

## Draft Resolution on wetlands in polar and subpolar regions

*Submitted by Sweden*

### Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached Draft Resolution for consideration by the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

### Introduction

#### *Information for the Standing Committee*

Already at the European pre-COP meeting in Austria 2014 the participants concluded that there are gaps in our knowledge on Arctic wetlands and their values. Among other things they agreed upon a recommendation to prepare a Draft Resolution for COP12 as a next substantial step focusing on an inventory of polar and circumpolar wetlands.

As chair for the Ramsar Regional Initiative NorBalWet 2016-2017, Sweden has taken over the lead to produce and submit a draft resolution on polar and subpolar wetlands. Sweden has also recently started a project in the Arctic Council about wetlands. Sweden would like this project to continue and develop further and ensure similar measures are taken in the southern hemisphere, when applicable. Such measures have been included in the resolution.

#### *Financial implications of implementation*

The draft resolution mostly addresses the Contracting Parties so costs for the Secretariat should be limited. We believe that the cost for the Secretariat could come from the core budget, especially since there is already some funds allocated for the co-operation with the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF).

The draft resolution does not include establishment of centers etc. that demand investments and long-term management costs.

Paragraph (number and key part of text)	Action	Cost (CHF/year)
The entire resolution	Support Contracting Parties to implement the Resolution (if accepted at the COP) / Staff at the Secretariat	15 working days
	Travel budget for meetings 1-2 per year (Lower figure with one meeting, higher figure with two meetings.)	3 000-6 000 (Lower figure with one meeting, higher figure with two meetings.)

## Draft Resolution XIII.xx

### Wetlands in polar and subpolar regions

*The area and the Contracting Parties this resolution addresses*

1. HAVING CONSIDERED that there is no single agreed-upon definition of the polar and subpolar regions, there is a need to specify the area that this resolution addresses. This resolution addresses the Arctic and subarctic delineated as the CAFF boundary (Arctic Council) and the Antarctic as delineated by the Antarctic Treaty area (the area south of 60° South Latitude) and the subantarctic as areas with tundra climate (ET) according to Köppen climate classification<sup>1</sup> between the 45° and 60° South Latitudes, except areas with mountain climate that doesn't have adjacent lowland areas with tundra climate.
2. ALSO, HAVING CONSIDERED that since some measures to mitigate the impact on polar and subpolar areas can take place *ex situ*, for example mitigating climate change, much can be done for the polar and subpolar areas *ex situ*. In that aspect the resolution also addresses all the Contracting Parties. RECALLING the Ramsar resolutions X.25 and X1.14, that restoration of peatland can (could) be such one measure,

*Polar and subpolar wetlands biodiversity, ecosystem services and vulnerability*

3. RECALLING that Wetlands, as defined by the Ramsar Convention, are "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters",
4. NOTING that according to the definition above, various types of wetlands occur in the polar and subpolar regions, many of them having subtypes and a biodiversity that only exists in these regions, and are of global importance. AWARE of the diversity and value of wetland ecosystems in polar and subpolar regions, and on their global connections via the flyways of migratory bird and migration routes of sea mammals,
5. RECOGNIZING the importance of wetlands for their biodiversity, their ecosystem services for local communities and First Nations, and their function as carbon sinks and storage is of importance in the global context of climate change,
6. RECOGNIZING that the polar and subpolar wetland ecosystems are very sensitive and vulnerable, for example oil spills may cause more severe impact due to dark midwinters and lower temperatures than in other regions, and that these regions are also among the those where climate change has and will have a large impact. ALSO RECOGNIZING that terrestrial land areas are also vulnerable, for example can damaged vegetation covers take a long time to recover with severe erosion problems as a result. Such erosion can also damage wetlands, draining them or overlaying them with deposits.
7. CONSCIOUS that with climate change, thawing will have impact on wetlands, for example palsa mires,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Peel, M. C.; Finlayson, B. L.; McMahon, T. A. (2007). "Updated world map of the Köppen–Geiger climate classification". *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.* 11: 1633–1644. doi:10.5194/hess-11-1633-2007. ISSN 1027-5606.

### *Knowledge and awareness*

8. CONSCIOUS that much scientific data is still needed about wetland ecosystems in the polar and subpolar regions, and that knowledge remains relatively poorly assessed and recognized of different wetlands types' historical evolution, geographic distribution and area coverage, and their biodiversity, ecological functions, ecosystem services and other important values as well as the amount of their vulnerability;
9. ALSO, CONSCIOUS of the urgent need for increased knowledge of these wetlands, as knowledge is necessary (crucial) for effective conservation and sustainable, wise use,

### *Protected areas and areas of high conservation value*

10. RECOGNIZING that there are several protected areas in the polar and subpolar areas and that the total area of protected areas has increased in the last 25 years and almost doubled in the Arctic/subarctic. There is a wide range of management categories for these protected areas, from strict nature reserves to protection with sustainable use. The level of protection and governance varies throughout these regions. At the end of 2017, there were about 80 sites designated as Ramsar sites in the Arctic/subarctic and 5 sites in the Antarctic/subantarctic,
11. CONCERNED that while progress has been made, there is no analysis of how well the network of protected areas fulfill the criteria of being an "ecologically connected, representative, and effectively managed network of protected and specially managed areas that protects and promotes the resilience of the biological diversity, ecological processes and cultural heritage",
12. RECOGNIZING that even if the Antarctic is not part of any territory of the Contracting Parties, international agreements protecting certain areas in the Antarctic are in place; for example, the Antarctic Treaty and the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.
13. ALSO RECOGNIZING that CAFF has recognized 97 areas of marine heightened ecological and cultural significance in the Arctic/subarctic<sup>2</sup>, areas where impact from shipping should be avoided or mitigated. Several of these areas included coastal wetlands,

### *Threats to wetlands*

14. RECOGNISING the potential threats generated by current and future developments in the polar and subpolar region,
15. RECALLING that the polar and subpolar areas are highly impacted by climate change, especially in the northern hemisphere, and are among the most rapidly changing ecosystems due to climate change,
16. RECALLING that wild fires have increased in the Arctic and subarctic, even in the dried up upper layer of peatlands,
17. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment notes several changes in the Arctic ecosystems, for example rapid northward shifts of northern tree lines as a result of recent rises in summer temperatures, marine species changing their food habits due to lack of prey and

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<sup>2</sup> AMAP/CAFF/SDGW. Identification of Arctic marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance. Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) IIc.

breakdowns in food webs, thereby losing fitness and often being in bad condition due to lack of food or having to excessively consume energy by increased foraging,

18. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment of the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora working group of the Arctic Council (CAFF) notes declines in some wetland types in the Arctic, and that the Global Assessment on Peatlands Biodiversity and Climate Change adopted by Decision IX/16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity on Biodiversity and climate change states that Arctic peatlands are vulnerable.

#### *International co-operation*

19. RECALLING the Memorandum of Cooperation signed at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11, Bucharest, 2012) between the Ramsar Secretariat and CAFF,

### THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

#### *Knowledge and awareness*

20. ENCOURAGE that the concerned Contracting Parties have sufficient data about polar and subpolar wetlands and should undertake needed complementary inventories, research and assessment of polar and subpolar wetlands;
21. URGE that assessment(s) of the polar and subpolar wetlands are made; the assessments may include the state of wetlands, hot-spot analysis for wetland biodiversity, gaps in the network of protected areas – their representation and connectivity for different scenarios for climate change in these regions and how this may affect the wetlands;
22. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to work with the support of the Secretariat to raise awareness of the value of polar and subpolar wetlands and to consolidate existing knowledge for decision-making for their conservation and (sustainable and) wise use; not forgetting the importance of each individual's behavior to prevent wild fires and unwise use of terrain vehicles that may cause damage;

#### *Protected areas and areas of high conservation value*

23. ENCOURAGE Contracting Parties to designate new Ramsar sites in ecological regions in the polar/subpolar regions where certain wetland types are underrepresented in the network of Ramsar sites;
24. URGE Contracting Parties to designate new protected areas in ecological regions in the polar/subpolar regions where protected areas with certain wetland types are underrepresented in the network of protected areas;
25. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to designate more protected areas through international agreements in the area covered by the Antarctic Treaty, where there are unprotected wetland hotspots for biodiversity;

#### *Mitigation of impact on wetlands and restoration*

26. URGE Contracting Parties to ensure that restoration measures in wetlands are prioritized and taken to improve the connectivity between suitable habitats, especially for sites of importance

for migrating wetland species and sites with available fresh water in sub regions where fresh water is scarce; -.

27. URGE Contracting Parties to ensure that physical planning and development projects take proper care of wetlands in polar and subpolar regions. For example, terrain vehicles may be forbidden in areas with sensitive habitats where damage may be a consequence;
28. URGE Contracting Parties with domestic or semi-domestic grazing animals to ensure that the population size of these herds is kept at a level that does not risk wetland populations of wild grazing animals and that the combined grazing pressure of domestic and wild animals does not risk overgrazing of the wetlands.
29. URGE Contracting Parties to mitigate large scale erosion problems that may arise or already exist because of different kinds of exploitation. Measures may include both wetlands and terrestrial habitats;
30. URGE that Contracting Parties ensure that measures to eradicate existing and future possible invasive alien species are put into place;
31. URGE that Contracting Parties restore peatlands with large carbon storage, regardless of their climate zone, to mitigate climate change in the polar/subpolar regions;

#### *International co-operation*

32. CALLS on the Ramsar Secretariat to consider synergies with UNFCCC to identify mechanisms and incentives for the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands; and further CALLS on the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions to mobilize relevant frameworks, such as the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), to improve the conservation and wise use of polar and subpolar wetlands;
33. INVITES the Ramsar Secretariat, building on the existing cooperation agreement with CAFF, to consider developing and signing a similar type of agreement with the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat;
34. INVITES the Ramsar Secretariat to create an ad hoc working group with Ramsar, UNFCCC, CBD, IPBES, CMS/AEWA and the Berne Convention to work on polar and subpolar wetlands;

#### *Follow-up*

35. URGE concerned Contracting Parties, with the support of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and the Ramsar Secretariat in cooperation with relevant other MEAS, Regional Organizations, Regional Initiatives, IOPs, etc, to establish an assessment of the polar wetlands and to present reports of the results (one for each hemisphere may also be acceptable) at Ramsar COP15 in 2024. Short progress reports can be presented at the COP14 in 2021.