

Update on a common communications strategy for Ramsar Regional Initiatives

Background

1. Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat in late 2015 to further develop the common communications strategy for Ramsar Regional Initiatives, taking into account the comments made at the meeting (Decision SC51-12).
2. This builds on the requirement in paragraph 25 of the Regional Initiatives Operational Guidelines 2013-2015: “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 processes 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.”
3. Information on the communications activities of the different Regional Initiatives was collected with the help of questionnaires. From this analysis, it follows that there is currently a significant variation in the approach to branding and communications across the Regional Initiatives. This is summarized at Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Communications activities of Ramsar Regional Centres

Ramsar Regional Centre	Logo	Website	Social media
Eastern Africa (RAMCEA)	yes	yes	FB; Tw; LI; g+
Eastern Asia (RRC-EA)	yes	no	-
Central and Western Asia (RRC-CWA)	no	yes	-
Western Hemisphere (CREHO)	yes	yes	-

Table 2: Communications activities of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

Ramsar Regional Initiative	Logo	Website	Newsletter	Social media
BlackSea Wet	yes	yes	-	-
CARIWET	yes	pdf sheet	-	-
CWI	yes	yes	-	-
Initiative for Plata River Basin	yes	pdf sheet	-	-
NigerWet	yes	no	-	-
NorBalWet	yes	yes	yes	-
MedWet	yes	yes	yes	FB, Tw, RSS
HAW	yes	pdf sheet	-	-
Mangroves & Coral Reefs	yes	pdf sheet	-	-
EAAF	yes	yes	yes	FB Tw YT RSS Flk Wei
WACOWet	yes	-	-	-

4. The logos and links to the individual websites are available on the Ramsar website at: <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-regional-initiatives>
5. At the first workshop for the leaders of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives on 22 November 2015, an initial discussion was held which included conversations on two communications areas:
 - Increased collaboration and information sharing
 - Development of a proposed communications strategy to publicize the work of the RIs
6. Two questions went into the four group discussions:
 - How can Regional Initiatives have more prominence/ visibility within the Ramsar Convention?
 - Should we be trying to create a Ramsar RI family feel? And if so what elements might we consider bringing into the mix? For example should we agree a set of minimum branding standards; Logos on websites?
7. Following on from the meeting, a more detailed questionnaire listing 32 communications related areas were distributed to the leaders of the Regional Initiatives , and the suggestions proposed below represent a summary of the responses and proposals for future collaborative work areas.

Branding

8. The current diversity amongst the RIs and their relationship to the Ramsar brand was seen to potentially weaken the RIs position: *"In some cases how can the public know that they are initiatives in the framework of the Convention?" "It should be identified as Ramsar Initiatives."*
9. While there was a desire to retain the separation of the individual RIs through their own specific logo and brand identity, overall there was strong commitment to the idea of having a Ramsar "family feel", with agreed parameters for mutual branding on websites and other communications tools. There was a positive response to the proposal of minimum branding standards such as the Ramsar logo appearing alongside the RI/RC logo.
10. This was seen as a useful means of providing additional visibility to potential donors.
11. This mirrors the requirements within para 7 of the Operational Guidelines which details *"the adoption of a specific logo, to be used in combination with the Ramsar logo, and the establishment and regular updating of a specific website"*.

CEPA Strategy

12. Resolution XII.9 para. 13 instructs the Secretariat to provide relevant information to the Regional Initiatives on priorities and activities, to support delivery of the CEPA Programme.
13. The RIs can play a hugely significant role within a global Ramsar communications strategy and should be included as a very specific communications channel and tool.
14. The potential role of the RIs to work more closely with the CEPA NFPs to help draft CEPA Action Plans would be very interesting to explore. In addition the RIs could play a central role in the organisation of CEPA FP workshops, liaising between the CPs and Secretariat in their respective regions.

15. Co-ordinating the existing capacity building activities within the RIs/Secretariat to avoid duplication and ensure content cohesion.

Ramsar website

16. The Ramsar Secretariat could include a concept for website pages for each Ramsar Regional Initiative in further website developments.
17. In addition a Factsheet on each of the Initiatives, made available as a downloadable pdf could be considered, potentially even for inclusion within the Ramsar Information Pack.
18. The components of the website content could be revisited: for example a map with highlighted countries where a relevant Initiative operates, introduction text, description of Initiative's operations & activities, calendar of activities, contact details, Initiative's logo, links to key documents (e.g. action plans), link to Initiative's website (for those who have websites), photos of the Centre.

RIs Network

19. There is a desire to increase information exchange not only between the RIs and the Secretariat, but between the RIs themselves. This might take the form of a virtual network within the RIs page of the Ramsar website (similar to the STRP workspace for example).
20. The development of a specific RIs contact database is one of the elements that could be included within the Ramsar database proposal, providing an easily accessible up to date drop down menu allowing fast and efficiently communications.

Communications Packs

21. The Secretariat should distribute the latest materials directly to the RIs through the network including details of upcoming annual priorities to allow for synergy building. And similarly the RIs could feedback to the Secretariat how the materials are being used, what's working and input into future plans.

Newsletter

22. Ramsar could include a specific section within the Ramsar newsletter covering the latest updates from the RIs and vice versa.

WWD Activities

23. Ensure that RIs are at the forefront of material generation (particularly social media pack, hashtags) to enable them to outreach the largest possible stakeholder group and engage more closely with the NFPS. The RIs could use this to promote specific sites and activities.
24. In turn the Secretariat could showcase and promote RI WWD activities within both the RI web pages within the Ramsar site and on the WWD site.

Press & Media Support

25. The Secretariat could send out a monthly “call for news” to the RI community platform that could then be included within the main Ramsar website news feed, and within the quarterly Ramsar newsletter.
26. The Secretariat could send key press releases in three languages to the RIs for distribution through their channels and vice versa, using shared media lists such as the Meltwater press distribution channels.

STRP Related Material

27. The Operational Guidelines state that: “the operation of a Regional Initiative should be focused upon making optimal use of the Ramsar tools (frameworks, guidelines, guidance, methodologies etc) published in the Ramsar Handbooks, Technical Reports and Briefing Note series.” Understanding how the RIs use these materials is critical to developing plans for closer communication links.
28. Feedback on the different types of materials was as follows:
 - Fact Sheets: RIs considered these to be one of the most useful of the communications materials produced by the Secretariat. There is potential for future collaboration on the topics covered potentially looking at a regional focus when necessary.
 - Briefing Notes: seen as useful, ensure distribution through joint channels
 - Technical Report: too scientific and rarely used
 - Handbooks: useful as training tools but request for them to be repackaged in easier modules

Education Materials

29. The RIs perceive a gap in education materials for schools and this might be an area worth exploring further as a CEPA activity.

Training

30. There is the potential to utilise the RI workspace mentioned previously to share training materials within the RI network. For example preparing and promoting webinars in conjunction with the Secretariat and STRP covering themes ranging from the approved STRP work plan to specific concerns within the regions.
31. The RIs could play a large role in helping the Secretariat to develop a central depository for all educational material including all the latest training courses and capacity building workshops. In addition collaboration on the hosting and content of webinars feeding into the overall Ramsar and RI strategy could broaden outreach.

Events

32. The Secretariat could convene and promote specific side events at COP to support the RIs.