

Report and Decisions of the 53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Wednesday 31 May 2017

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements¹ were made by:
 - Mr Jorge Rucks, Uruguay, Chair of the Standing Committee;
 - Mr Stewart Maginnis, Global Director, Nature-based Solutions Group, IUCN (on behalf of the Director General of IUCN);
 - Ms Jane Madgwick, Chief Executive Officer of Wetlands International, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs); and
 - Ms Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention.

Agenda item 2: Review and adoption of the Provisional Agenda

2. The **Chair of the Standing Committee** tabled documents SC53-01 *Provisional Agenda* and SC53-01 Add.1 Rev.1 *Annotated Provisional Agenda* and opened the floor to comments.
3. In its capacity as Chair of the Sub-group on Finance, **Senegal** noted that a second meeting of that Sub-group had been arranged for the lunch break on Thursday 1 June and asked that the Provisional Agenda be updated accordingly.

Decision SC53-01: The Standing Committee approved the Provisional Agenda and revised Annotated Provisional Agenda, with the addition of the second meeting of the Sub-group on Finance.

Agenda item 3: Admission of observers

4. At the invitation of the **Chair**, the **Secretary General** read out the names of observers contained in document SC53-Inf.Doc.02 Rev.1 *List of registered observers*.
5. **Senegal** asked the Secretariat to ensure compliance in future with Article 7, paragraph 8, of the Rules of Procedure, which requires the list of registered observers to be notified to Contracting Parties 14 days prior to meetings of the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP) or Standing Committee.
6. The **Chair** expressed his confidence that the Secretariat would comply with this requirement.

¹ The opening statements and other meeting documents are accessible at <http://www.ramsar.org/event/53rd-meeting-of-the-standing-committee>.

Decision SC53-02: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed by the Secretary General, as contained in document SC53 Inf.Doc.02 Rev.1.

Agenda item 4: Report of the Secretary General

7. The **Secretary General** presented highlights of her written report contained in document SC53-02 *Report of the Secretary General*, complemented by new information on activities undertaken since the document had been published. She drew particular attention to developments relating to:
 - Servicing the Contracting Parties through the organisation of meetings of the COP, Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and enhancing the Secretariat's accountability;
 - Increasing the relevance of wetlands and the Convention in the broader global agenda, including sustainable development policy objectives;
 - Strengthening support and enabling implementation of the Convention;
 - Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention; and
 - Strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness.
8. Parties formally welcomed the new Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and other new Secretariat staff, thanked the Secretary General for her report and expressed confidence in and support for the work undertaken to date.
9. **India** was grateful that the Secretary General had highlighted the issue of capacity building of wetland managers as a priority task to focus on in the future, and drew attention to the potential for cooperation with the World Lake Conference organised biennially by the International Lake Environment Committee.
10. The **United States of America** appreciated the solutions-oriented efforts made by the Secretary General to understand the views of Parties and to strengthen the Secretariat. A lot of positive change had been achieved, but further work was needed, which would require openness to new approaches and innovative ways of working by all those concerned.
11. **Austria** expressed appreciation of the work of the Secretary General and the Secretariat and assured them of the full support of Parties in Europe to ensure the modern, efficient and transparent implementation of the Convention to meet current the environmental challenges. They recommended a review of the practices of other Conventions to inform efforts to streamline Ramsar administration to avoid duplication of activities. Working groups which had fulfilled their mandates should be dissolved. Avoidance of lengthy and costly procedures and an open approach to new ways of working would make it possible to really concentrate on conservation and the wise use of wetlands.
12. **Switzerland** commended the new Secretary General for acting strategically and inclusively to bring the Secretariat into a more modern era and to engage more closely with the functioning of UN conventions. Switzerland requested further information about whether the management of a large project, such as that in favour of the Caribbean Wetlands Regional Initiative (CariWet) mentioned during the Secretary General's presentation, was within the mandate of the Secretariat.
13. **Colombia** warmly welcomed the willingness of the new Secretary General to listen to all Contracting Parties and other interested groups.

14. **Kenya** was also pleased to see the passion and impetus that the new Secretary General had brought to the Secretariat's work and appreciated the intersessional work of the Standing Committee and all subsidiary bodies and working groups.
15. **Senegal** thanked the entire Secretariat team, in particular for the work done on documentation, which was much improved. The Secretary General's oral presentation had included a lot of information of activities carried out after the report was published. In future, it would be useful to make such material available in an updated version of the document. Senegal shared Switzerland's concern that project management might not be within the Secretariat's mandate. Recent experience showed the need for complete transparency with regard to projects and it would be more appropriate for the Secretariat to support the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) to mobilise resources themselves.
16. **Seychelles**, speaking on behalf of the Africa region, called for a paragraph on Wetland City Accreditation to be added to the Secretary General's report. This was an initiative that African Parties considered very important for increasing the Convention's visibility and linking with local government and city administrations.
17. **Uruguay** thanked the Secretary General for her work to date in enhancing the effectiveness of the Secretariat and looked forward to further progress. Uruguay acknowledged the work conducted with other Parties through the Facilitation Working Group, which it co-chaired with the United States, and in particular the efforts made to facilitate enhanced relations between the Convention and IUCN.
18. **Nepal** was encouraged by the proactiveness, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the Secretary General and assured her of full support.
19. The **Islamic Republic of Iran** thanked the Secretary General, Secretariat team and IOPs for their work and drew attention to the challenges associated with dust storms in West Asia and the Middle East. Greater engagement of the Ramsar Secretariat in this issue would be welcome, given that the major reasons, in addition to climate change, included wetland dessication and poor management of water resources in the region. They invited contributions from any country to an international conference on the subject to be held in Tehran in June.
20. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** noted that it was important to consider least developed countries in the work of the Convention, and also important to prioritise monitoring and evaluation of what was actually being achieved as a result of Convention implementation.
21. **Cuba** wished to hear more about plans for increasing engagement with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Close collaboration between Ramsar and UNFCCC was particularly important for island states such as Cuba.
22. **Romania** considered that the Convention had embarked on a new and positive era, but reminded the meeting of the decision taken at the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC52) concerning a Regional Officer for Europe. There was a real need for such an Officer to support for Contracting Parties in the region that have between them designated over 1,000 Ramsar Sites.
23. **Australia** commended the Secretary General on producing such a comprehensive report in a short time. Ramsar had been through a difficult period. Australia nevertheless encouraged all

colleagues to maintain a focus on the important goals of the Convention and to resist a tendency to focus on the minutiae of administration.

24. **The Secretary General** thanked Parties for all of their comments and statements of confidence. She underlined that the progress made reflected the efforts of the whole Secretariat. She had taken note of the need to work across the regions in order to serve the Parties in a more consistent way, and of the importance of strengthening monitoring and follow-up. She proposed that the point raised in relation to the CariWet project be covered under Agenda item 9 on the RRI and if appropriate also under Agenda item 20 *Report of the Sub-group on Finance*. Wetland City Accreditation would be covered under Agenda item 15. She recalled that her report provided an overview and other documents provided further detail on different items under the Agenda. At the request of the Facilitation Working Group, the Secretary General ensured that her presentation had included any new information or updates, but trusted that this would not require the written report itself to be reissued; this was not normal practice in other fora. She concurred that there was an enormous opportunity to engage with UNFCCC; awareness of Ramsar's potential contribution was currently very low and there was much to be done to rectify this. Regarding a Regional Officer for Europe, she noted that this position was not covered in the approved budget, that needs and priorities would be assessed in developing the budget for the next triennium, and that alternative options for serving the Convention in the best possible way, within existing resources, could be considered.
25. **South Africa** underlined the importance to the Africa region of follow-up to Resolution X.10 on *Wetland City Accreditation*, which African Parties regarded as a key means of raising the visibility of the Convention.
26. Following further observations from **Senegal** concerning the mandate of the Secretariat to manage projects, it was agreed that this matter would be addressed under Agenda item 20.
27. In response to a request from **Senegal** for a closed meeting of the Management Working Group (MWG), the Chair asked the Executive Team to meet during the lunchbreak.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Management Working Group

28. **Australia**, as Vice-Chair of the MWG, presented a summary of conclusions and action points from the meeting of the MWG held on Monday 29 May 2017. This summary had been distributed to Standing Committee participants (see the report at: www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/mwg_conclusions_action_points_e.pdf)
29. The **Standing Committee** noted the report of the MWG and took the following decision:

Decision SC53-03: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to conduct a review of all current and proposed cooperative agreements (whether Memoranda of Understanding, Memoranda of Cooperation, or similar), taking account of the present document as well as the work previously conducted for SC52, to report to SC54. The Standing Committee further decided that:

- **this review should be conducted on the basis of criteria which could include those suggested by Management Working Group members, such as an assessment of costs and benefits of existing and proposed agreements, value added, mechanisms for monitoring results, possible development of an agreement 'template' and consideration of whether some partnerships could be taken forward effectively without the need for formal written agreements;**

- **the draft MOU with South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP, Annex 1 to Doc. SC53-04) should be considered within this wider review of cooperative agreements;**
 - **the Secretary General may sign the proposed letter of agreement with the International Partnership on Blue Carbon, responding to the invitation received from the Government of Australia, which had been made available to the Management Working Group.**
30. The **Chair of the Standing Committee** stated that during the MWG discussion on the Status of Working Groups of the Standing Committee (document SC53-05), the Parties expressed interest in reviewing the effectiveness of the Convention, including for example its working groups, its governance, the Rules of Procedure and other elements. As agreed, and as he had committed to as Chair of the MWG, he had consulted interested Parties, and proposed that this work be carried out by the Facilitation Working Group through an extension to its mandate.

Decision SC53-04: The Standing Committee agreed to review the effectiveness of the Convention’s governance in order to optimise the use of resources, to create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and to increase the participation and representation of the Parties, and also to propose the considerations and means necessary to do this. To this end it decided to extend the mandate of the existing Facilitation Working Group with an open membership. The outcomes of this review and any corresponding proposals should be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Standing Committee for subsequent submission to the Conference of the Parties for decision.

(Agenda item 5 continues at paragraph 43)

Presentation

31. The **Chair** drew attention to the fact that SC53 would mark the last meeting of the Standing Committee for Mireille Katz of the Secretariat staff. Ms Katz would shortly be retiring, having served the Convention tirelessly for some 33 years in a range of capacities, most recently as Executive Assistant to the Secretary General. He made a presentation to Ms Katz, conveying the Standing Committee’s sincerest appreciation of her work and warmest wishes for her retirement. A proposal of **Uganda** that Mireille Katz be designated a ‘Wetland Person of International Importance’ was endorsed by acclamation.

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 6: Report of the Sub-group on COP13

32. The **Chair** referred to document SC53-07 *Progress with preparations for the 13th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties* and invited the United Arab Emirates, in its capacity as Chair of the Sub-group on COP13, to introduce this agenda item.
33. The **United Arab Emirates** presented the recommendations of the Subgroup on COP13, which had met during the afternoon of Monday 29 June 2017 (see the recommendations at www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/cop13_wg_recommendations_e.pdf).
34. In response to a question from **Kenya**, the **United Arab Emirates** confirmed that approval had recently been received from the relevant authorities for a high-level segment to be held during COP13. Discussions would be held with the Secretariat about the exact timing and theme.

35. **Japan**, supported by **India**, noted that the proposed dates of COP13 coincided with the World Lake Conference being held in Japan from 15 to 19 October 2018. Since the themes and likely participation in the two conferences would be very similar, Japan asked that consideration be given to adjusting the dates of COP13.
36. **Nepal** thanked the United Arab Emirates for the excellent work done to date and welcomed the holding of a high-level segment at COP13; this would increase impetus for the Convention's work.
37. **Kenya**, speaking on behalf of the Africa region, welcomed the planned high-level segment to raise the profile of the Convention and the issues around wetland loss. They invited the Host Country, other Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to set an appropriate agenda for ensuring meaningful results. They offered the assistance of a person familiar with the organisation of the high-level segment at COP9.
38. **Uganda** welcomed and supported the holding of a high-level segment at COP13 and recalled that the Ministerial Dialogue held during COP9 in Kampala had galvanised political support. Setting the agenda would be key to deriving maximum benefit. It would also be important to have early clarity on visa issues.
39. In response to a question raised by **Colombia**, **Uganda** recommended that the theme of the high-level segment should be the same as the theme of the COP. The key point would be to determine exactly what contribution the high-level segment should make within the overall theme.
40. The **Secretary General** outlined the efforts that had been made to find a suitable date in the international events calendar and the challenges associated with this, in particular the change of dates of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The last quarter of 2018 also included the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, as well as a number of other key meetings. She greatly appreciated the flexibility that had already been shown by the Host Country in this regard.
41. Following further discussions, with contributions from **Japan**, **Senegal**, the **United Arab Emirates** and the **Secretary General**, it was agreed that further consultations would be held with interested Parties before a decision was made by SC53 on the dates of COP13.
42. The Standing Committee noted the Report of the Sub-group on COP13 and the interest expressed by Parties in the organisation of a high-level segment.

Decision SC53-05: The Standing Committee approved the main theme of COP13 as 'Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future', which would also serve as the theme for World Wetlands Day in 2018. The Standing Committee confirmed that the logo of COP13 would be finalised by the Host Country, taking into account comments made by the Sub-group on COP13. The Standing Committee approved the Provisional Agenda for COP13 contained in document SC53-08, and the addition of the high-level segment and correction of the title of item XIV), and requested the Host Country, in consultation with interested Parties and the Secretariat, to further develop plans for the organisation of a high-level segment.

(Agenda item 6 continues at paragraph 111)

Agenda item 5: Report of the Management Working Group (continued from paragraph 30)

a. Strategy on the use of UN languages

43. The Secretariat reported that the informal working group on languages had met during the lunch break earlier that afternoon and had agreed to recommend that the Standing Committee be invited to approve an intersessional process, through which the group would work with the Secretariat to take this matter forward to SC54.

Decision SC53-06: The Standing Committee decided that the matters dealt with in document SC53-06 *Preparation of a Language Strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands* should be taken forward intersessionally by the Secretariat in consultation with the open-ended informal working group established by SC52. The working group was asked to report to SC54 on the outcomes of its further deliberations, including any proposals that might be taken forward to COP13, subject to approval at SC54.

Agenda item 7: Secretariat Work Plan for the 2016-18 triennium and annual plan for 2017

44. At the invitation of the **Chair**, the **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-09 *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat*, including both its content and the process of its development. She recalled that the Standing Committee was being asked to take note of and approve the document, which reflected comments received during SC52 as well as decisions SC52-12 and SC52-13.
45. Interventions were made by **Argentina, Australia, Colombia, Finland, India, Nepal, Senegal**, the **United States** and **Uruguay**. Members of the Standing Committee welcomed improvements made in the Work Plan. Interventions included a number of suggestions for amendments to the contents of the Work Plan. Parties that tabled specific proposed amendments were requested to provide these in writing to the Secretariat.

Decision SC53-07: The Standing Committee approved the *Integrated 2017 Annual Work Plan and 2016-2018 Triennial Work Plan for the Secretariat* (document SC53-09) subject to the incorporation of amendments proposed by Parties and implications of decisions to be taken on other SC53 agenda items. The Standing Committee confirmed that the integrated nature of the document should be retained and that the core function of the Secretariat related to administration and servicing the governing and subsidiary bodies and of the Convention should be retained as a separate element. It further agreed to include an indication of whether activities were to be covered by core or non-core funding.

Agenda item 8: Report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

46. The **Chair of the STRP** summarised the report contained in document SC53-10 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)* and updated the Standing Committee on the Panel's progress to date in implementing the STRP work plan for 2016-2018.
47. The **Chair of the STRP** foresaw lower expenditure than budgeted, and invited initial consideration of how remaining funds might be reallocated. He also informed the Standing Committee that Second Order Drafts of the Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment and regional assessments of IPBES were open for review until 26 June. He also invited Parties to note that the call for proposals for the second IPBES work programme was expected in March 2018.

48. Members of the Standing Committee including **Kenya, Tunisia** and the **United States**, and Parties including **Canada, India** and **South Africa** acknowledged the progress of high-priority activities and the financial and other support extended by the IOPs to tasks. They welcomed the financial situation, and suggested activities that would be welcomed should the funds become available.
49. In response to enquiries, the **Chair of the STRP** confirmed: that STRP members would be available to attend pre-COP meetings and COP13, and external meetings if invited and subject to funding; that the 21st meeting of the STRP in January 2018 would be able to review Draft Resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties; and that members could review documents and provide advice within the STRP's ad-hoc advisory function. He noted that rotating STRP meetings between regions from the next triennium may be an effective means to promote regionally balanced participation. In response to a request by Kenya, he proposed to include in future reports to the Standing Committee a list of Parties and Focal Points which had given feedback on STRP drafts.
50. The **Secretary General** noted that consideration of budget reallocations needed to be considered after the completion of the work of the Sub-group on Finance.

Decision SC53-08: The Standing Committee took note of the report of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) Chair and agreed to:

- **emphasize to Contracting Parties the importance of participation by STRP National Focal Points in the development and review of STRP outputs, especially the report on the State of the World's Wetlands and their Services to People;**
- **encourage appropriate reviewers from all Contracting Parties to provide input about wetlands in the Second Order Draft of the IPBES Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment, as well as the Second Order Drafts of the IPBES regional assessments; and**
- **remind Contracting Parties, in light of the ongoing and more recent outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, about Ramsar guidance on appropriate policy and national responses to such outbreaks.**

Thursday 1 June 2017

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 9: Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

51. **Uganda**, as Chair of the Working Group on Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs), introduced document SC53-11 *Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives*.
52. Interventions were made by **Australia, Colombia, Cuba** on behalf of CariWet, **Estonia, Kenya** on behalf of the Africa region, the **Republic of Korea, Romania** on behalf of **France, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, Tunisia** on behalf of the Africa region, the **United States**, and **Uruguay** on behalf of the Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin.
53. There was broad support for the proposal of **Sweden**, contained in document SC53-11, that a Draft Resolution on the topic of RRIs be taken forward for consideration at COP13, taking into account the Working Group's report.

54. There were diverging views on the extent to which the Working Group's report fulfilled the mandate established by Decisions SC52-18 and SC52-19 in response to Resolution XII.8 on *Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*. A number of Parties considered that the Working Group had not been mandated to propose revised Operational Guidelines, as proposed in Annex 2 to document SC53-11, but only to assess the applicability of the existing Guidelines approved through Decision SC52-16. Other Parties had a different interpretation and indicated their support for the revised Guidelines contained in Annex 2, which they considered to be a result of the applicability assessment.
55. **Senegal** requested advice from the Legal Adviser on this matter, as well as on the application of the Rules of Procedure, specifically Rule 2, paragraph k), and Rule 25, paragraph 5 c).
56. The **Chair** concluded that further discussion should be deferred to the afternoon session of the meeting, when the Legal Adviser would provide her advice.

(Agenda item 9 continues at paragraph 77)

Agenda item 10: Update on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives

57. The **Chair** invited the **Secretariat** to present document SC53-12 *Update on Ramsar Regional Initiatives*.
58. In response to a question from **Kenya** speaking on behalf of the Africa region, the **Secretary General** confirmed that the Secretariat was mandated to support all RRI, but that the nature of this support varied in line with the diversity of the RRI themselves.
59. In response to questions raised by **Senegal**, the **Secretariat** provided clarification concerning differences in the figures for funds carried forward for RRI activities in 2017 resulting from different reporting dates (as shown in the table in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12, and in Annex 1 to document SC53-20), and on utilisation of the funds allocated to the Amazon Basin and Indo-Burma RRI.
60. The **Secretariat** further confirmed that the proposed allocation of the Ramsar 2017 core budget for RRI set out in the table in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12 was indicative only, based on the allocations made in 2016, and that it was for the Standing Committee to decide on the actual allocation in 2017 of the available total of CHF 120,000.
61. **Australia** and **Canada** suggested that the request for additional funding made by the Senegal Basin RRI should be dealt with by the Sub-group on Finance.

Decision SC53-09: The Standing Committee took note of the update on Ramsar Regional Initiatives contained in document SC53-12 and recommended to the Sub-group on Finance the allocation of CHF 30,000 from the 2017 core budget for RRI to each of the four new initiatives covering the Senegal Basin, Amazon Basin, Central Asia and Indo-Burma. The Standing Committee confirmed that the allocation of funds should be considered by the Sub-group on Finance, during its deliberations on the allocation of the 2016 core budget surplus.

(Agenda item 10 continues at paragraph 76)

Agenda item 11: Strategy on the use of UN languages

62. The **Chair** recalled that consideration of this item had been completed under Agenda item 5, *Report of the Management Working Group* (see paragraph 43 and Decision SC53-06 above).

Agenda item 12: Report of the CEPA Oversight Panel

63. The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel** recalled the decisions of COP12 and SC52 that had established the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and maintained the CEPA Oversight Panel with modified responsibilities. The Oversight Panel would continue to monitor and report on CEPA issues, monitor and report on progress in implementation of the CEPA Programme, and advise the Standing Committee and the Secretariat on CEPA work priorities at national and international levels. The Working Group would guide the communication activities of the Secretariat, including priorities and design of the Secretariat's CEPA Action Plan, monitor effectiveness of the Plan, and develop (with the advice of the STRP) a new approach for advising and supporting CEPA in the Convention for submission to COP13.
64. The Oversight Panel had met a number of times by teleconference during 2016 and developed its own Work Plan with a focus on priority needs and activities to deliver them. As part of that Work Plan, the Panel had recognised the need for a strategic approach to CEPA implementation and was therefore keen to contribute advice on how the Convention would manage the CEPA Programme into the future.
65. Four issues had arisen from discussions between the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel and the Chair of the CEPA Working Group held during the present meeting (see the meeting summary at www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/cepa_chairs_of_wg_and_op_e.pdf):
- The need for COP13 to revisit the CEPA governance question and what will be the work of the Oversight Panel;
 - The continuing need to be mindful of the limited resources available to the Secretariat and to match the Contracting Parties' ambitions to this, noting that the work of the Secretariat added value to help Parties to meet their obligations, but that the Secretariat's Action Plan was too ambitious;
 - The need to specify what outcomes the Parties wanted to obtain from CEPA, focusing on engagement and participation, providing what Parties need, training opportunities, addressing governance, and having a rigorous look at CEPA, possibly reducing the heavy focus on communications and social media; and
 - The need to seek opportunities to work collaboratively, until COP13, and consider how to improve outcomes.
66. He reported that a meeting of the CEPA Oversight Panel would be held in July 2017 to further progress matters discussed during SC53.
67. There being no interventions from the floor, the **Chair** concluded that the Standing Committee had taken note of the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel.

Decision SC53-10: The Standing Committee requested that the Panel continue its work as outlined and confirmed the importance of the four specific issues raised in the report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel, namely:

- **the need for COP13 to revisit CEPA governance and the work of the Oversight Panel;**
- **the need to match the Contracting Parties' ambitions to the limited resources available to the Secretariat;**
- **the need to specify what outcomes the Parties wanted to obtain from CEPA, focusing on engagement and participation, providing what Parties need, training opportunities, addressing governance, and having a rigorous look at CEPA, possibly reducing the heavy focus on communications and social media; and**
- **the need to seek opportunities to work collaboratively, until COP13, and consider how to improve outcomes.**

Agenda item 13: Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities

a. Implementation of Secretariat CEPA Action Plan

68. The **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-03, outlining progress in implementing the CEPA Action Plan for the Secretariat for 2016-2018. She noted the three underlying principles outlined at paragraph 7 of the report, and the areas of grouped activity listed at paragraph 8.
69. **Senegal** observed that the plan gave a clear indication of how to move forward, not just with communications but with a range of cross-cutting activities. He reminded the Secretariat of the value of branded hard-copy products which can highlight Ramsar and help communicate its strategic goals. He also invited the Secretariat to work further to share and promote the best practices of Contracting Parties.
70. The **Standing Committee** took note of the report and the comments of Senegal.

b. Report on World Wetlands Day 2017

71. The **Secretariat** presented a summary of outputs for World Wetlands Day 2017 and activities organized across the regions around the theme of 'Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction', and presented the winning photograph of the Youth Photo Contest.
72. **India, Romania, Senegal, South Africa**, the **United States** and **Wetlands International** noted the successes of the campaign and the importance of the theme. The Standing Committee acclaimed the engagement of France, where 655 activities were recorded to celebrate World Wetlands Day, and of Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico and Morocco, which had the most activities in their respective regions.
73. In response to suggestions by **Senegal** and **South Africa** to develop a clearing-house mechanism for sharing outputs of Contracting Parties, the **Secretary General** noted that development of a "Wise Use Resource Library" to this end was included as a task in the Secretariat's CEPA Action Plan for 2016-2018, and pointed to the new thematic information section on the website, which includes a page and outputs on disaster risk reduction. She suggested that the development of a clearing house such as that of the Convention on Biological Diversity could be considered by Parties when reviewing the effectiveness of the Convention. She also highlighted the very effective collaboration with partners including Wetlands International to make the campaign a success.

74. The **Secretariat** noted **Senegal's** observation on the importance of providing materials for children as well as adults, and **Romania's** suggestion for a letter of appreciation to event organizers. It confirmed that Contracting Parties could use the images submitted to the photo contest, as entrants had accepted a disclaimer that photos could be used for education and awareness-raising by Parties to the Convention and its partners.

c. Theme for World Wetlands Day 2018

75. The **Chair** noted that this issue had already been addressed under agenda item 6.a on *Progress with preparations for COP13 - COP theme and logo* (see Decision SC53-05 above).

(Agenda item 13 continues at paragraph 82)

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 10: Update on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (continued from paragraph 61)

76. **Canada** confirmed that the Sub-group on Finance had met during the lunch break and had acted to implement the decision of the Standing Committee during the morning plenary session to make allocations from the 2017 core budget as set out in the last column of the table contained in paragraph 11 of document SC53-12, i.e. CHF 30,000 for each of the four RRIs.

Agenda item 9: Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (continued from paragraph 56)

77. The **Chair** asked the Legal Adviser to respond to the questions raised during the morning session.

78. The **Legal Adviser** reported her conclusions that:

- Decisions SC52-18 and SC52-19 did not prohibit the Working Group from putting forward revisions to the Operational Guidelines, provided that such revisions related to issues raised in the Working Group's report;
- The Rules of Procedure did not explicitly preclude a Party that was not a member of the Standing Committee from becoming the Chair of a Working Group. However, the relevant Rules of Procedure would benefit from revision to improve their clarity and logic.

79. Following extensive discussion with contributions from **Colombia, India, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and Uruguay**, and responses from the **Secretariat** to a number of questions raised, the **Chair** proposed that the report of the Working Group be taken forward as an input to the development of a Draft Resolution to be submitted for consideration at COP13.

80. **Senegal** welcomed the proposal and offered to join other Parties interested in drafting decision language.

81. **Uruguay**, speaking as a member of La Plata Basin RRI, stated that it was unable to accept the Operational Guidelines agreed by Decision SC52-16. The RRI would instead continue to apply

the previous Guidelines, pending an eventual COP13 decision on revised Operational Guidelines.

Decision SC53-11: The Standing Committee noted that some Contracting Parties would continue to implement the Operational Guidelines in effect as of COP12.

Decision SC53-12: The Standing Committee decided that a Draft Resolution on Ramsar Regional Initiatives should be prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with interested Parties, for consideration at COP13. This work should take account of the information contained in the Working Group's report, as contained in document SC53-12.

Agenda item 13: Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities (continued from paragraph 75)

d. The Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Awards 2018

82. The **Secretariat** introduced document SC53-13 The Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards: Categories, criteria and nomination procedures.

83. Specific suggestions for amendments to the document were made by **Canada, Senegal, Tunisia** and the **United States**.

84. The **Secretariat** confirmed that these had been noted for incorporation and responded to a number of questions raised.

85. **Colombia** suggested that efforts might be made to review the impact of the Awards on wetland conservation.

Decision SC53-13: The Standing Committee approved the proposed procedures for the COP13 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, as contained in document SC53-13, subject to incorporation of the amendments tabled by Parties.

e. Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands"

86. The **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-14 *Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands"*. She noted that the project had been signed by her predecessor and that considerable work was ongoing. A number of Contracting Parties had participated in this work, but others had raised questions or concerns about whether activities were in line with the mandate given by the COP or the decisions of the Standing Committee. No specific recommendation was being tabled; however, the Secretariat was requesting guidance from Parties on the way forward. There was a contractual agreement with the MAVA Foundation, but MAVA understood that the Ramsar Secretariat had to act in conformity with the wishes of Contracting Parties, hence the need to have clear guidance.

87. Interventions were made by Australia, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Finland, Kenya, Nepal, Senegal, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United States and Uruguay.

88. Parties emphasised the importance of culture and wetlands, but differed in their views on how this could best be taken forward in the context of the Convention. **Uruguay** emphasised that the main concern was in relation to whether the project had been established in accordance with the applicable rules.

89. The **Chair** established an open-ended contact group, suggesting that Australia, Colombia, and Nepal might form the core of the group, along with Senegal, Uruguay and any other interested Party. He asked the contact group to meet and report back on 2 June 2017.

(Agenda item 13 continues at paragraph 110)

Agenda item 15: Progress report on implementation of the Wetland City Accreditation

90. The **Secretary General** introduced document SC53-16 *Progress report on the implementation of the Wetland City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention*. She reported that UN-Habitat had informed the Secretariat that it would not have the capacity to act as chair of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), though it would continue to participate as a member. The Secretariat was seeking to understand the implications for itself of the Accreditation, especially taking into account the instructions from Contracting Parties in Resolution XII.10 and Decision SC52-09 to ensure that costs were not borne by the core budget and to minimize the impact on the Secretariat's time and resources.
91. She noted that the document proposed a step-by-step approach, which would enable a fuller understanding of the demands of the scheme and of the potential associated risks to the Convention, for example in cases where wetlands in accredited cities were threatened. She invited advice on the ongoing operation of the IAC, on the Parties' desire to implement an incremental approach, either by initially restricting the number of applications, by limiting the scheme to cities linked to Ramsar Sites, or by engaging in an alternative programme with UN-Habitat and other partners to identify issues and good practices before proceeding with the Accreditation. The Secretariat had indicated that unless the new Chair of the IAC could take responsibility for the operation of the Committee, resources would be required for the Secretariat to fulfil any related tasks.
92. **Tunisia**, speaking on behalf of the Africa region, did not favour the pilot phase of the Accreditation proposed by the Secretary General. The Parties recognized the concerns of the Secretary General and the issues with the start-up phase of the Accreditation, underlined the need to respect the intentions of the Contracting Parties expressed in Resolution XII.10, and called for the Secretariat to recover lost time by publishing the call for applications as soon as possible after SC53, and for the deadline for applications to be put back by one month to 30 October 2017. The delegate proposed that the scheme should be implemented as originally agreed, and reported that Tunisia would be able to act as Chair of the IAC and the Republic of Korea as Co-Chair. He welcomed the ongoing promotion efforts by Parties and IOPs, and suggested that accredited cities be announced either at the COP13 Ramsar Awards event or at the end of the proposed high-level segment. He noted that organisations including UN-FAO and UNDP had expressed an interest in promoting the scheme, and thereby Ramsar.
93. **Colombia** reported that it would be unable to approve implementation without clarification on the resource implications of Accreditation and the long-term identity of the IAC chair.
94. **Austria** called for implementation, recalling that Austria and Sweden had promoted the scheme at COP12 on behalf of the Europe region, as an increasingly important and effective way to mobilise communities. They had worked to craft a Resolution which would not overburden the Secretariat. IAC meetings could be timed to coincide with Standing Committee or STRP meetings.

95. The **Republic of Korea** urged the Standing Committee to enable the scheme to proceed. Some 20 Parties were preparing to make applications, and the Secretariat's role, as mentioned in Resolution XII.10, paragraph 14, was limited to collating and forwarding applications received to the IAC.
96. **UN-Habitat** praised the scheme, especially as much ongoing urbanisation was uncontrolled and concentrated around vulnerable coastlines or inland water bodies. Though unable to take up the role of IAC chair, it would continue to work with the Co-Chairs on technical criteria and processes.
97. The **Chair** adjourned the meeting.

(Agenda item 15 continues at paragraph 101)

Friday 2 June 2017

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

98. The Chair proposed the completion of unfinished business from the two previous days, beginning with Agenda item 15, *Wetland City Accreditation*, followed by a report back from the working group established under Agenda item 13 e, *Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands"*, and further consideration of the date for COP13 under Agenda item 6, *Report of the Sub-group on COP13*.
99. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, speaking on behalf of the Africa region, called for matters related to the voluntary contributions from African Parties and the allocation of 2017 core funding to Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) to be considered in plenary, rather than in the Sub-group on Finance, in order to avoid a possible conflict of interest as the Chair of the Finance Sub-group was a host country to an RRI.
100. Following discussion, with contributions from **Australia, Canada, Senegal** and the **United States**, the Committee noted that the issue raised had already been dealt with by the Sub-group on Finance. It was noted that the issues would be dealt with in plenary as part of Agenda item 20, *Report of the Sub-group on Finance*.

Agenda item 15: Progress report on implementation of the Wetland City Accreditation (continued from paragraph 97)

101. The **Chair** opened the floor to further comments and questions.
102. The **United States** noted the enthusiasm and interest generated by the Wetland City Accreditation (WCA) initiative, and appreciated the offer of the Republic of Korea and Tunisia to serve as Co-Chair and Chair, respectively, but noted a number of concerns, in particular the potential impact on the Secretariat workload and other possible resource implications. She stressed that all sites of international importance had not yet been designated and that there was still considerable work to be carried out to ensure the conservation of those designated, including those currently in the Montreux Record. She favoured a step-wise approach and urged Contracting Parties to prioritize carefully. The United States would not itself be putting forward any applications for the WCA.

103. **Canada** felt that the potential burden on the Secretariat should be reduced to a minimal level.
104. The **Republic of Korea** recalled the provisions of Resolution XII.10 with regard to the role of the Secretariat and the fact that costs were not to be covered by the Convention's core budget.
105. The United Arab Emirates supported the initiative and invited the IAC to work towards the announcement of accredited cities at COP13.
106. **Azerbaijan, China, Estonia, Romania** speaking on behalf of the Europe region, **South Africa** on behalf of the Africa region, **Switzerland** and the **Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)** expressed strong support for the WCA, highlighted the opportunities it offered, and urged rapid progress with implementation of the relevant COP12 Resolution.
107. **South Africa** tabled a number of specific proposed amendments to document SC53-16 and confirmed that these would be communicated in writing to the Secretariat.
108. The **Ramsar Regional Centre for East Asia (RRC-EA)** volunteered to participate in the IAC.
109. The **Secretary General** responded to a number of the points raised and underlined that non-core funding would need to be mobilised for translation of documents and operation of the IAC, since this could not be covered from the core budget.

Decision SC53-14: The Standing Committee:

- **confirmed the composition of the IAC until COP13 as set out in Resolution XII.10, with the exception that the Chair would be Tunisia and the Co-Chair would be the Republic of Korea, while UN-Habitat would serve as a member of the Committee;**
- **welcomed the offer of RRC-EA to participate in the IAC;**
- **agreed that the participation of the Secretary General or her designee in the IAC should be largely symbolic;**
- **confirmed that the administrative role of the Secretariat should be minimal, limited to receiving applications and forwarding them to the IAC, without an impact on core budget funding (meaning operation of the IAC including translations of WCA applications and other relevant documents would have to be covered by external funds to be mobilised by the IAC);**
- **noted the specific proposed amendments to document SC53-16 tabled by South Africa; and**
- **agreed an extension of the deadline for the submission of WCA applications until 31 October 2017.**

Agenda item 13: Secretariat report on CEPA-related activities (continued from paragraph 89)

- e. Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands" (continued)

110. **Australia** tabled a brief report on behalf of the Contact Group established under this agenda item on Day 2 of the meeting, as follows:

"The Group met last night and enjoyed a good discussion chaired by our Swiss colleague. The Group acknowledged the generous support of the MAVA Foundation for the culture project, and confirmed its collective view that culture is an important element of many wetlands, connecting wise use and communities to wetland management.

“The Group acknowledged the concerns expressed by Uruguay that the contract, as signed, does not have a strong legal standing; asked the Secretary General to seek further legal advice, including from IUCN, to put the ongoing work onto a sound legal footing; and recommended that the Secretary General be authorised to sign a new contract, following legal advice, if required.

“The Group encouraged the Secretariat to review the website to ensure that the project is appropriately reflected in relation to the priorities of the Convention, as approved at COP12. Interested Parties will work together to consider how best to take the issue of culture and wetlands through to the next COP.

“In relation to funding, Contact Group members expressed concern that the project should not pursue work under paragraph 21, subparagraphs a, b & c of document SC53-14. The Group encouraged the Secretariat to explore: (a) a further project in each Ramsar region, on the basis of the availability of co-financing, which could include, where possible, opportunities to enhance CEPA outcomes; and (b) future opportunities with MAVA for collaboration of mutual benefit.”

Decision SC53-15: The Standing Committee approved the report of the Contact Group established under Agenda item 13 and mandated the Secretariat to take forward the Contact Group’s recommendations, including by:

- **seeking further legal advice to put the ongoing work onto a sound legal footing, with the Secretary General authorised to sign a new contract if necessary;**
- **reviewing the Ramsar website to ensure that the project is appropriately reflected in relation to the priorities of the Convention, as approved at COP12; and**
- **exploring: (a) a further project in each Ramsar region, on the basis of the availability of co-financing, which could include, where possible, opportunities to enhance CEPA outcomes; and (b) future opportunities with MAVA for collaboration of mutual benefit.**

Agenda item 6: Report of the Sub-group on COP13 (continued from paragraph 42)

a. Progress with preparations for COP13 – dates and venue of COP13

111. An extensive discussion included contributions from **Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Switzerland**, the United Arab Emirates, and the **United States**, as well as from the **Secretary General** and the **Secretariat**.

Decision SC53-16: The Standing Committee decided that COP13 would take place from 21 to 29 October 2018, and thanked the Host Country for its proposal to hold a high-level segment, noting the need to take into account the dates of the high-level segment of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Agenda item 14: Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on partnership and synergies

112. The **Secretariat** introduced document SC53-15 Progress on implementing Resolution XI.6 on Partnership and synergies with Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other institutions.

113. **Colombia, India, South Africa, Switzerland** and the **United States** welcomed the Secretariat’s report and encouraged direct contact with the Secretariat of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), while also keeping the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) informed. They urged Parties, through synergies at national level, to work with GEF and national

focal points of the CBD to ensure that wetlands are integrated into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and projects that go forward to GEF.

114. **Colombia, Switzerland** and the **United States** also made a number of specific comments on document SC53-15, which were noted by the Secretariat.

115. In response to a suggestion from **Senegal**, the **Secretary General** confirmed that the Secretariat was already in contact with the GEMI project group with regard to SDG indicator 6.6.1. She asked for a clear mandate to continue the Secretariat's active engagement in this process, working with UN Environment and other agencies, in order to contribute to methodological development taking into account the need to reduce unnecessary burden to countries, to ensure that data in Ramsar National Reports would be included as the main source for validated data for the development of this indicator, and to avoid duplication of reporting.

116. **Finland** cautioned against focusing only on indicator 6.6.1 and suggested the relevance of other water and wetland-related indicators that Ramsar might contribute to, notably 6.5.1 and 6.5.2.

117. **UN Environment** congratulated the Convention and Secretariat for their cooperative spirit, especially in relation to synergies with biodiversity-related MEAs. UN Environment was in the process of looking at ways to maximise such synergies, including through a new project funded by the European Commission. Areas for ongoing collaboration between Ramsar and UN Environment, governed by an MOU, included national reporting and responding to the SDGs, although UN Water was leading the UN response to Goal 6 on water and sanitation.

118. The **Chair** concluded that Parties had shown openness to continued work on synergies and had provided comments and advice to the Secretariat.

Decision SC53-17: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to continue working actively with the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), as well as with other relevant United Nations agencies, on water-related indicators, and in particular indicator 6.6.1 on wetland extent, to contribute to its methodological development, to ensure that Ramsar National Reports, and more specifically on wetlands extent, are included as the main source of information and to avoid duplication of reporting at national level; and requested that the Secretariat explore options for institutional arrangements that include being a leader for indicator 6.6.1 or its sub-indicator on extent.

Decision SC53-18: The Standing Committee requested that the Secretariat transmit to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) the elements of the Ramsar Strategic Plan that are aligned to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, SDGs and the four-year framework of programme priorities (2018-2022) for the seventh replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund annexed to CBD Decision XIII/21.

Decision SC53-19: The Standing Committee requested that the Secretariat review the actions in Annexes I and II of CBD Decision XIII/24 that are relevant for the Convention, and provide inputs to the synergy process as appropriate.

Announcement

119. The Head of Delegation of **Indonesia** noted that one of his team's key members, Mrs Cherryta Yunia, Deputy Director of Wetlands Conservation and Biodiversity Parks, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, would be retiring in July after many years of service, including 10 years working with the Ramsar Convention.

120. The **Chair** conveyed the Committee's thanks to Mrs Yunia and wished her well for the future.

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 16: Report on national and regional targets of the Strategic Plan

121. The **Secretariat** introduced document SC53-17 National targets in line with Resolution XII.2.

122. Interventions were made by **Argentina, Australia** on behalf of the Oceania region, **India, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland**, and the **United States**. Comments focused in particular on the poor rate of submission of national and regional targets, the potential problems for some countries to use the online reporting system, and the need to minimize the administrative burden for Parties and to review the utility of some online questions.

123. The **Secretariat** took note of the points raised and confirmed that, when submitting National Reports to COP13, it was optional for Parties to submit the additional information requested through Resolution XII.2.

Decision SC53-20: The Standing Committee took note of document SC53-17, requested that the Secretariat take into account the comments made, and invited Parties that encountered challenges in using either the National Reporting Format or the voluntary online reporting system to advise the Secretariat as soon as possible.

Agenda item 17: The status of the List of Wetlands of International Importance and update on the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS)
--

124. The Secretariat introduced document SC53-18 Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

125. **Senegal** suggested a number of potential improvements to the structure and content of the document and indicated its willingness to assist with funding of up to two Ramsar Advisory Missions, in conjunction with the African Development Bank (ADB).

126. **Kenya** thanked the Secretariat for its extensive analysis, noting that it focused on one of the core elements of Ramsar implementation.

127. **Switzerland**, and **Senegal** speaking on behalf of West African Parties, acknowledged the support of the Secretariat in updating the Ramsar Information Sheets for their respective Ramsar Sites.

128. The **Secretariat** took note of specific comments made by **Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea** and **Tunisia** regarding individual Ramsar Sites in their territories listed in the Annexes to document SC53-18.

129. The **Chair** invited the Parties concerned to send their comments in writing to the Secretariat and requested the Secretariat to follow up bilaterally.

130. **Mexico** expressed a broader concern in relation to the Secretariat's mandate and procedures for responding to reports of potential change in ecological character under Article 3.2 of the

Convention text, especially where such reports did not come from Parties themselves. They suggested that the Management Working Group be tasked with examining this issue.

131. The **Chair** concluded that it would be appropriate to discuss Mexico's suggestion under Agenda item 19 *Report of the Facilitation Working Group*.

Decision SC53-21: The Standing Committee took note of document SC53-18 and instructed the Secretariat to take into account the comments made with regard to the structure and content of the report and to follow up bilaterally with those Parties that had made specific observations on individual Ramsar Sites and/or other elements of the technical Annexes to the document.

Agenda item 18: Options for holding future meetings of the Standing Committee in Geneva

132. The **Secretariat** introduced document SC53-19 *Options for holding future meetings of the Standing Committee in Geneva*, recalling that SC52 had requested the Secretariat to prepare this paper.

133. **Romania**, supported by **Australia, Azerbaijan, Senegal, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United States** and **Uruguay** recommended that Gland should remain the venue for future meetings of the Standing Committee.

134. **Indonesia** pointed out that holding the meetings in Geneva might encourage participation of additional countries, especially smaller countries, through their permanent missions, but supported the consensus.

135. **Romania** further requested that consideration be given to organising a visit to a Swiss or French Ramsar Site during a future meeting of the Standing Committee.

136. The **United States** and **Uruguay** expressed interest in the proposal of Romania, but pointed out that the practicalities and costs of such a visit would need to be carefully evaluated and could not be covered from the core budget. **Switzerland** indicated its readiness to consider this issue along with the Secretariat.

Decision SC53-22: The Standing Committee decided that its future meetings would continue to be held in Gland, and welcomed the offer of Switzerland to work with the Secretariat to consider the feasibility of a visit to a Swiss Ramsar Site at a future meeting, without drawing on core budget funds.

Agenda item 19: Report of the Facilitation Working Group

137. **The United States** presented the report of the Facilitation Working Group (see the report at www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/facilitation_working_group_report_e.pdf).

138. The **Chair** thanked the Co-Chairs and members of the Working Group and reminded participants that Mexico had, under agenda item 17, sought clear guidelines for communications between the Secretariat and Contracting Parties in connection with Article 3.2 reports. There being no interventions from the floor, he concluded that the Standing Committee had approved the report of the Working Group.

139. The **Secretary General** recorded her thanks to the Working Group for its expressions of trust and confidence as well as for the guidance provided, and thanked the whole Secretariat team for its hard work since she had taken office.

Decision SC53-23: The Standing Committee approved the report of the Facilitation Working Group (FWG), and took note of:

- the work completed to date by the FWG, the confidence they had expressed in the Secretary General, and the work and changes made to foster strengthened implementation of the Convention, and that as a result of this high confidence and full support, the FWG was stepping back from its closer-than-usual facilitation role;
- the Working Group's offer to be of continued service to Parties for new tasks, as it steps back from its heightened facilitation role;
- Decision SC53-04, which had already extended the mandate of the FWG to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance in order to optimise the use of resources, to create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and to increase the participation and representation of the Parties, and also to propose the considerations and means necessary to do this; and
- the request to the Working Group to facilitate clarification of the Secretariat's mandate and means of communication between the Secretariat, Contracting Parties and the public in Article 3.2 cases.

Agenda item 21. Other matters

a. Date and venue of the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee

140. Following an extensive discussion, with contributions from **Canada, Japan, Romania, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, Tunisia**, the **United States** and the Secretariat, the **Chair** concluded that consensus had been reached that SC54 should be held during the week beginning Monday 23 April 2018. This would enable a number of regional preparatory meetings to be held as scheduled during the period March to mid-April.

141. The **Secretariat** provided an oral update of the COP13 timeline now that the dates for both COP13 and SC54 had been fixed (see the timeline at www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/timeline_to_cop13_e.pdf). They noted that the deadline for submission by Parties of Draft Resolutions for consideration would be 22 February 2018, which would allow a very short period for production of translations to service Regional Preparatory Meetings in March. The Secretariat would examine how best to expedite this.

Decision SC53-24: The Standing Committee agreed that the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee would be held in the week of 23 – 27 April 2018 at IUCN headquarters in Gland, Switzerland.

b. Adoption of the report of the 53rd Meeting

142. The **Chair** invited comments from Parties and Observers on the draft reports for the first two days of the meeting, which had been distributed in all three languages, and requested that the Parties delegate to him authority to approve the report of the third day.

143. Specific amendments were tabled by **Austria, Colombia, Japan**, the **Republic of Korea, Senegal, Tunisia** and the **United States** and agreed by the Committee.

Decision SC53-25: The draft reports of the meeting for Wednesday 31 May and Thursday 1 June were adopted, subject to the inclusion of specific amendments tabled by Austria, Colombia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Tunisia and the United States. The Standing Committee authorised the Chair to approve the report of the meeting for Friday 2 June.

(Agenda item 21 continues at paragraph 151)

Agenda item 20. Report of the Sub-group on Finance

144. **Senegal**, as Chair of the Sub-group on Finance, presented highlights of the draft report (see www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/conclusions_and_action_points_of_finance_subgroup_e.pdf), which referred to Documents SC53-20, Add.1. of SC53-20 and SC53-21.

145. Regarding the allocation of funds to RRI in line with the earlier Decision SC53-09 of the Standing Committee, **Canada** noted that it had chaired the discussion in the absence of Senegal to ensure that any potential conflict of interest be avoided. **Canada** and **Australia** reconfirmed that the Subgroup had agreed to allocate CHF 30,000 to each one of the four regional initiatives.

146. **Romania** requested that for the Draft Resolution on Finance, to be submitted to COP13, the Sub-group include consideration of a part-time accounting assistant and a regional officer for Europe. The **United States** clarified that the Subgroup had not discussed the addition of a regional officer for Europe.

147. **Argentina** noted for the record that it had paid its arrears for 2016.

148. **Canada** and the **United States** made interventions regarding the timing of the report and the need for members to see it before it is submitted to the Plenary. The **Sub-group Chair** asked that more time be allocated to the meetings of the Sub-group in the future, and invited members of the Sub-group to review its final report and submit comments to the Chair.

Decision SC53-26: The Standing Committee took note of the preliminary core budget results for 2016, the preliminary 2016 balance sheet and the 2016 draft financial statements as of 31 December 2016, and the delay of the 2016 financial statement audit.

Decision SC53-27: The Standing Committee took note of the replenishment of the reserve to its maximum of 15% of 2016 core budget, equivalent to CHF 762,000 in accordance with Resolution XII.1.

Decision SC53-28: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to develop an intersessional proposal on the use of the travel funds and to seek approval of the Subgroup on Finance, as well as to look into the option of participation in IUCN's training courses.

Decision SC53-29: The Standing Committee decided to use the 2016 surplus as follows:

Proposed reallocation of 2016 surplus funds ('000 CHF)

Description	SC53	Comments
Core Surplus	5 1 0	
Position and contract extension approved by the Executive Team (21-22 February 2017):		
Part-time Accounting Assistant	86	50% July 2016 - December 2018 (Level A3)
Finance Management - transition period	70	Up to SC53 and 2016 audit
Subtotal approved by Executive Team	156	
Core Surplus, Remaining Balance	354	
Proposal for Remaining Surplus:		
Planning, Capacity Building and Team Building to ensure effective operations of the Secretariat (2017 and 2018)	110	Planning Workshop x 2: 30 Workshop x 2: 30 Conflict resolution / leadership x 2: 40 Team-building x 2: 10
Executive Team Meeting	8	As needed
Subtotal, Proposal	118	
Core Surplus, Remaining Balance	236	
COP Priorities (Resolution XII.1) - Ramsar Advisory Missions	90	Sierra Leone (35), Nicaragua (25), Iraq (30)
Regional Initiatives	60	To be set-aside in case needed and availability of funds
Improvements for the on-line system for National Reports	10	
Pre-COP interpretation	32	Asia (12), Americas (8), Africa (12)
Remaining Balance	44	To be allocated at next SC

Decision SC53-30: The Standing Committee further instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution on financial matters to be considered at COP13 and to include the Accounting Assistant position.

Decision SC53-31: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, regarding its proposal to start the use of designated reserves for exceptional annual core budget surpluses, to:

- **report back to the Sub-group on the basis of the Terms of Reference for the Financial Administration of the Convention at Resolution 5.2 Annex 3, paragraph 8;**

- create an operational reserve on a pilot basis, if needed; and
- report on the experience to SC54.

Decision SC53-32: The Standing Committee took note of the non-core budget and voluntary contributions for 2016 and instructed the Secretariat to continue including a breakdown of voluntary non-core contributions received (as per table 3 of document SC53-20) in documents for future Standing Committee meetings, and to indicate which of these contributions relate directly to the budgeted non-core expenditure priorities of the triennium (as per document SC53-20, Annex 5).

149. **Canada** asked for clarification on the CHF 116,000 balance in the Admin project referred to in point e. of the draft report. The Secretariat clarified that this sum related to funds earmarked for certain continuing activities such as RSIS which should be used for those activities.

Decision SC53-33: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to take steps to undertake a financial / management review of non-core funds.

Decision SC53-34: The Standing Committee took note of the improvement in the status of outstanding contributions of Contracting Parties, and encouraged Contracting Parties to pay any outstanding dues in due course.

Decision SC53-35: The Standing Committee took note of the proposed Secretariat actions for 2017 on outstanding contributions mentioned in document SC53-21 paragraphs 11 and 12, and recommended that the Secretariat publish on the Convention website the status of contributions.

Decision SC53-36: The Standing Committee approved the proposal of the Secretariat to change the method of calculating the annual provision against dues receivable from Contracting Parties, as presented in document SC53-21, table 4, in line with the practice of other Conventions.

Decision SC53-37: The Standing Committee:

- took note of the cumulative voluntary contributions of Contracting Parties in the Africa region, which had totalled approximately CHF 99,000 between 2009 and 31 December 2016, and recognized that such contributions should be allocated to Regional Initiatives for the Africa region; and
- instructed the Secretariat, upon further analysis and subsequent audit confirmation of the final balance of the voluntary contributions for 2016, to seek advice from the Africa region on the allocation of the 2016 balance for the African Regional Initiatives.

Decision SC53-38: The Standing Committee allocated, from the 2017 core budget for Ramsar Regional Initiatives, CHF 30,000 to each of the following new initiatives: Amazon Basin, Central Asia, Indo-Burma and Senegal Basin.

Announcement

150. To general acclamation, the **Chair** thanked Ingrid Catton, who was completing her last meeting as the head of the team of interpreters, after some 27 years of interpreting for the Ramsar Convention.

c. Any other business

151. **Australia** reported that the Oceania region had held fruitful discussions with a number of interested Parties from other regions regarding a possible submission to COP13 on blue carbon, and invited meeting participants to review the materials that had been distributed.
152. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** drew attention to the current severe challenges it was facing with regard to implementation of the Convention and underlined the importance of support from the Secretariat, in particular through Ramsar Advisory Missions.
153. Regarding the administration of the proposed IKI-funded CariWet initiative **Switzerland** welcomed such projects but believed that the Secretariat should select a consultant to administer the project, rather than recruiting for a staff position.
154. The **Secretary General** sought the guidance of the Standing Committee on the Secretariat's role in managing and ensuring capacity for non-core-funded projects when it has succeeded in fundraising for priorities identified by the COP, as in this case. Contracting Parties had committed matching funds. The concerned Parties had initiated the request: the CariWet submission approved for funding by IKI had included a proposal that the Secretariat manage the funds, as the concerned Parties do not have, nor wish to establish, an equivalent structure or facilities to do so. She noted that IUCN policy in accordance with Swiss Law prevented the selection of consultants for long-term and full-time roles, and preferred to hire staff in such cases with the duration of the contract subject to the availability of project funds.
155. **Cuba** on behalf of the Caribbean Contracting Parties concurred with the explanation of the Secretary General regarding the development of the IKI project and request to the Secretariat.
156. **Senegal** suggested that, to enable proper consideration, this case should be referred to SC54.
157. The **United States**, supported by **Australia**, **Colombia** on behalf of Caribbean Parties, **Kenya** and **Switzerland**, welcomed the project, and proposed that the Secretariat seek an interim arrangement that would satisfy the donor until COP13, when the Parties might consider this case and agree wider guidance in a Draft Resolution on the role of the Secretariat in managing projects enabled by non-core funding. **Colombia** added that Swiss law had not prevented recruitment for the MAVA project.
158. In response to an enquiry by **Canada** as to the potential impact on existing Secretariat staff, the **Secretary General** clarified that Contracting Parties in the region would be responsible for the implementation of the project and that they had requested that the Secretariat manage the funds and provide technical support through locally-hired staff and a position in the headquarter's office focused on administration. She also invited advice from the Legal Adviser and consideration of similar experiences from other Conventions.
159. **Colombia**, speaking on behalf of Cuba and the Caribbean Parties given that there was no longer translation, supported the proposal of the United States, and did not consider that there was any legal or procedural barrier to stop the Secretariat assuming this role. She noted that Swiss law had not prevented recruitment for the MAVA project.

160. **South Africa** noted that an IOP might be in a position to assume the role, given the lack of clarity of existing Resolutions on the procedure in such instances.
161. The **Legal Adviser** confirmed that there were no clauses in the Convention text, in Resolution XII.1 on finance, in Resolution XII.4 on the Standing Committee, in Resolutions XI.5 and XII.8 on RRIs, in the Operational Guidelines on RRIs, in the Rules of Procedure or in the Delegation of Authority to the Secretary General, to proscribe the hiring of staff with non-core funds for the benefit of an RRI.
162. **Colombia**, speaking on behalf of Cuba and the Caribbean Parties, as there was no longer interpretation, did not believe that there was any legal or procedural barrier to prevent the Secretariat assuming this role.
163. **Argentina** emphasized the transparency shown by the Secretary General on financial issues, and reiterated the faith which Parties had expressed in her.
164. The **Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia (RRC-EA)** congratulated the Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean on their fundraising success, and hoped for similar support in their region.

Decision SC53-39: The Standing Committee authorised the Secretariat, on an exceptional basis, to proceed with the project funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) in support of CariWet and to work with the donor to find an interim human-resources mechanism to support CariWet, and invited Parties to identify a sustainable approach and corresponding guidelines in a Draft Resolution to be submitted for consideration at SC54.

Announcement

165. Noting that this was the last Ramsar meeting for Mr David Papps (Australia), Vice Chair of the Standing Committee, and for Ms Doina Catrinoiu (Romania), the **Chair** thanked them for their long service to the Convention and the work of the Committee. This was greeted with acclamation.
166. Following delegation's expressions of appreciation for the work of the Chair and members of the Committee, the **Chair** gave thanks to the members of the Committee and observers, the Secretariat, the interpreters, the translators and the rapporteur, and closed the meeting at 19h40.