2. The Secretariat therefore asked the 15 Regional Initiatives that were endorsed by Standing Committee as operating under the Convention during the triennium 2013-2015 to fill in a questionnaire. The responses received enabled the compilation of up-to-date information and the establishment of a baseline for the assessment of the achievements of the RRI and their compliance with the existing Operational Guidelines. A draft of this assessment was submitted for comments to the leaders of the Regional Initiatives (during a workshop on 22 November 2015) and to all Parties (by correspondence in December 2015). Comments received are included in this revised version. The remainder of this document lists brief summaries of the responses submitted by the Initiatives. Standardized short answers provided below allow the reader to compare differences between the Initiatives and to see where responses are similar. The comments added by the Secretariat make reference to the existing Operational Guidelines 2013-2015, aiming to develop common ways forward to support Ramsar Regional Initiatives for the increased implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
3. This report follows the structure of the questionnaire and its numbering. The individual initiatives are identified with one-letter codes:
 - A Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA) in Kampala
 - B Regional Ramsar Centre for Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA) in Teheran
 - C Ramsar Regional Centre for East Asia (RRC-EA) in Changwon
 - R Regional Ramsar Centre for Wetland Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO)
 - D West African Coastal Zone Wetlands Network (WaCoWet)
 - E Ramsar Network for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet)
 - F Regional Strategy for High Andean Wetlands
 - G Strategy for Wetlands in the La Plata River Basin
 - H Caribbean Wetlands Regional Initiative (CariWet)
 - J Conservation and Wise Use of [American] Mangroves and Coral Reefs
 - K East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)
 - L Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet)
 - M Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI)
 - N Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet)
 - P Black and Azov Sea Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet)

Major achievements of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

4. The leaders of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives were asked to list up to three major successes (and their outcomes). This was intended to clarify the major contributions the Regional Initiatives make to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. Below is a summary of their answers. The initiatives A, B, C and R concern regional centres for training and capacity building. Thus, training programmes figure prominently among their major achievements, while the initiatives D-P concern regional networks for cooperation that do not necessarily focus predominantly on training:
- A elaboration of a strategic framework, establishment of a Secretariat, logo and website, assessment of capacity needs and training of 19 wetland managers from 4 countries
 - B development of a regional training programme, promoting wetlands wise use through research and management, raising awareness about the Convention among non-Parties
 - C training of wetland managers, creating a network of national CEPA and STRP focal points, establishment of a grant programme for wetland conservation
 - R training of wetland managers, training of trainers, promotion of scientific and technical cooperation and know-how transfer
 - D elaboration of a governance and cooperation structure, elaboration of operational procedures, rules and communication tools, capacity development and fundraising plans
 - E elaboration of operational procedures, capacity development and fundraising plans, preparation of a wetland atlas for the river basin
 - F publication of a regional wetland strategy and action plan to 2020, establishment of the structures of the initiative as a cooperation mechanism in all countries and at international level, strengthening of wetland management at regional level, based on regular meetings and established structures
 - G elaboration of a three-year work plan and its financial needs, elaboration of operational and governance procedures, establishment of a logo for the initiative and preparation of its communication plan
 - H consolidation of the governance mechanism, preparation of an action plan and financial strategy to increase national capacities, providing support to non-Parties for their accession to the Convention
 - J elaboration of a strategy and three-year work and finance plan, establishment of a governance structure and communication tools, exchange of national information and know-how to strengthen implementation capacities
 - K building a flyway partnership among 34 government agencies, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, establishment of working groups addressing issues of particular concern, signing a hosting agreement for the secretariat since 2009
 - L major symposium at the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the initiative, relocation of the Secretariat with financial support for three years after a period of uncertainty, relaunch of the communication and outreach programme

- M signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the Ramsar and Carpathian Conventions to coordinate and support the activities of the initiative, execution of several projects with partners for wetland management, inventory, transboundary cooperation and other subjects, holding of several workshops, seminars and training sessions, including the establishment of an information and training centre
- N preparation and successful adoption of the Ramsar Resolution XII.11 on peatlands and climate change regulation, preparation of an assessment report and a policy brief (adopted by the relevant Ministers) on the same issue, successful execution of a regional CEPA project
- P commitment of the national partners in 6 out of 7 countries in the region to work in cooperation, elaboration of a governance and operational structure, website and logo, and holding of four meetings of the management body of the initiative

Secretariat comment:

5. A conclusion that can be drawn from these responses is that it was worthwhile for the RRI to take time to establish sound operational, administrative and governance procedures, to elaborate strategies and action plans, to build strong working relations with partners, donors, and other stakeholders, and to create their own identity, communications and outreach plans and tools (such as logos, websites, etc.). Some significant outcomes have been achieved. A strong institutional base which enables the RRI to execute targeted programmes, projects and activities in a professional way, with sufficient funding, is an important prerequisite to increase Ramsar implementation in their respective regions and countries, and beyond.

Greatest difficulties of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

6. These are the short answers by the initiatives' leaders when asked to list the three most difficult problems they have experienced:
 - A lack of a legal status, mobilising adequate financial resources, slow engagement by countries
 - B lack of a legal status, obtaining financial resources, respect of agreed governance procedures by host country
 - C lack of a legal status, lack of human resources, limited support from the Ramsar Secretariat
 - R limited financial resources, absence of acknowledgement that the centre is available for training activities covering the entire region
 - D lack of financial resources, weak engagement by countries, little progress with adherence to the Strategic Plan
 - E weak financial support, weak engagement of countries, weak engagement of the relevant river basin organisation
 - F lack of financial resources, frequent change of national focal points slows down progress with work
 - G lack of awareness and knowledge at national level, lack of financial resources, frequent change of national focal points
 - H lack of financial resources, lack of coordination with other regional Conventions, lack of communication, also due to a language barrier

- J lack of financial resources, difficulty to have an impact on the conservation of Ramsar Sites, weak engagement by countries
- K change of national focal points, weak commitment of countries at higher political levels, development pressures on wetlands
- L inability to build upon the momentum created by the major anniversary symposium, weak legal status, lack of commitment by countries
- M lack of national financial resources, change of national focal points, lack of legal status is difficult for project preparation and funding
- N lack of involvement by one country, lack of time and resources at national level, lack of financial resources
- P lack of involvement by one country, lack of financial resources

Secretariat comments:

7. All regional centres (A,B,C,R) consider the lack of a legal status, with sufficient independence from a host institution, as a major problem for their operations. The lack of a legal status can also be an obstacle for RRIIs seeking to raise funding. Obtaining sufficient funding is considered to be difficult and a challenge.
8. Several RRIIs deplore the absence of sufficient engagement and support by all the countries concerned. This is a disturbing situation, as these regional initiatives were not externally imposed, but created locally by the countries in the region to address local needs, and to provide solutions for problems identified locally as a priority within the regional context. The maintenance of the work programme and the outreach of RRIIs often depend on a few individuals only. In many cases they do not benefit from a sufficient institutional or financial set-up, as stipulated in the Operational Guidelines.
9. The Ramsar national focal points in the Ministries are supposed to work together through a regional initiative, but often have little time to do so and the individuals concerned change frequently. This slows down progress in the work of the initiative, hampers their wider acceptance and visibility in the region concerned, and creates difficulties in raising substantial governmental support. The added value of regional cooperation among countries, in synergy with regional partner organisations, and in a complementary way to the work of the Ramsar Secretariat, is in many cases not yet sufficiently analysed, recognized, and communicated.

Priorities for 2016 listed by the Regional Initiatives

10. Asked to list their three main targets for 2016, the leaders of the Regional Initiatives provided these answers:
 - A conduct training for national Ramsar committees and site managers, conduct a regional wetland assessment, commission particular countries to spearhead specific result areas
 - B provide flyway-related training and capacity building, promote wetland wise use through research and management, explore funding opportunities

- C provide training programmes for local stakeholders, improve cooperation among wetland centres, develop Ramsar Site management tools
- R launch capacity building programme, coordinate regional communications programme, identify and strengthen links with community-based organisations
- D obtain funds, develop and adopt a strategic plan for the initiative, develop specific projects and a website
- E increase capacities of the national focal points, establish better the secretariat and its outreach capacity, work with partners in the region to raise funds and work on transboundary wetlands
- F raise funds for the implementation of the regional strategy, consolidate the regional project for submission to GEF6, guarantee that the action plan will be in line with the new Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024
- G provide workshops for capacity building at national level, sign cooperation agreements with regional organisations and donors in view of support to the regional project, progress with the regional wetland inventory
- H finalize a regional project and its submission to a donor, support accession to the Convention by non-Parties, strengthen the mutual agreements among the members of the initiative
- J obtain long-term financial sustainability for the initiative, identify local projects for inclusion into the regional project, involve private sector to adopt better practices to avoid further wetland degradation
- K conduct an independent evaluation of the initiative, develop and implement a sustainable financing strategy, develop an action plan for intertidal areas
- L members to adopt an ambitious framework for action 2016-2030, identify partners to develop concrete projects for submission to donors
- M update the regional strategy in accordance with Ramsar's Strategic Plan 2016-2024, improve wetland knowledge and the understanding of priorities for restoration, training, education and awareness building in view of a CEPA plan development
- N finalise ongoing projects, develop new projects on ecosystem services, prepare financial support
- P elaborate a regional project proposal, explore ways of obtaining a legal status

Secretariat comment:

- 11.** All Regional Initiatives provide clear priorities for their work during the coming year. Further comparisons of the workplans may provide insights to identify and analyse possible gaps or weaknesses in the action plans or forward strategies of individual RRI. At this stage, the assessment is intended to provide basic information to compare one's own initiative with the achievements, challenges and objectives of others. Such comparison with the experiences of sister initiatives, may lead to adaptations in work programmes and attitudes and become beneficial for the outcomes of all initiatives. The leaders may also identify possible areas for cooperation between different initiatives and synergies to be created through exchange of tools, materials and know-how, and support by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

Lessons learnt by Ramsar Regional Initiatives

12. Asked to list the three most relevant lessons learned through regional cooperation, the leaders of the Regional Initiatives responded thus:

- A regional initiatives need to be based upon real needs and to address identified gaps, all key partners need to be consulted and their commitment be secured, leadership is critical to maintain continued interest and contributions by all partners who need to bring in their own strengths
- B workshops for national CEPA focal points can develop more effective procedures, sharing case studies and experience at workshops help capacity development at national level, translation of Ramsar documents into Arabic and Russian is effective to raise understanding and involvement
- C regional centres should have a legal status, independent governing structure and funding plan before starting to operate, communication with the Ramsar national focal points in the region and the Ramsar Secretariat is important
- R Ramsar national focal points need to be closer involved in the activities of the centre, stronger Secretariat support is needed, better alignment with Strategic Plan and synergies with regional projects
- D it is necessary to contact the Ministers in the countries concerned directly
- E regional initiatives facilitate integration and coordinated management of resources shared between different countries, our programme needs to focus on integrated water resources management, climate change, and wetland restoration
- F regional meetings are essential to identify issues of common interest, developing a common vision is difficult but fundamental to create compromises and political will among the countries, this will lead to necessary formal engagements (regarding financial, human and other resources)
- G progress was achieved with the integrated approach for the wise use of the river basin, communication between the initiative, the national focal points and the Secretariat was improved, and the need to act in synergy with other programmes active in the region was recognized
- H regional cooperation provides better results, mobilises more funds and requires support from all members, different languages used in different countries need to be overcome, small island states in the region can profit from the initiative, synergies through working with other partners need to be created, also to avoid duplicated efforts
- J leading a regional initiative requires time and dynamic leadership, the potential for international/regional cooperation is important, given the similar ecosystems and their similar threats faced, the involvement of other actors and partners will multiply synergies and help to avoid duplication of efforts
- K a broad and diverse membership is important to promote international activities and to build national constituencies, it is necessary to build national partnerships, CEPA and especially communication are important
- L the leadership needs to be constantly pro-active re the member countries and to maintain an active presence with partners, it needs to resolve the legal status of the initiative, and the need to establish a strong synergy with the Ramsar Secretariat

- M demonstrated beneficial effects of cooperation between two international conventions, the transfer of wetland policies and the development of transborder cooperation
- N it is important to focus on specific projects and targets and to assess the strengths of our initiative and region, active leadership by specific countries is crucial, good networking skills are needed, especially for the leader of the initiative
- P cooperation needs to be enlarged to include other regional organisations

13. Following these four broad questions, the questionnaire focused on more specific and measurable indicators relating to the Operational Guidelines 2013-2015.

Contracting Parties and other partners involved in Ramsar Regional Initiatives

14. This chapter tries to analyse the extent of participation and of appropriation (“buy-in”) of the regional cooperation mechanism by its members. Primarily the Ramsar Administrative Authorities and National Focal Points, but hopefully not limited to them, and including all other relevant stakeholders. The table below provides a numerical summary of the responses provided to questions 7 to 11 in the questionnaire. The term “countries” refers to Ramsar Contracting Parties and non-Parties. Other partners refer to Ramsar’s International Organisation Partners (IOPs) and intergovernmental, non-governmental, civil society, scientific and other relevant organisations actively involved in the work programme of the initiatives.

Countries and Partners involved	A	B	C	R	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P
7.1 number of countries involved	5	19	17	30	13	9	8	5	17	14	17	27	7	10	6
7.2 number of representatives from other Ministries involved	4	-	-	2	-	-	-	yes	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
7.3 STRP, CEPA focal points and other wetland experts involved	1	-	-	15	-	-	-	yes	-	yes	yes	-	3	yes	-
7.4 NGOs, CSOs and other organisations involved	8	-	-	17	-	2	7	yes	7	10	10	2	6	-	yes
7.5 business/private sector partners involved	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
7.6 other partners involved	3	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	3	-	yes	-
8. active cooperation with national or regional institutions	8	6	6	8+	4	3	7	1	5+	yes	1	1	8+	yes	-
9. cooperation with stakeholders in different sectors	10	-	-	15	-	-	11	12	8	12+	-	1	10	-	-
10. number of Strategic Plan tasks implemented	3	1	-	yes	3	3	5	3	9	13+	-	-	17	2	4
11. number of Ramsar tools used	18+	yes	-	6+	17+	9	28+	10+	17	16	-	-	48+	5	7

Secretariat analysis:

15. Question 7.1 lists the number of participating countries in each Ramsar Regional Initiative. For the four centres (A, B,C, R) this is the number of countries geographically covered by the target region, while the number of countries that benefitted from training and capacity building programmes was so far

substantially less, in particular for the initiatives B, C and R.

16. Question **7.2** shows that very few initiatives include representatives from other Ministries than the one responsible for Ramsar implementation, despite the request of **Operational Guideline 20** that “Each Initiative should entail the participation, from the start, not only of the Administrative Authorities responsible for the application of the Convention in the Contracting Parties involved, but also of all other relevant stakeholders with an interest in and directly or indirectly responsible for wetland issues, including the ministries responsible for environment and water issues, intergovernmental bodies, Ramsar IOPs, other NGOs, academia, local communities, and economic actors.”
17. Question **7.3** shows a similar gap concerning the requests of **Operational Guideline 26** that “Regional Initiatives need to support the further development of the Convention’s Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) through cooperation with STRP national focal points in the region, STRP members and experts, and through synergies to be established at all possible levels of the activities undertaken by Regional Initiatives.” and of **Operational Guideline 25** requesting that “Regional Initiatives need to raise the visibility of the Ramsar Convention and the general awareness of Ramsar objectives. Specific activities in the fields of communication, education and participatory process with relevant stakeholders should be included in their work plans. The outcomes of such activities should be communicated to the Secretariat for use by the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel.”
18. Question **7.4** and **7.6** show that the involvement of other organisations and partners is more widespread, according to what is stipulated in **Operational Guideline 20**.
19. Question **7.5** shows that the involvement of private (business) sector partners is not yet much advanced and concerns so far only two mining companies.
20. While the questions 7.1-7.6 refer to “active members” participating in the initiatives, question **8** refers to outside partners working together with the initiatives, mainly in the framework of specific projects. The answers show that such project-based partnerships are well established across the Regional Initiatives, although there remain exceptions.
21. Question **9** asks to list stakeholders from other sectors, such as water, agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, urban/municipal/local authorities, energy, culture, and others that work together with the initiative (often in the framework of specific projects). About half of the Regional Initiatives undertake such inter-sectoral work, as requested by **Operational Guideline 20** (cf. above). The others have not reached this stage yet.
22. Question **10** shows that a majority of the Regional Initiatives have listed tasks of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015, towards the implementation of which they contributed, in line with the request of **Operational Guideline 24** that “The strategic and operational targets of a Regional Initiative should be fully aligned with the Strategic Plan of the Convention by means of policy and site technical work and activities.”
23. Question **11** indicates that the use of specific Ramsar tools is widespread among the initiatives, however with a few notable exceptions.

Governance mechanisms of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

24. **Operational Guideline 14** requests that “Regional Initiatives need to become firmly established in their geographical region. They must establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms approved by the administration involved from the Contracting Parties as well as other stakeholders, in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight.” The answers to questions 12-16 summarized in the table below provide the baseline data to check to which degree this is a fact:

Governance	A	B	C	R	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P
12 governing body	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
13 number of governing body meetings per triennium	3	3	1	6	?	1	3	3	3	3	1-2	3	3	6	1-3
14 Ramsar Secretariat participates in governing body	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
15 governing body has written ToR, RoP and meeting minutes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
16 political, technical, financial support from Parties	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Secretariat analysis:

25. Question **12** shows that all initiatives have established a governing body.
26. **13** these bodies meet at regular intervals at least annually, with a few exceptions of bodies who do not meet regularly on one hand, and two bodies that meet at least twice a year, also through teleconferences, on the other hand.
27. **14** where such bodies meet, the Ramsar Secretariat participates and “maintains regular links with the Regional Initiatives and provides advice so that global Ramsar guidelines are applied throughout the different regions, and so that the strategic and operational targets of Regional Initiatives are aligned with the Convention’s Strategic Plan” as requested by **Operational Guideline 9**.
28. **15** with the exception of one, the governing bodies have written terms of references or rules of procedures and produce meeting minutes for members and partners.
29. The responses to question **16** show that the existence of a governing body, and transparent rules for its procedures, are necessary to obtain support (political, technical and financial) from the participating Contracting Parties.

Funding of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

30. Questions 16-19 are not intended to provide a detailed financial analysis of the operations of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, but to show how the requests of **Operational Guideline 29** that “The launching of a Regional Initiative needs to rely upon secured funding for planned work, activities and projects” and of **Operational Guideline 32** that “Regional Initiatives need to generate their own resources and become financially self-sufficient after an initial start-up phase and in the long term.” are implemented:

Funding	A	B	C	R	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P
16.1 number of regular donors	3	-	2	3	1	10	10	1	4+	1	3	27	2	-	1
16.2 number of occasional donors	2	2	-	3	-	-	yes	-	-	5	3	2	13	-	-
16.3 number of projects providing funds	1	-	-	3	-	-	yes	-	-	-	4+	2	5+	1	-
17. number of years with Ramsar core budget funding support	6	5	-	7	6	3	4	5	7	6	-	6	7	-	3
18. own bank account, accounting and financial reporting	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
19. budget for 2015 in '000 CHF (0.9 EUR/CHF, 1 USD/CHF)	215	-	400	274	77	42	60	18	18	20	450	380	64	-	44
19.1 major expenditures a=staff/consultants, b=meetings/travel, c=communications, d=on-site work	d,b,a	-	a,b	a,c	b,c	d,c	b	b	b	b	a	a	d	a	b

Secretariat analysis:

31. Question **16.1-3** the situation differs much between the initiatives and indicates that a single financial model does not necessarily fit all of them. Some initiatives are producing tangible results by executing only one common project with hardly any overhead costs, while others have a multitude of regular and occasional donors, including specific annual contributions by their member countries, based on the UN model used by the Ramsar Convention. **17** however, creating and maintaining in the long term a sufficient regular income, beyond specific project support, is a challenge for most of them, notably for those who received start-up funding from the Ramsar core budget during two successive periods between two Conferences of the Parties (COPs), in accordance with the procedures detailed in **Operational Guidelines 30, 31** and **35**.
32. Question **18** shows that many initiatives depend on the Ramsar Secretariat performing their financial management, accounting and reporting. The proposed Operational Guidelines 2016-2024 stipulate that Regional Initiatives will have their own financial accounting and reporting system, supervised by their governance body, in order to be able to operate, to receive funds, and to conduct specific projects.
33. Question **19** experiences gained through the operation of regional initiatives show that the supervisory role of their governing bodies is particularly important where an initiative remunerates dedicated staff or consultants contracted for specific tasks.

Legal status of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

34. Ramsar's Regional Initiatives are endorsed as operating under the Convention for each triennium between two Conferences of the Parties, through a Standing Committee decision (the latest one concerned the triennium 2013-2015, i.e. DEC. SC47-26). Besides this recognition of being an operational mechanism of the Convention, regional initiatives do not have any particular status.

Legal status	A	B	C	R	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P
20. initiative has its own legal status	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
21.1 initiative has a host institution	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	-	-	yes	yes	yes
21.2 initiative is sufficiently independent from host institution	yes	no	no	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	yes	-	-
22. initiative seeks to obtain its own legal status	yes	no	yes	-	-	yes	no	no	no	no	-	yes	yes	-	yes

Secretariat analysis:

35. Question **20** shows that one Regional Ramsar Centre is recognized as an international institution by its host country since March 2015, and that the professional secretariats of two Regional Initiatives have a legal status (either business or non-profit). One of them aims to change this status from a national non-governmental association to the status of a legally recognized international inter-governmental organization. **22** others are aiming for the same result, anticipating that this would ease their operations, recognition and support by governmental agencies. It is suggested to share experiences with these ongoing and future efforts among all initiatives as soon as available, in order to identify ways how to possibly obtain an international legal status.
36. Question **22.1** shows which initiatives are hosted by a national institution. The relationship between a Regional Initiative and its possible hosting institution is addressed through **Operational Guideline 15** stating that "In order to establish a coordination body or mechanism, key support from a host country, an International Organization Partner (IOP) of the Convention, or a host intergovernmental organization is essential. However, when established, the coordination body needs to be able to operate independently and be responsible through its work and reporting to all members that constitute a Regional Initiative (Contracting Parties and other members), not only to the host country or body." and through **Operational Guideline 28** stipulating that "Substantial support from a host country is especially important if a coordinating office is to be established. This would need a hosting agreement to be signed, in order to provide sufficient independence of operation to the Regional Initiative in terms of staffing, accounting, and fundraising." **21.2** two initiatives report that they are currently not sufficiently independent from their host institution. For others, such conflicts seem not to have arisen yet. If asked to do so, the Ramsar Secretariat is willing to assist regional initiatives with the preparation of hosting agreements.

Developing the capacity of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

37. Questions 23-26 provide some indicators about progress with capacity development by the initiatives:

Capacity development	A	B	C	R	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	M	N	P
23. initiative has its logo, website and promotional material	yes	only logo	yes	yes	only logo	no	only logo	only logo	only logo	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
24. initiative has a development plan	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
25. the development plan covers a period until year	2020	-	-	2017	-	-	2020	2018	2017	2021	2016	2030	2014	-	-
26. number of dedicated staff working for the initiative	3.5	-	2	4+	1	4	-	-	1	-	6+	3.5	1.5+	-	2.5

Secretariat analysis:

38. Question **23** while all Ramsar Regional Initiatives have created their own logo (see <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-regional-initiatives>), only some of them have established a website and maintain it up-to-date with information about their operations, structure, members, results and future plans.
39. **Operational Guideline 3** states that “Regional Initiatives are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitating and improving the implementation of the Ramsar Convention.” One may deduct from this rule that Regional Initiatives should develop a forward or development plan, an operational strategy or a similar guidance document. **24-25** show that a significant number of them have done so and have currently valid plans, or intend to renew expiring plans in the near future.
40. Question **26** shows that a substantial number of initiatives can count on the work of dedicated staff, either hired specifically or seconded by a public institution. For initiatives without dedicated staff, it is normally the Ramsar National Focal Points who assure such tasks beyond their other professional duties. This rapidly imposes limits to what a given initiative can undertake, given the little time Ramsar National Focal Points can free for Regional Initiatives.

Conclusions

41. This factual overview and analysis of the achievements and operations of the current Ramsar Regional Initiatives is intended to provide Parties and the leaders of Regional Initiatives with background information and insights that are useful for the further development of the initiatives.
42. The assessment will serve as a resource document for the newly established Working Group (Standing Committee Decision SC51-11) to examine the implications of the proposed new Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives.