

Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness
Update on the MAVA project
“Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note this report and to make a recommendation for a decision at COP13 on the Ramsar Culture Network, as indicated in paragraph 13.

Background

1. In Decision SC53-15, regarding the MAVA project on “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”, adopted at its 53rd meeting (SC53, 2017), the Standing Committee mandated the Secretariat to take forward the recommendations of the Contact Group, including by:
 - “seeking further legal advice to put the ongoing work onto a sound legal footing, with the Secretary General authorized 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”.
2. The Secretariat has implemented Decision SC53-15, and integrated the feedback provided into its work. This document provides a report of the actions taken and invites the Standing Committee to take a decision regarding the Ramsar Culture Network.

Implementation of Decision SC53-15

3. Legal status: Following SC53, the Secretariat consulted IUCN’s Office of the Legal Adviser (OLA) about the legal status of the “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands” MAVA contract (March 2015 – March 2018). OLA’s view is that the former Secretary General’s signature on behalf of the Ramsar Culture Network is not a major flaw in the contract. Indeed the contract clearly states, in the beginning, that the party is the Ramsar Convention Secretariat represented by the Secretary General, who is named. OLA said that it was however possible to amend the contract if the Standing Committee wished to do so and that this would require agreement and signature from MAVA. Given that there were no outstanding legal issues and that the contract ends in March 2018, the Secretariat has not made amendments and focused on finishing the implementation of the project.

4. Website: The recommendations listed in Decision SC53-15 have been addressed. The culture and wetland webpages have been simplified and moved from the “Activities” section of the Ramsar Convention website to the section on the programme on Communication, Capacity Building, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) and can now be found at the following URL: <https://www.ramsar.org/activity/culture-wetlands>.
5. Regional culture and wetland projects and future opportunities for collaboration with MAVA: The Secretariat explored the possibility of 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. The following projects were underway at the time of writing, thanks to financial support from the MAVA project, with expected completion dates between 31 January and 15 February 2018. The Secretariat intends to make the outputs of these regional projects available on the Ramsar Convention website.

Africa

- Evaluating women’s knowledge on traditional management of shellfish resources in the Bijagós Archipelago Ramsar Site, Guinea-Bissau (implemented by Tiniguena)

Americas

- Cycle of video conferences on the importance and benefits of wetlands, Mexico (implemented by Centro de Educación y Capacitación para el Desarrollo Sustentable)
- Ramsar, culture and territory: closer to communities, Colombia (implemented by Fundacion Omacha)

Asia and Oceania

- Learning from experience: how indigenous peoples and local communities contribute to wetland conservation in Asia and Oceania (coordinated by a consultant in close collaboration with various partners in the region)

Europe

- Gastronomic heritage in Mediterranean wetlands – healthy wetlands, healthy eating (implemented by Med-INA)
- Awareness raising and public engagement for “river-pearls” wetlands in the canton of Grisons, Switzerland (implemented by WWF Grisons)
- Ramsar Culture Network development in the Carpathian Region (implemented by Carpathian Wetland Initiative)
- The cultural heritage of Ramsar wetlands in Finland (implemented by Metsähallitus)

6. Concerning the exploration of future opportunities with MAVA for collaboration of mutual benefit, the MAVA foundation has indicated that it is willing to support wetland-related projects in line with its strategic priorities to 2022, notably in the West African coastal region, the Mediterranean and Switzerland. A number of Mediterranean projects have already started in cooperation with the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Mediterranean Wetlands (MedWet).
7. Other project activities: In Resolution XII.2, paragraph 20, the Conference of the Contracting Parties “... REQUESTS the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources to compile the data [provided by Parties] as an initial report on the relationship of indigenous peoples and local communities with wetlands”. Given that this task relates to the aim of the MAVA project, and thanks to its financial support from the MAVA foundation, an initial report on the relationship of indigenous peoples and local communities with wetlands has been prepared. This report is based on data provided by Contracting Parties in National Reports and Ramsar Information

Sheets, supplemented by case studies and a voluntary questionnaire submitted by Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners, Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), CEPA Focal Points, non-governmental organizations and indigenous and community groups (the call for case studies and the voluntary questionnaire were circulated through the Ramsar Exchange service on 24 October 2017). The initial report on the relationship of indigenous peoples and local communities with wetlands will be made available on the new culture and wetland pages of the Ramsar Convention website.

8. Germany had generously offered since 2016 to host a workshop on “The Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Wetlands – Supporting the integration of nature and culture in their governance and management” for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. This workshop was held from 26 February to 2 March 2018 at the International Academy for Nature Conservation, Isle of Vilm, and was organized by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). The workshop was funded by the German Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. The 18 participants represented, among others, Slovenia, Germany, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (Wetland Link International), UNESCO World Heritage Centre, UNESCO Science Sector, UNESCO German Commission, UNESCO Indigenous Peoples working group, IUCN World Heritage Programme, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, Water Heritage Programme), the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos, and the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee.
9. The MAVA project will come to an end on 23 March 2018.

Guidance on the status of the Ramsar Culture Network

10. In paragraph 17 of Resolution IX.21 on *Taking into account the cultural values of wetlands*, adopted at its ninth meeting (Kampala, 2005), the Conference of the Contracting Parties “REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat to establish a multi-disciplinary working group on the cultural values of wetlands with a balanced geographic representation, under the supervision of Standing Committee, with appropriate input from the STRP, to coordinate the activities described above ...”. Subsequently, at the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC46, 2013), document SC46-10, entitled *Governance, planning and funding of activities on culture and wetlands in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, was presented by the Culture Working Group (CWG). Paragraphs 17 to 22 set out the CWG’s “proposed Ramsar Culture Network (RCN)”. Specifically, paragraph 17 states “An overall revitalisation of the CWG is now proposed, with some adjustments to its structure, governance and operation. A key component of this is the re-casting of the “Working Group” construct as a wider “Ramsar Culture Network” (RCN).” Document SC46-10 was presented by the Secretariat and addressed at SC46. In Decision 46-12, “The Standing Committee welcomed the work of the Culture Working Group and encouraged it to continue its work and to report progress to the Standing Committee at its 47th meeting...”. Document SC47-20, entitled *Ramsar Culture Network – report on activities* was presented by the RCN at SC47 (2014). Decision SC47-25 stated: “The Standing Committee noted the progress report presented, and expressed support for the activities of the Ramsar Culture Network and its cooperation with UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre.” At SC53 (2017), in document SC53-14, the Secretariat provided an update on the MAVA project. This referred to the activities of the Ramsar Culture Network but did not seek to clarify its status.
11. In January 2018, the Secretariat consulted the Ramsar Legal Adviser on the status of the Ramsar Culture Network. The Legal Adviser analysed the relevant Resolutions of the Conference of the Contracting Parties and decisions of the Standing Committee. She concluded that, as the Conference of the Parties had not authorized the transformation of the CWG into the RCN, it is

arguable that the RCN does not have any formal status under the Convention. However, it is also arguable that the Conference of the Parties implied endorsement of the RCN after the fact. Given the unorthodox and ambiguous manner in which the RCN emerged, she therefore recommended that this matter be addressed at COP13.

12. The Secretariat notes that the RCN has been coordinated and has operated with funding from the MAVA project. This includes a 50% position in the Secretariat and consultancy contracts with the RCN coordinators, as well as funds for its activities. The MAVA project comes to an end in March 2018 and thus funding will not be available.
13. The Secretariat therefore invites the Standing Committee to consider the status of the Ramsar Culture Network and make a recommendation for COP13 to take a decision.
 - The Standing Committee may consider that, while the work of the RCN has merit, it is no longer needed and is no longer funded. This would be broadly consistent with the reasons given by the Facilitation Working Group (FWG) for recommending that some groups be concluded. In this case, one option would be to consider adding a reference to the RCN in paragraph 8 of the draft resolution of the FWG in document SC54-9 (and a corresponding reference in the preamble).
 - If, on the other hand, the Standing Committee considers that the RCN should continue, it would be necessary to find an appropriate way to specify its membership, terms of reference and line of reporting. The Secretariat also asks for clear guidance as to its potential engagement in the work of the Network if it is to continue, taking into account that no funding is available.