

Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

Actions requested:

Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the issues raised and the proposals submitted by the members of the Working Group on Ramsar Regional Initiatives as reported below;
- ii. adopt the revised text for “Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention” provided in Annex 2, to replace the Guidelines adopted through Decision SC52-16; and
- iii. consider the proposal by Sweden to instruct the Secretariat, in conjunction with the Working Group, to prepare a Draft Resolution on Ramsar Regional Initiatives for COP13.

Background

1. At its 52nd meeting (June 2016), the Standing Committee took two decisions to which this summary report responds:
 - a. Decision SC52-18: “The Standing Committee asked the Contracting Parties members of Ramsar Regional Initiatives, through the Working Group, to assess the applicability of Operational Guidelines as approved, at the latest four months before the 53rd Standing Committee.”
 - b. Decision SC52-19: “The Standing Committee requested the Working Group, in conjunction with the Secretariat, to present at the 53rd Standing Committee a summary report of the issues raised by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives and any proposals related to them.”
2. In August 2016, the Secretariat invited the Contracting Parties which were members of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) to confirm their interest in being involved in the continuing work of the Working Group (WG) on RRIs, to nominate a chair for the WG, to comment on its composition, to raise issues and related proposals to be addressed in the summary report to SC53, and to assess the applicability of the Operational Guidelines as approved with Decision SC52-16.
3. Seven Parties responded to this call (Argentina, Burkina Faso, Dominican Republic, France, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Uruguay), as did the coordinators of two RRIs (the Carpathian Wetland Initiative and the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative). They agreed that Paul Mafabi (Uganda, Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa / RAMCEA) should continue as chair of the WG, and that the

coordinators of RRIs and relevant representatives of Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs) could participate as observers of the WG. They also listed issues and related proposals to be addressed in this summary report and assessed the applicability of the Operational Guidelines, as detailed below.

Summary of issues raised by Contracting Party members of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

4. The RRI for the La Plata River Basin (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) and the RRI for the High Andean region (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) consider it important that the RRIs focus on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention through international cooperation, rather than creating parallel regional institutional structures that may weaken actions of the Parties. In this sense it is important that the Ramsar Secretariat works with the RRIs to bring closer together the representatives and focal points of the IOPs, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the Programme on Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA), as well as other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have signed memoranda of understanding with the Ramsar Convention and are able to support and improve the work of the RRIs.
5. Sweden, chairing the RRI for the Nordic-Baltic region (NorBalWet), raised a number of issues regarding the continued work of the WG, and made the following proposals:
 - a. The purpose of RRIs is to promote regional cooperation between Ramsar Parties and to contribute to the implementation of the Convention in the region. Within this framework, the governing body of each RRI should select the issues to work on.
 - b. RRIs are best managed as cooperative activities among Parties through the relevant governmental authorities in order to create national responsibility and a good anchoring of the RRI with the Ramsar Administrative Authorities (AAs) and national policies. Such a form of cooperation should be the preferred choice for an RRI.
 - c. The governing body of each RRI should decide about the legal status of the RRI within the framework of the Ramsar Resolution on RRIs. The RRIs can place themselves within the framework of a nationally established legal organization.
 - d. Ramsar Resolutions should address Ramsar Parties, not RRIs, and request the Parties to clarify the issues of governance, administration, financing and participation in the RRIs. This would anchoring the structure and functioning of RRIs well with the Convention and with its Parties, while still allowing different operations for different RRIs.
 - e. The participants in RRIs should be distinguished as members, observers and other stakeholders, in order to clarify that it is the Contracting Parties who are responsible for the implementation of the Convention.
 - f. The members of an RRI should be governmental authorities or ministries working with environmental issues related to wetlands. Subnational authorities may be members of RRIs that do not cover the entire national territory of a Contracting Party. The members of an RRI are part of its governing body and are responsible for the statutes, financing, activities and internal organization of the RRI.

- g. The members should decide how they contribute to the RRI, at what level decisions about participating are taken within their own organization, who represents them in the RRI, how their actions are anchored and how results of the RRI are reported to their own organization by their representative in the RRI.
 - h. The governing body should be able to accept specific organizations and networks as observers of an RRI. Observers need to have close links to the activities of the RRI and objectives in line with the Ramsar Convention. Observers participate in RRIs with a consultative voice and can be responsible for RRI projects or activities approved by the governing body. However, the responsibility for the activities of the RRIs remains with the members of the governing body, i.e. Contracting Parties.
 - i. The RRI governing body should be able to invite suitable stakeholders as experts, consultants, project partners, etc. for temporary participation in the work undertaken by the RRI and information exchange.
 - j. A new Ramsar Resolution should encourage Parties, through their member organizations, to finance the RRIs in which they participate. This can be done with own funds, or through applications for funds from other organizations that support environmental projects. Observers, stakeholders and other donors may also finance specific activities.
 - k. To avoid unethical behaviour and decisions, financial transparency is important. When it comes to external financing, rules of procedures for financial transfers and accounts, planning and reporting should be checked. Private donations may need to be limited in time, in order to reduce long-term dependency on individual donors and the risks associated with this.
 - l. The governing body of each RRI should decide whether the RRI needs its own secretariat, and whether it should be hosted by an NGO host organization, or by one or several of its members.
 - m. It should be possible for the secretariat to be hosted temporarily or permanently within a member organization or a different host organization. When temporary locations are chosen, a decision is needed as to whether the secretariat moves with the chairmanship of the RRI, or according to a different schedule.
6. Based on the above proposals, Sweden has requested that the Ramsar Secretariat prepare a well-structured Draft Resolution on RRIs for COP13 (October 2018) that specifies the aim, legal status, role and mandate of RRIs, and outlines a framework for how RRIs are to be governed and financed, and what kind of organizations can be members or observers of RRIs.
 7. Sweden considers that with a new Resolution clarifying these points, specific Operational Guidelines may not be needed any longer, as the main points concerning the RRIs and their management (governance, financing, administration) will have been negotiated and prepared during COP13 by the Parties.
 8. Many of the Parties involved in RRIs paid special attention to the Operational Guidelines for RRIs approved at SC52, and made assessments of their applicability which are summarized below.

Applicability of the Operational Guidelines for RRIs adopted at SC52

9. Parties which are members of RRIs assessed the Operational Guidelines adopted at SC52 as an improvement on the earlier ones. The chair of the RRI for the Nordic-Baltic region (NorBalWet) stated that they do not fulfil all the new guidelines (as was the case with the former ones), and that they will continue until COP13 to work as before.
10. The Parties participating in the La Plata River Basin and High Andean RRIs stated that they analysed very carefully each paragraph of the new Operational Guidelines, taking into account the Convention mandate, the aims of the RRI networks, and measuring all legal, institutional or resource implications for national Authorities as well as for the Ramsar Secretariat. Based on their assessment of applicability, they provided detailed comments paragraph by paragraph, which are presented in Annex 1.
11. In addition, these Parties consider that RRIs that establish regional centres and hire specific staff may have different needs for guidelines than RRIs operating in the form of a network for intergovernmental cooperation. They assume therefore that it may be necessary to elaborate additional guidelines to cover the legal status, institutional and resource implications for RRIs incorporating specific regional centres with dedicated staff.
12. Based on the suggestions by the members of the WG on RRIs in Annex 1, a revised text for simplified and improved Operational Guidelines for RRIs is proposed in Annex 2. The Standing Committee is invited to take note of this new proposal, to adopt the Operational Guidelines provided in Annex 2, and to confirm that they replace the text adopted through Decision SC52-16.

Annex 1

Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention

A compilation of specific comments for textual changes provided by members of the Working Group.

The left-hand column shows the text of the Operational Guidelines as adopted through Standing Committee Decision 52-16. The right-hand column shows amendments proposed by members of the Working Group. Remaining existing text is shown normal, new text proposed is shown underlined, text to be deleted is shown ~~strikethrough~~.

Chapter 1: The aim and scope of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs)	
<p>1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) formally recognized by the Convention are operational means of support for the effective implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. RRIs improve the visibility of the Convention through international cooperation at regional level on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving in each case all relevant national and regional stakeholders.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) formally recognized by the Convention are <u>made up of and led by national Ramsar Administrative Authorities as</u> operational means of support for the effective implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. RRIs improve the visibility of the Convention through international cooperation at regional level on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving in each case all relevant national and regional stakeholders.</p> <p><i>Sweden re. the last sentence:</i> ... involving in each case all relevant national and regional <u>suitable</u> stakeholders.</p> <p><i>Colombia re. the last sentence:</i> involving in each case all relevant national and regional stakeholders.</p>
<p>2. As appropriate, RRIs could either be physically established centres that have a regional training or capacity building programme, regional cooperation networks with no physical centre, or a combination of both.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i> <i>Colombia:</i> As appropriate, RRIs include centres that have a regional for training or and capacity building programme, regional cooperation and networks which facilitate cooperation with no physical centre, or a combination of both.</p>
<p>3. Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. In practical terms, a RRI may or may not correspond to one of the six global Ramsar regions.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. In practical terms, a RRI may or may not correspond to one of the six global Ramsar regions.</p> <p><i>and add a new paragraph:</i> <u>RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural</u></p>

	<p><u>and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned.</u></p>
<p>Chapter 2: Governance and functioning of the RRIs</p>	
<p>4. The development, coordination and functioning of RRIs is the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs delete paragraph and replace with this text:</i> <u>The Ramsar AAs of the Contracting Parties have the responsibility to manage, develop and coordinate the functioning of the regional initiatives.</u></p> <p><i>Colombia:</i> The development, coordination and functioning of RRIs is the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders <u>Administrative Authorities of the Contracting Parties.</u></p>
<p>5. RRIs establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent manner. This requires the establishment of a governing body for each initiative made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders. The governing body meets regularly, guides and monitors the initiative's work programme and its resources, independently manages the activities of the initiative and publicly provides all its members with relevant information.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> RRIs establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent <u>and equitable</u> manner. This requires the establishment of a governing <u>coordinating</u> body for each initiative made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders.</p> <p><i>Make the 3rd sentence a separate paragraph:</i> The coordinating governing body meets regularly, <u>defines mandates, rules and principles of procedure</u> guides and monitors the initiative's work programme and its resources, independently manages the activities of the initiative and publicly provides all its members with relevant information. <u>The operative procedures are made public and shared with the Ramsar Secretariat.</u></p>
<p>6. The complementary roles of RRIs and the Ramsar Secretariat, including their respective responsibilities, may be defined in written arrangements, if agreed by all Contracting Parties concerned.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>
<p>7. Equitable and transparent governance and coordination structures should be laid down in a set of operational procedures, based on written, commonly agreed terms of reference, rules of procedure, or operational guidance. These operational procedures are made public and shared with the Ramsar Secretariat.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs / Sweden-NorBalWet RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>

<p>8. The coordination or governance mechanisms of each RRI are defined in its statutes and need to include the active participation of all Contracting Parties and other stakeholders participating in the initiative. RRIs are coordinated by a dedicated RRI secretariat with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat as appropriate.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> The coordination or governance mechanisms of each RRI are defined in its <u>operative rules statutes</u> and need to include the active participation of all Contracting Parties and other stakeholders participating in the initiative. RRIs are coordinated by a dedicated RRI secretariat with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat as appropriate.</p> <p><i>Sweden (NorBalWet RRI):</i> <i>not all RRIs have a secretariat, its tasks may be covered by an AA.</i></p>
<p>9. RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned. They need support from all participating Contracting Parties. To be eligible for funding from the Convention, such support must be confirmed through a formal letter by the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in the Parties concerned, which would ideally be renewed for each period between two meetings of the Ramsar Conference of the Parties (COPs). Sufficient national support by the Parties concerned is essential to set up a minimal operational structure for effective work in the region.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean RRIs:</i> <u>All Contracting Parties participating in an RRI must sign an official letter of commitment, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee, and participate actively in the activities included in the action plan of the RRI in accordance with the statutes governing its operations for each period of the Ramsar Strategic Plan approved by the COP.</u></p> <p><i>Reefs-Mangroves RRI:</i> <u>The interest of a Contracting Party to form part of or ratify its presence in an RRI needs to be shown with a written request from its AA to the Ramsar Secretariat. The request will be prepared following the procedure established to this end.</u></p>
<p>10. It is the responsibility of the involved stakeholders, and in particular of the Heads of the Administrative Authorities in the Contracting Parties, which engage in the governance of RRIs, to develop, coordinate and manage RRIs. Depending on available human and financial resources, the Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist the RRIs to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through mobilization of additional resources.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> It is the responsibility of the involved stakeholders, and in particular of the Heads of the Administrative Authorities in the Contracting Parties, which engage in the governance of RRIs, to develop, coordinate and manage RRIs. Depending on available human and financial resources, The Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist the RRIs to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through mobilization of additional resources.</p> <p><i>Sweden (NorBalWet RRI):</i> <i>restrict paragraph to assistance by the Ramsar Secretariat.</i></p>
<p>11. Each RRI is encouraged to have its own system for accounting and presenting reports, which is supervised by its governing body, in</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs / Burkina Faso (NigerWet) / Sweden (NorBalWet) RRIs:</i></p>

<p>order to be able to carry out its activities, receive financing, and implement specific projects.</p>	<p>Delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>12. Each RRI is encouraged to have professional staff involved to supervise or coordinate regional projects and programmes, in order to enhance the implementation capacity for the Convention in the region.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs / NorBalWet RRIs: Delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>13. RRIs are encouraged to make optimal use of the existing Ramsar tools, in particular the Resolutions and their technical annexes, the manuals, guidelines, methods, etc. RRIs are encouraged to establish regular contacts and cooperation with the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its National Focal Points and other appropriate experts, that may be recognized as partners of the initiative, in order to obtain the best scientific and technical advice globally available, and to contribute regional experience into STRP's global work.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: RRIs are encouraged to make optimal use of the existing Ramsar tools, in particular the Resolutions and their technical annexes, the manuals, guidelines, methods, etc. RRIs are encouraged and <u>RRIs are encouraged and</u> to establish regular contacts, <u>where considered necessary, with national focal points, including those for CEPA and STRP, of the corresponding Parties. and cooperation with the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), its National Focal Points and other appropriate experts, that may be recognized as partners of the initiative, in order to obtain the best scientific and technical advice globally available, and to contribute regional experience into STRP's global work.</u></p>
<p>14. RRIs members, Contracting Parties and other stakeholders, may meet regularly with the assistance and guidance of the Ramsar Secretariat. These meetings should be prepared and announced sufficiently in advance and have concrete objectives and expected results.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>Chapter 3: Status of the RRIs</p>	
<p>15. 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. This may need a hosting agreement to be signed with such entities, in order to provide sufficient independence of operation to the RRI in terms of staffing, accounting, fundraising and implementation of its work plan.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p> <p>Tunisia (MedWet RRI) proposing second part: This may need A hosting agreement is to be signed with such entities, in order to provide sufficient independence of operation to the RRI in terms of staffing, accounting, fundraising and implementation of its work plan. <u>The host agreement needs also to detail the support provided by the hosting institution.</u></p>
<p>16. RRIs do not form part of the Ramsar Secretariat or of any national authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements. The RRIs are encouraged to establish their own identity, which specifies their independence, their status</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: RRIs do not form part of the Ramsar Secretariat or of any national authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements. The RRIs are encouraged to</p>

and role. They apply relevant provisions of national legislation and seek to obtain a formal recognition in their host country.	establish their own identity, which specifies their independence, their status and role. They apply relevant provisions of national legislation and seek to obtain a formal recognition in their host country.
17. When a RRI is hosted by an institution, a hosting agreement should recognize the specific status of the initiative and its operational independence with regard to the host institution, following the format adopted by the Standing Committee.	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs / Tunisia (MedWet) / Burkina Faso (NigerWet) RRIs:</i> <i>delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i>
18. RRIs are approved by the COP and/or the Standing Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions and that they comply with the Operational Guidelines.	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs proposal to replace original paragraph with: (English translation provided by Colombia)</i> RRIs are approved <u>by the COP or the Standing Committee,</u> provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions and that they comply with the Operational Guidelines.
19. All Contracting Parties participating in a RRI shall sign a formal letter of engagement, following the format adopted by the Standing Committee, and participate actively in the activities of the initiative's work plan in accordance with its statutes.	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i>
Chapter 4: Participation in RRI	
20. Active participation in RRIs should be encouraged by the Ramsar national Administrative Authorities. It may include representatives of other ministries, Ramsar IOPs, other non-governmental and civil society organizations, universities, local communities, and the private sector, in addition to the Convention's other national focal points for CEPA (Communication, Education, Participation, Awareness) and STRP.	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs replace paragraph with this text:</i> <u>The Contracting Parties members of RRIs, meet periodically with the assistance and advice of the Ramsar Secretariat and may invite other interested parties (Ministries, Governmental Organization, International Organization Partners (IOPs) to Ramsar) or other non-governmental organizations and civil society, universities, local communities and the private sector, in addition to the national CEPA and STRP focal points of the Convention. These meetings should be prepared and announced to the members of the initiative, and to the Ramsar Secretariat, in good time and with concrete objectives and expected results.</u>
21. RRIs should strive to actively collaborate with intergovernmental and international partners in their region, with regional conventions, regional and sub-regional economic commissions and basin organizations,	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> RRIs should <u>seek active-cooperation</u> strive to actively collaborate with intergovernmental and international partners in their region, with

<p>and with Ramsar IOPs, to establish complementary activities and work programmes, to create synergies and to avoid duplication.</p>	<p>regional conventions, regional and sub-regional economic commissions and basin organizations, and with Ramsar IOPs, to establish complementary activities and work programmes, to create synergies <u>and joint actions</u> and to avoid duplication.</p>
<p>Chapter 5: Relation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the RRI</p>	
<p>22. A RRI is not and cannot act as a regional office of the Convention. It presents itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of RRIs, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. A practical means to this end may be to adopt a specific logo and to use it in combination with the Ramsar logo in consultation with the Ramsar Secretariat. A RRI may also establish and regularly update a specific website.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> An RRI is not and cannot act as a regional office of the Convention. It presents itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of RRIs, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. A practical means to this end may be to adopt a specific logo and to use it in combination with the Ramsar logo, <u>in accordance with the rules for its use elaborated by in consultation with</u> the Ramsar Secretariat. An RRI may also establish and regularly update a specific website.</p>
<p>23. The active involvement of all Ramsar National Focal Points, including those for CEPA and for STRP, of the relevant Contracting Parties is encouraged in order that the RRIs can achieve significant results.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>24. The development of effective coordination and collaboration between RRIs acting regionally and the Ramsar Secretariat acting globally and being responsible to the Standing Committee and COP is essential.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>25. The Secretariat maintains regular contacts with the RRIs through its Senior Regional Advisors to ensure that the objectives and work programmes of the RRIs are in alignment with the Convention's Strategic Plan, and that Ramsar's Operational Guidelines are applied throughout the different regions.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs propose to align the Spanish text with the existing English text and to make one change:</i> ... its Senior Regional Advisors ... :</p>
<p>26. The Secretariat invites comments from all RRIs when it proposes new programmes and activities in a joint effort and disseminates key documents in the languages of the Convention also to RRIs. Such documents may be prepared in anticipation to be reviewed by the Standing Committee and the Conference of the Parties.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</i> delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</p>
<p>27. The Ramsar Secretariat communication</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs</i></p>

<p>team involves the RRIs in its work programme and in specific campaigns, including for World Wetlands Day, from the start of such activities. In this way, Ramsar messages can be spread consistently across the globe.</p>	<p>RRIs: <i>delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>
<p>Chapter 6: The role of the RRIs to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan</p>	
<p>28. The work programme of each Ramsar Regional Initiative should be aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan, focus on the fulfilment of the priorities of the region concerned, and contribute to the implementation of relevant international agreements, thereby serving to build synergies to support the implementation of the Convention in the region.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs propose to align the Spanish text with the existing English text.</p>
<p>29. RRIs support the Contracting Parties to develop projects in the framework of the work plan of the initiative to implement the Strategic Plan in view of obtaining financial support from donors.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: <i>delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>
<p>30. The work programme of RRIs improves the visibility of the Convention and the general awareness of the objectives of its Strategic Plan. The work programme should include specific activities related to CEPA. RRIs are invited to ask the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel for advice and send a report on the results of their activities to the panel.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: The work programme of RRIs improves the visibility of the Convention and the general awareness of the objectives of its Strategic Plan. The work programme of RRIs should include specific activities related to CEPA. RRIs are invited to ask the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel for advice and send a report on the results of their activities to the panel.</p>
<p>Chapter 7: Financing of the RRIs</p>	
<p>31. All participating Contracting Parties are encouraged to provide assistance to RRIs, and donors are encouraged to provide funds for their activities, for example through financing provided by specific projects or programmes.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs propose to align the Spanish text with the existing English text</p>
<p>32. When possible or necessary, RRIs may have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their governing bodies, in order to carry out their activities, receive financing, and execute specific projects.</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: When possible or necessary, RRIs may have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their <u>coordinating governing bodies</u>, in order to carry out their activities, receive financing, and execute specific projects.</p>
<p>33. RRIs generate their own resources and should take the necessary measures to establish</p>	<p>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs:</p>

<p>financial sustainability with resources from a variety of fairly distributed reliable sources, allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.</p>	<p>RRIs generate their own resources and should take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources from a variety of fairly distributed reliable sources, allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.</p>
<p>34. Each COP establishes a core budget line to support RRIs Initiatives over the coming triennium. The Standing Committee allocates these funds annually to specific RRIs that request so and fulfil the Operational Guidelines.</p>	
<p>35. Financial assistance to a RRI from the core budget of the Convention is provided for a limited period of time, in principle only for a period corresponding to the interval between two meetings of the COP. Afterwards, the initiative should be self-supporting. Financial support to regional centres that meet the Operational Guidelines can be obtained for a period of up to six years in total.</p>	
<p>36. RRIs that receive financial support from the Ramsar core budget shall use part of this support to find long-term financing from other sources, in particular if they receive support from Ramsar support for more than one period between two COPs.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs / Burkina Faso (NigerWet) RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>
<p>37. Support from a host country is especially important if a coordinating office is to be established.</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i></p>
<p>Chapter 8: Reporting and evaluation of the RRIs</p>	
<p>38. RRIs are requested to present annual reports on progress with work and financial status in the past year to the Ramsar Secretariat, together with finance and work plans for the coming year, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee. A summary of Ramsar and other funding sources is reported. RRIs should inform the Ramsar Secretariat about collaborations they establish. Such reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the documents for the annual meeting of Standing Committee.</p>	<p><i>Sweden (NorBalWet RRI) change the second part:</i> ... RRIs should inform the Ramsar Secretariat <u>within three weeks</u> about <u>new</u> collaborations they establish. Annual Such reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the documents for the annual meeting of Standing Committee.</p>
<p>39. The RRIs that satisfy the Operational Guidelines are approved by the Standing Committee as operating within the framework of the Convention for the period between two meetings of the COP, and receive the status of</p>	<p><i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs propose to align the Spanish text with the existing English text.</i></p>

Ramsar Regional Initiative.	
40. All RRIs that do not report on their activities to the Ramsar Secretariat in time, will have their status of Ramsar Regional Initiative withdrawn by the Standing Committee.	<i>La Plata / High Andean / Mangroves-Reefs RRIs: delete paragraph from the Guidelines.</i>

Annex 2

Proposed revised Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives

The text below is based on the comments made by the Working Group and the proposals for textual revisions listed in Annex 1.

The Standing Committee is invited to adopt the text below to replace the Operational Guidelines adopted in 2016 through Decision 52-16.

Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention

Chapter 1: The aim and scope of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs)

1. Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) formally recognized by the Convention are made up of and led by national Ramsar Administrative Authorities (AAs) as operational means of support for the effective implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan. RRIs improve the visibility of the Convention through international cooperation at regional level on wetland-related issues of common concern, involving suitable stakeholders.
2. Geographical regions to be covered by RRIs are defined according to the wetland-related needs of the relevant actors in their region. RRIs are intended to provide lasting structural and operational support to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region concerned.

Chapter 2: Governance and functioning of the RRIs

3. The Ramsar AAs of the Contracting Parties have the responsibility to manage, develop and coordinate the functioning of the regional initiatives.
4. RRIs establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent and equitable manner. This requires the establishment of a coordination body for each initiative made up of the participating Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders.
5. The coordinating body meets regularly, guides, defines mandates, rules and principles of procedure and monitors the initiative's work programme and its resources, independently manages the activities of the initiative, and publicly provides all its members with relevant information. The operative procedures are made public and shared with the Ramsar Secretariat.
6. The coordination or governance mechanisms of each RRI are defined in its operative rules and need to include the active participation of all Contracting Parties.
7. All Contracting Parties participating in an RRI must sign an official letter of commitment, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee, and participate actively in the activities included in the action plan of the RRI in accordance with the statutes governing its operation for each period of the Ramsar Strategic Plan approved by the COP.

8. The interest of a Contracting Party to form part of or ratify its presence in an RRI needs to be shown with a written request from its AA to the Ramsar Secretariat. The request will be prepared by following the procedure established to this end.
9. The Ramsar Secretariat will endeavour to the best of its ability to assist the RRIs to strengthen their capacity and effectiveness, including through mobilization of additional resources.
10. RRIs are encouraged to make optimal use of the existing Ramsar tools (in particular the Resolutions and their technical annexes, manuals, guidelines, methods, etc.) and to establish regular contacts, where considered necessary, with national Ramsar focal points, including those for CEPA and STRP, of the corresponding Parties.

Chapter 3: Status of the RRIs

11. RRIs are approved by the COP or the Standing Committee, provided that their establishment is justified as a response to the needs of the regions and that they comply with the Operational Guidelines.
12. RRIs do not form part of the Ramsar Secretariat or of any national authority or organization that may provide them with support or hosting arrangements.

Chapter 4: Participation in RRIs

13. The Contracting Parties, members of RRIs, meet periodically with the assistance and advice of the Ramsar Secretariat, and may invite other interested parties (Ministries, Governmental Organizations, International Organization Partners (IOPs) to Ramsar), other non-governmental organizations and civil society, universities, local communities and the private sector, in addition to the national CEPA and STRP focal points of the Convention. These meetings should be prepared and announced to the members of the initiative, and to the Ramsar Secretariat, in good time and with concrete objectives and expected results.
14. RRIs should seek active cooperation with intergovernmental and international partners in their region, with regional conventions, regional and sub-regional economic commissions and basin organizations, and with Ramsar IOPs, to create synergies and joint actions and to avoid duplication.

Chapter 5: Relation between the Ramsar Secretariat and the RRIs

15. An RRI is not and cannot act as a regional office of the Convention. It presents itself with its own identity, in order to avoid any confusion between the roles of RRIs, the Ramsar AAs at national level, and the Ramsar Secretariat at international level. A practical means to this end may be to adopt a specific logo and to use it in combination with the Ramsar logo, in accordance with the rules for its use elaborated by the Ramsar Secretariat. An RRI may also establish and regularly update a specific website.
16. The Secretariat maintains regular contacts with the RRIs through its regional advisors to ensure that the objectives and work programmes of the RRIs are in alignment with the Convention's Strategic Plan, and that the Operational Guidelines are applied throughout the different regions.

Chapter 6: The role of the RRIs to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan

17. The work programme of each RRI should be aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan, focus on the fulfilment of the priorities of the region concerned, and contribute to the implementation of relevant international agreements, thereby serving to build synergies to support the implementation of the Convention in the region.
18. The work programme of RRIs should include specific activities related to CEPA. RRIs are invited to ask the Ramsar CEPA Oversight Panel for advice.

Chapter 7: Financing of the RRIs

19. All participating Contracting Parties are encouraged to provide assistance to RRIs, and donors are encouraged to provide funds for their activities, for example through financing provided by specific projects or programmes.
20. When possible or necessary, RRIs may have their own systems for accounting and presenting reports, overseen by their coordinating bodies.
21. RRIs should take the necessary measures to establish financial sustainability with resources from a variety of fairly distributed sources, allowing for the development of their activities over the long term.
22. Each COP establishes a core budget line to support RRIs over the coming triennium. The Standing Committee allocates these funds annually to specific RRIs that request so and fulfil the Operational Guidelines.
23. Financial assistance to an RRI from the core budget of the Convention is provided for a limited period of time, in principle only for a period corresponding to the interval between two meetings of the COP. Afterwards, the initiative should be self-supporting. Financial support to regional centres that meet the Operational Guidelines can be obtained for a period of up to six years in total.

Chapter 8: Reporting and evaluation of the RRIs

24. RRIs are requested to present annual reports on progress with work and financial status in the past year to the Ramsar Secretariat, together with finance and work plans for the coming year, according to the format adopted by Standing Committee. A summary of Ramsar and other funding sources is reported. RRIs should inform the Ramsar Secretariat within three weeks about new collaborations they establish. Annual reports must reach the Secretariat in time for the preparation of the documents for the annual meeting of Standing Committee.
25. The RRIs that satisfy the Operational Guidelines are approved by the Standing Committee as operating within the framework of the Convention for the period between two meetings of the COP, and receive the status of a Ramsar Regional Initiative.