

Ramsar Regional Initiatives
Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and Operational Framework

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the work undertaken to implement Resolution XII.8 on *Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, with the help of an ad hoc Working Group, operating between SC51 and SC53, and the follow-up to Decision SC53-12;
- ii. review the draft resolution on *Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2019-2021* and the draft *Operational Framework for Ramsar Regional Initiatives* annexed to it for consideration by the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Developments since COP12

1. Following on Resolutions adopted at earlier meetings, at its 12th meeting (COP12, Punta del Este, 2015) the Conference of the Contracting Parties adopted Resolution XII.8 on *Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, which:
 - a. “INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee to undertake a review of the *Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention*, as adopted for 2013-2015 through Standing Committee Decision SC46-28 and published on the Ramsar website, taking into account issues, among others, of governance, capacity, fundraising, and programmatic approach in alignment with the Ramsar Strategic Plan, and adopt the necessary amendments no later than the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC52);” (paragraph 9),
 - b. “INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to publicize at global level regional initiatives as an operational means to provide support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention to complement the efforts of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level and the regional initiatives themselves;” (paragraph 18), and
 - c. “FURTHER REQUESTS the Secretariat: i) to assess the achievements of regional initiatives in delivering technical, administrative and collaborative benefits to the Parties in their regions, as well as their effectiveness and efficiency; ii) to analyse weaknesses, strengths and difficulties of regional initiative implementation and management; and iii) to formulate recommendations for improving the Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention;” (paragraph 21).

2. Responding to the above requests, the Secretariat invited the heads of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) and the members and permanent observers of the Standing Committee to a *Collaborative workshop of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives together with the Convention Secretariat* on 22 November 2015. The workshop took place in Gland, just prior to the opening of the 51st meeting of Standing Committee (SC51), and was attended by 31 representatives of RRIs and Contracting Parties. Together with Secretariat staff, the participants reviewed the Operational Guidelines, provided feedback on a draft assessment of the achievements of RRI by 2015, and discussed a proposed communication strategy to publicize the work of the RRIs.
3. An oral report on the results of the workshop was delivered at SC51. Based on this report, SC51 took the following decisions:
 - a. Decision SC51-11: "The Standing Committee agreed to establish a new Working Group to examine the implications of the proposed new Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives and asked the Secretariat to support the setting up of this group."
 - b. Decision SC51-12: "The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to complete the assessment of existing Ramsar Regional Initiatives and to develop further the common communications strategy taking into account the comments made at the meeting."
 - c. Decision SC51-13: "The Standing Committee agreed that a one-day workshop to revise the Operational Guidelines for Regional Initiatives should be held immediately before SC52."
4. These decisions were followed up with the establishment of a new Working Group, which was convened at a workshop on 12 June 2016 in Gland, just prior to the opening of the 52nd meeting of Standing Committee (SC52). Document SC52-11 Rev.1, presented at that meeting, summarizes the work and lists the composition of the Working Group.
5. In response to Decision SC51-12, a completed assessment of the achievements of the RRIs was published: *Ramsar Regional Initiatives: An assessment of their achievements by 2015* (SC52-Inf.Doc.04). It provides a compilation of up-to-date information received from the RRIs through responses to a questionnaire, in narrative and tabular form. It makes reference to the Operational Guidelines for RRIs 2013-2015, and allows for easy comparison of RRIs. As an additional output from the Working Group, the Secretariat also published an *Update on a common communications strategy for Ramsar Regional Initiatives* (SC52-Inf.Doc.05).
6. During its workshop prior to SC52 and in meetings during SC52, the Working Group tried to reach consensus on amendments to be made to the proposed revised Operational Guidelines for RRIs, as instructed through Resolution XII.8 (cf. paragraph 1a above). Following these efforts, at SC52 the Standing Committee adopted the following decisions.
 - a. Decision SC52-16: The Standing Committee adopted the revised Operational Guidelines, submitted to the 52nd Standing Committee by the Working Group for the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, as "Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives to support the implementation of the Convention".
 - b. 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."

- c. 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.”
7. The Working Group continued its work after SC52 and submitted to SC53 the *Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives* (document SC53-11). It provides a summary of issues raised by Contracting Parties and lists their detailed comments on the applicability of the Operational Guidelines adopted at SC52, including proposals for textual changes of the Guidelines.
 8. Paragraph 81 of the *Report and Decisions of the 53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee* recalls that “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.” Based on this statement, the Standing Committee agreed to Decision SC53-11 as follows:

“The Standing Committee noted that some Contracting Parties would continue to implement the Operational Guidelines in effect as of COP12.”
 9. The *Report of the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives* (document SC53-11) also listed a number of proposals made by Sweden, as chair of the RRI for the Nordic-Baltic region. Paragraph 6 of this report concluded that, “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.” Paragraph 7 indicates that, “Sweden considers that with a new Resolution clarifying these points, specific Operational Guidelines may not be needed any longer, as the main points concerning RRIs and their management will have been negotiated and prepared during COP13 by the Parties.”
 10. This led to several interventions during SC53. They are summarized in paragraph 53 of the *Report and Decisions of the 53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee*, concluding that “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.” The Standing Committee took the following decision:

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 SC53-11.”
 11. After SC53, the Secretariat shared with all Parties concerned by RRIs, and with those that participated in the Working Group and in the discussion at SC53, an outline of the issues to be addressed by a Draft Resolution on RRIs for COP13, asking for their comments and suggestions. Eight Parties responded, and their suggestions were integrated into the attached Draft Resolution.
 12. The proposed text for a COP13 Draft Resolution is attached below. It takes into account the proposals contained in document SC53-11, those submitted earlier by Sweden (in paragraph 5 of document SC53-11) and suggestions of Parties after SC53. The operative paragraphs of the

Draft Resolution focus on the coming triennium between COP13 and COP14 (2019-2021). The proposed Annex to the Draft Resolution provides general operative criteria for RRIs that are intended to remain valid beyond the period 2019-2021. These issues are listed in an *Operational Framework for Ramsar Regional Initiatives*. It is expected that the adoption of this *Operational Framework* by the Conference of the Parties at COP13 would provide a solution for Parties that do not consider the Guidelines adopted at SC52 to be applicable, because the new *Operational Framework*, if adopted, would replace all earlier guidance or operational guidelines for RRIs.

Annex 1

Draft Resolution XIII.xx

Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2019-2021 with an Operational Framework

1. RECALLING that Regional Initiatives under the Ramsar Convention, which include regional centres for training and capacity building and regional networks to facilitate cooperation, are intended as an operational means to provide effective support for improved implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in specific geographic regions, through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern;
2. ALSO RECALLING that the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COPs) has recognized the importance of Regional Initiatives in promoting the objectives of the Convention in Resolution VIII.30 (2002) on *Regional initiatives for the further implementation of the Convention*, Resolution IX.7 (2005) on *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, Resolution X.6 (2008) on *Regional initiatives 2009-2012 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, Resolution XI.5 (2012) on *Regional initiatives 2013-2015 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention* and Resolution XII.8 (2015) on *Regional initiatives 2016-2018 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*, and that, at COP12 (Punta del Este, 2015) the Conference of the Parties endorsed a number of Regional Initiatives as operating within the framework of the Convention in 2016-2018;
3. NOTING that, during the triennium 2016-2018, the Standing Committee approved 19 active Regional Initiatives as fully meeting the *Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives* (as approved by Standing Committee through Decision SC46-28, and approved as remaining valid for the period 2016-2018 by Resolution XII.8) and noted the substantial progress made by many of the initiatives, based on the annual reports that they submitted during those years; and
4. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the experience gained through the operational years of those Regional Initiatives, the application of the *Operational Guidelines* in selecting and supporting Initiatives, and the conclusions derived from the review of their effectiveness;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

5. REAFFIRMS the effectiveness of regional cooperation through networks and centres, grouped under the term Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs), in supporting improved implementation of the Convention on Wetlands and its Strategic Plan 2016-2024;
6. ADOPTS the *Operational Framework for Ramsar Regional Initiatives*, annexed to this Resolution, to supersede and replace all earlier versions of Guidance and Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives;
7. DECIDES that any Regional Initiative run jointly by several Contracting Parties for improved implementation of the Convention, should comply with the conditions listed in the attached *Operational Framework* in order to be formally recognized under the Convention as a Ramsar Regional Initiative;
8. REQUESTS Contracting Parties participating in any existing or future Ramsar Regional Initiative to endeavour to achieve full compliance of the RRI with the attached *Operational Framework*;

9. ENDORSES the existing Ramsar Regional Initiatives listed below as operating in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands until the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. This list includes:
- Four regional Ramsar centres for training and capacity building:
- Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA),
 - Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO),
 - Ramsar Regional Centre – Central and West Asia (RRC-CWA),
 - Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia (RRC-EA), and
- Fifteen Ramsar networks for regional cooperation:
- Ramsar Regional Initiative for West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WaCoWet),
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet),
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin,
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of High Andean Wetlands,
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin,
 - Caribbean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (CariWet),
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Wise Use of Mangroves and Coral Reefs,
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin,
 - East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership,
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia,
 - Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative,
 - Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet),
 - Carpathian Wetland Ramsar Regional Initiative (CWI),
 - Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (NorBalWet),
 - Ramsar Regional Initiative on Black and Azov Seas Coastal Wetlands (BlackSeaWet).
10. INSTRUCTS the above-listed Ramsar Regional Initiatives to submit annual reports on their compliance with the new Operational Framework, according to the new format to be approved by the Standing Committee at its 56th meeting, based on the format adopted through Standing Committee Decision SC41-21, in order to maintain their formal recognition as a Ramsar Regional Initiative that operates in the framework of the Convention on Wetlands during the period 2019-2021, and as an operational tool to improve the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan 2016-2024;
11. REQUESTS the Standing Committee to further endorse new regional initiatives intersessionally, dependent on a positive assessment of their compliance with the new Operational Framework and on their substantiated activities to improve the Convention implementation in the region;
12. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to open the call for proposals for new regional initiatives for the period 2019-2021, to be endorsed by the Standing Committee at its 57th meeting, until the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties;
13. DECIDES to include financial support in the Convention core budget line “Support to Ramsar Regional Initiatives”, as listed in Resolution XIII.00 on *Financial and budgetary matters*, to provide start-up support for the running costs of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives. Such start-up funding will be provided for not more than two consecutive periods between meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties for Regional Initiatives established after COP12¹ and any

¹ This concerns the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin, the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia, and the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative, and any

additional new Regional Ramsar Initiative, provided that they fully comply with the conditions defined in the *Operational Framework*;

14. DECIDES that the levels of financial support from the Convention core budget to eligible Ramsar Regional Initiatives for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 will be determined annually by the Standing Committee, based on their most recent annual reports and updated work plans to be submitted in accordance with the required format and timetable, and informed by the specific recommendations made by the Subgroup on Finance to the Standing Committee;
15. REQUESTS Ramsar Regional Initiatives that receive financial support from the core budget to use part of this support to seek sustainable long-term funding from other sources, particularly during the second triennium in which they qualify for such support;
16. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to support as appropriate the fundraising activities of regional initiatives and the administration of external funds received for their support in accordance with the financial terms of reference of the Convention;
17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other potential donors to support Ramsar Regional Initiatives, whether or not they are also receiving funding through the Convention's core budget, and URGES Contracting Parties geographically related to a Ramsar Regional Initiative that have not yet done so, to provide formal letters of support as well as financial support;
18. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to publicize at global level Ramsar Regional Initiatives as a means to provide international cooperation and support for the implementation of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention that complements the efforts of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities at national level;
19. REQUESTS the Ramsar Regional Initiatives to maintain active and regular contact with the Secretariat, and INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to support and advise Ramsar Regional Initiatives, within available resources, regarding reinforcement of their capacity and effectiveness;
20. REQUESTS the Secretariat to continue publishing on the Convention's website information provided by the Ramsar Regional Initiatives, including reports on their success and work plans;
21. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to invite regional intergovernmental, international and non-governmental organizations, including transboundary river and groundwater basin organizations, to participate in Ramsar Regional Initiatives;
22. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee to prepare a summary assessment of the operations and success of the Ramsar Regional Initiatives operating during the period 2019-2021, for consideration at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties; and
23. REPEALS and replaces the following Resolutions on Ramsar Regional Initiatives, each of which concerns a specific time period:
 - Resolution VIII.30 (2003-2005),
 - Resolution IX.7 (2006-2008),
 - Resolution X.6 (2009-2012),
 - Resolution XI.5 (2013-2015), and
 - Resolution XII.8 (2016-2018).

additional new Regional Ramsar Initiative, provided that they fully comply with the conditions defined in the *Operational Framework*.

Annex A

Operational Framework for Ramsar Regional Initiatives

Article 1: Purpose of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 1.1 The purpose of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) is to promote regional cooperation between Contracting Parties for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in specific regions.
- 1.2 RRIs aim to increase the capacity of Contracting Parties to implement the Convention and the Resolutions adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties in specific regions and to achieve the goals and targets of the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan.

Article 2: Endorsement and Recognition of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 2.1 The Conference of the Parties formally recognizes a list of RRIs that operate within the framework of the Convention through a Resolution. This recognition is granted for the period until the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP).
- 2.2 The Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands may intersessionally endorse a new Ramsar Regional Initiative proposed by a Contracting Party. Such endorsement is valid until the next COP.
- 2.3 The Standing Committee may also propose to the Conference of the Parties to withdraw the recognition of an RRI that has been endorsed at the previous COP, if the RRI fails to report on its activities or no longer complies with this Operational Framework.
- 2.4 To fulfil the criteria for formal recognition as a “Ramsar Regional Initiative”, the partners in a regional cooperation mechanism must comply with the conditions listed in this Operational Framework for RRIs.

Article 3: Status of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 3.1 RRIs are a regional mechanism to support implementation of the Convention on Wetlands, formally endorsed by the Conference of the Parties.
- 3.2 The work programme of activities of each RRI should be aligned with the Ramsar Strategic Plan and be consensually agreed by the participating Contracting Parties to the Convention.
- 3.3 The Administrative Authorities responsible for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention at national level are also responsible for the development and implementation of the RRI and its work programme in which they take part.
- 3.4 The work programmes of RRIs respond to relevant Resolutions adopted by the Conference of the Parties and to Decisions taken by the Standing Committee intersessionally and support the implementation of Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024.

Article 4: Role of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 4.1 RRIs do not replace national action plans and national work programmes for wetland conservation, management and restoration. RRIs add to such national programme activities,

coordinated at supra-national level, and carried out jointly by a number of collaborating Parties to the Ramsar Convention.

- 4.2 RRIs are not regional offices of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and do not undertake tasks that are assigned to the Convention Secretariat.
- 4.3 RRIs provide additional capacity to focus on the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan in the region, notably through the development and execution of regional projects, training courses and other regional capacity-building activities.
- 4.4 The provision of training and capacity-building opportunities must be focused on, but not restricted to, national Administrative Authorities, and include all relevant stakeholders as appropriate.
- 4.5 Beyond the regional cooperation of national Ramsar Administrative Authorities, RRIs are encouraged to work in partnership with additional relevant organizations, notably with the International Organization Partners of the Convention and other suitable partners.

Article 5: Mandate of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 5.1 RRIs develop their mandate in accordance with the purpose and role of RRIs described in this Operational Framework.
- 5.2 RRIs work with national focal persons designated by the Parties for scientific and technical matters (for the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, STRP) and for the Convention's programme on communication and outreach (Communication, Capacity Building, Education, Participation and Awareness, CEPA), in order to increase the implementation capacity in the region.
- 5.3 RRIs submit reports of progress in their work and financial summaries at the end of each year, together with a work plan and budget for the following year. This enables the Standing Committee to confirm that they comply with the Operational Framework and, where appropriate, to allocate Ramsar core budget start-up funding to RRIs that are eligible and request it.

Article 6: Governance of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 6.1 RRIs should establish a governing body to oversee their work programme and to monitor and evaluate its outputs and achievements. The governing body of an RRI includes the national Ramsar Administrative Authorities of the participating Parties and is responsible for the management, development and coordination of the operation of an RRI. Administrative Authorities may agree on additional participants in the RRI as part of the governing body.
- 6.2 Contracting Parties participating in an RRI establish their own governance and advisory mechanisms in order to provide coordination, guidance and insight in a transparent and equitable manner. They may agree that the administration and coordination of the RRI be conducted by a participating national Ramsar Administrative Authority or that the administration of an RRI may be entrusted to a legally established national organization. The Standing Committee verifies that such administration agreements are compatible with this Operational Framework and under the framework of the Convention.

- 6.3 The governing body of each RRI meets regularly, provides guidance, defines mandates, rules and principles of procedure, and monitors the RRI's work programme and resources. The governing body manages the activities of the RRI and provides its members, observers and partners with relevant information. Operative procedures of the RRI are made public and shared with the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.
- 6.4 The Ramsar Convention Secretariat serves as a member of the governing body of each RRI. The specific tasks of the Convention Secretariat are: to make the governing body aware of the need for the RRI to comply with the programme and priorities of the Ramsar Convention and the requests formulated by the Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee; to encourage the RRI to make optimal use of Ramsar tools and the experience and advice provided by Ramsar working panels (STRP, CEPA); and to facilitate the dissemination of experience from the RRI into global Ramsar processes.

Article 7: Financing of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 7.1 All Contracting Parties that participate in an RRI are encouraged to financially support the RRI in which they take part and to identify donors that are willing to provide additional support, notably through specific projects and cooperation programmes.
- 7.2 The Standing Committee allocates Ramsar Convention core budget start up support funds on an annual basis to new RRIs that request it in their annual reports.
- 7.4 RRIs need to achieve financial sustainability from a variety of sources. This is to ensure their operation beyond specific project periods, and to prevent RRIs from becoming dependent and exposed to the availability of one major donor only.
- 7.5 Parties in each RRI will agree, as appropriate, on the mechanisms and procedures to achieve its financial sustainability.

Article 8: Members and Partners of Ramsar Regional Initiatives

- 8.1 The Administrative Authorities responsible for implementation of the Ramsar Convention at national level in countries that wish to participate in an RRI are members of the RRI. The Ramsar National Focal Points designated by the Administrative Authorities should be actively engaged in an RRI in order to ensure coherence and complementarity between implementation of the Convention at national level and regional cooperation in the framework of an RRI.
- 8.2 RRIs are encouraged to include as partners other public authorities and institutions, research and private organizations, Ramsar International Organization Partners and experts who are relevant, able and willing to contribute to the operation of the RRI, in order to increase their operative and outreach capacity.
- 8.3 RRIs may decide how to distinguish between members who are part of their governing body, responsible for the operational procedures, activities and financing of the RRI, and partners who participate in the work of the RRI only on a temporary or otherwise limited basis.