

Report and Decisions of the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Tuesday 24 April 2018

09:45 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 1: Opening statements

1. Opening statements were made by:
 - Mr Jorge Rucks, Uruguay, Chair of the Standing Committee
 - Ms Inger Andersen, Director General of IUCN
 - Mr Martin Spray, Director General of WWT, on behalf of the six International Organization Partners (IOPs)
 - Ms Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda

2. The **Chair** referred document Doc. SC54-2 *Provisional agenda* for the Standing Committee's consideration and approval. There were no proposals for amendment.

Decision SC54-01: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme

3. The **Chair** referred the meeting to documents Doc. SC54-3 Rev.2 *Adoption of the provisional working programme* and Doc. SC54-3 Rev.2 *Addendum Annotated provisional working programme*, which had been prepared on the basis of recommendations by the Executive Team to ensure that more complex issues were tabled as early as possible during the meeting.
4. The **Chair** and the **Deputy Secretary General** outlined a proposed working method, as follows:
 - a. Brief introduction and discussion in plenary session of each substantive agenda item, followed by discussion and approval or referral, as required, to a small "Friends of the Chair" group, or, where there were significantly diverging views, a larger contact group;
 - b. Preparation of revised, consensus documents from the Friends of the Chair group or contact group, showing amendments as tracked changes, to be submitted by such groups to the Secretariat, by Thursday 26 April at the latest, for translation and posting on the Convention website, for final discussion in plenary session on Friday 27 April.

5. The **Secretariat** undertook to work with **France** and **Sweden** to address possible constraints associated with the rescheduling of specific items in the revised working programme.
6. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance** (Senegal) noted the Subgroup's understanding that its report would be tabled on Friday 27 April.

Decision SC54-02: The Standing Committee adopted the revised provisional working programme (Doc. SC54-3 Rev.2 and its addendum) as well as the proposed working method.

Agenda item 4: Admission of observers

7. The **Secretary General** referred the meeting to document Doc. SC54-4 Rev.1 *Admission of observers*.
8. The **Chair** invited comments; there were no requests for the floor.

Decision SC54-03: The Standing Committee admitted the observers listed in document Doc. SC54-4 Rev.1.

Agenda item 5: Report of the Secretary General

9. The **Secretary General** presented highlights of her report contained in document Doc. SC54-5 *Report of the Secretary General*.
10. During discussion, Contracting Parties and observers thanked the Secretary General and Secretariat for the work undertaken and raised the following specific points:
 - a. The need to maintain support the Africa region (**Senegal, South Africa**). On behalf of the Africa region, **South Africa** specifically requested that the position of Regional Officer for Africa be reinstated with the original position title and terms of reference, in line with Resolution XII.1.
 - b. A welcome for the strengthening of internal controls and financial management, the “whole-of-Secretariat approach”, the increased use of communications technology, the revised agreement with IOPs, and the filling of Secretariat vacancies (**United States of America**).
 - c. Disappointment that some Standing Committee documents were published late (**United States of America**).
 - d. The need to provide more information and transparency on human resources and staffing issues, including vacancies and recruitment, organizational structure, terms of reference for Secretariat positions, and the use of consultants (**Finland, France, Senegal, Switzerland**).
 - e. The need for improved reporting on meetings attended by the Secretariat, so that potential synergies with Contracting Parties and other processes could be realized at global and regional levels, including in relation to Indicator 6.6.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (**Finland, France, Senegal, Switzerland**).

11. In response the **Secretary General** noted that:
 - a. It would have been impossible to issue meeting documents any earlier. However the Secretariat was putting in place improved systems.
 - b. Her focus in making adjustments within the Secretariat was not only global; there was a need to be more engaged in regional processes and also to support the Contracting Parties better at national level through effective enabling activities, for example by working more with the IOPs on capacity building and issues concerning the designation and management of Ramsar Sites. It was not the intention to remove support at the national level but to make it stronger and more impactful.
 - c. Vacancies and recruitment information would be posted on the Ramsar website. Discussion of specific staffing issues should be addressed through a more appropriate process.
 - d. A contact management database was being developed to help manage information on meeting contacts. She was open to considering sharing additional information, but this needed to be practical and effective.
 - e. Her position as focal point for the Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves was an honorary one that would help to raise the profile of the Convention.
 - f. At the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC53), the Facilitation Working Group had expressed satisfaction and indicated that it would be able to step back from closer-than-usual oversight of the Secretariat.
12. **Australia** suggested that a contact group be established to address any remaining concerns that had not been fully covered by the Secretary General's responses.
13. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** tasked the Working Group on Staffing Issues, chaired by Canada, with the participation of France, Senegal, South Africa and other interested Contracting Parties, to address personnel-related issues raised by Parties and to report back to a later plenary session.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Management Working Group

14. The **Chair of the Management Working Group** (Australia) presented the summary report of the Group's meeting on 23 April 2018, which is included as Annex 1 to this report.
15. **Switzerland** and the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** indicated that they would have preferred to see the written report before it was presented orally.
16. **Switzerland** clarified that, during the MWG discussion of the 360-degree evaluation of the Secretary General, it had been intervening on behalf of the Europe region. Switzerland further noted that the Director General of IUCN had been subject to an external evaluation by IUCN Council and that the DG had found this process to be a very positive one. IUCN Human Resources might be asked to provide further information.
17. The **United Kingdom** further underlined the value of 360-degree evaluations.

18. The **Secretary General** noted that, as requested by the MWG, a meeting between IUCN Human Resources and the Committee was being scheduled. The Secretary General herself would not be present at that meeting.
19. In response to a point raised by the Chair of the Subgroup on Finance, the **Chair of the MWG** confirmed that oversight of funding agreements was the responsibility of the MWG.

Decision SC54-04: The Standing Committee accepted the report of the Management Working Group and endorsed its recommendations.

Agenda item 9: Report of the Facilitation Working Group

Agenda item 21.8: Draft resolution on Improving the efficiency of structure and processes of the Convention (Submitted by Switzerland)

Agenda item 10: Roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee

20. The **Chair** noted that agenda items 9, 21.8 and 10 would be taken together as they addressed closely related matters.
21. The **co-Chair of the Facilitation Working Group (FWG)**, the United States of America, presented the report of the FWG, which is included as Annex 2 to this report, and includes a summary of the work undertaken, and document Doc. SC54-9 *Draft Resolution on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention*. An informal meeting of the FWG had been held on 23 April 2018.
22. **Switzerland** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-21.8 *Draft resolution on Improving the efficiency of structure and processes of the Convention*.
23. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-10 *Roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee*.
24. The **Chair** opened the floor to comments on the three agenda items.
25. During discussion, contributions were made by **Austria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, France, Honduras, Japan, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland**, the **United States of America** (including in its capacity as co-Chair of the FWG) and the **Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)**.
26. Among the issues identified were:
 - The potential for consolidation or merging of documents Doc. SC54-9 and Doc. SC54-21.8;
 - The timing of potential decisions on governance reforms, either at COP13 or at COP14;
 - The need to clarify the implications for the roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, including the potential retirement of some working groups;
 - The need to clarify the implications for the STRP; and
 - The need to clarify financial implications.
27. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** tasked the FWG with further consideration of the issues raised and with preparing recommendations for submission to the Standing Committee in due course.

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

Agenda item 21.6: Draft resolution on peace and sustainable management of biodiversity in Ramsar Sites (Submitted by the Central African Republic)

Agenda item 21.15: Draft resolution on wetlands, peace and security (Submitted by Senegal)

28. Documents Doc. SC54-21.6 and Doc. SC54-21.15 were briefly introduced by the **Central African Republic** and by **Senegal**, respectively.
29. A number of Parties, including **Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and **South Africa** expressed concern that some language used in the two draft resolutions could be perceived as beyond the mandate of the Ramsar Convention.
30. **France** supported the merging of the texts.
31. The **United States of America** indicated that it had a number of edits to suggest to the current drafts, but would await a revised, consolidated draft before intervening further.
32. **Kenya** and **South Africa** indicated their willingness to assist the proponents in preparing a revised text.
33. **UNEP** provided information on relevant decisions taken by the UN Environment Assembly at its second and third meetings (UNEA2 and UNEA3).
34. **Wetlands International** felt that the link between wetlands, peace and security was missing.
35. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** asked Senegal to chair an open-ended working group, taking into account the views expressed, and to come back to the Standing Committee with a revised text.

Agenda item 21.2: Draft resolution on cultural values, local communities and climate change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands (Submitted by Burkina Faso, Senegal and Tunisia)

36. Document Doc. SC54-21.2 was briefly introduced by **Senegal**.
37. During discussion, specific comments and suggested amendments were tabled by **Cuba, Senegal, Slovenia**, the **United States of America** (including a number of points with regard to consistency across the draft resolutions for COP13 as a whole), **Uruguay** and the **Chair of the STRP**.
38. In response to one of the points raised by both Senegal and Slovenia, the **Secretary General** proposed that discussion relating to the Ramsar Culture Network be deferred until agenda item 11.3.
39. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** asked Slovenia to chair a “Friends of the Chair” group to prepare a revised text for the further consideration of the Committee. Parties and observers that had tabled specific comments were asked to send these to the Secretariat by the end of the day so that they could be made available to the group.

Agenda item 21.12: Draft resolution on urbanization, climate change and sustainable wetlands
(Submitted by the United Arab Emirates)

40. Document Doc. SC54-21.12 was briefly introduced by the **United Arab Emirates**.
41. **Oman** supported the draft resolution.
42. Amendments were tabled by **Austria** speaking on behalf of the Europe region, **Canada, Colombia, France, the United States of America, Senegal, Slovenia, Uruguay** (supported by **Cuba**), the **Chair of the STRP** and **WWT**.
43. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** asked the United Arab Emirates to prepare a revised text taking into consideration the comments made. Parties and observers that had tabled specific comments were asked to send these to the Secretariat by the end of the day.

Agenda item 13: Language strategy

44. The **Secretariat** introduced document Doc. SC54-13 Rev.1 *Language strategy*.
45. **Oman** underlined the importance of the language strategy for attracting more Arabic-speaking Parties, particularly in light of COP13 being hosted by the United Arab Emirates.
46. During discussion, specific comments and suggested amendments were tabled by **Colombia, Japan, the United Arab Emirates** and the **United States of America**.
47. In response to a question from the United Arab Emirates, the Secretariat indicated that the Rules of Procedure did not provide a definition of the term “unofficial language”.
48. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** asked the United Arab Emirates to coordinate a “Friends of the Chair” group to prepare a revised text, taking into consideration the comments made. Parties that had tabled specific amendments were asked to send these to the Secretariat by the end of the day.

Agenda item 20.2: Ramsar Regional Initiatives: Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and operational framework

49. The **Chair** noted that this item would be dealt with on Wednesday 25 April.

Agenda item 21.5: Draft resolution on agriculture in wetlands (Submitted by Czech Republic)

50. Doc. SC54-21.5 was briefly introduced by the **Czech Republic**.
51. **Uruguay** supported the draft resolution.
52. During discussion, specific comments and suggested amendments were tabled by **Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Finland, France, Japan, Senegal, South Africa, the United States of America** and the **Chair of the STRP**.

53. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Czech Republic** indicated that it had taken note of all the comments made and would report back to the Committee the following day with a proposed way forward.
54. The **Chair** clarified that proposed amendments should be submitted to the Secretariat by the end of the day.

Agenda item 21.14: Draft resolution on wetlands in polar and subpolar regions (Submitted by Sweden)

55. Doc. SC54-21.14 was briefly introduced by **Sweden**.
56. During discussion, specific comments and suggested amendments were tabled by **Argentina, Australia, Japan, Senegal, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uruguay**, and the **Chair of the STRP**. Many of these interventions raised concerns that the draft resolution covered matters within the mandate of the Antarctic Treaty and Antarctic Council.
57. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** asked Sweden to chair a contact group to prepare a revised text taking into consideration the comments made. Parties and observers that had tabled specific amendments were asked to send these to the Secretariat by the end of the day.
58. In response to a question from the **Philippines**, the meeting decided that the draft resolutions on sea turtles and intertidal areas should both be addressed on the morning of Thursday 26 April.

The Chair closed the session at 18:05.

Wednesday 25 April 2018

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

The **Chair** called the session to order at 10.11.

Closed session on Management Working Group matters

59. The **Chair** informed the Standing Committee that the morning would commence with a closed session of the MWG to hear from a representative of IUCN on matters raised in the earlier session of the MWG. This would be followed by a report from the Standing Committee Working Group on staffing issues. The Committee would then resume its working programme. Observers and members of the Secretariat were requested to leave the room during the closed session. The plenary session resumed at 11:55.

Agenda item 7: Financial and budgetary matters – Report of the Subgroup on Finance

60. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance** presented an interim report on the Subgroup's work to date. This had included:

- Reviewing the work undertaken by the IUCN Oversight Unit in relation to non-core funds;
 - Reviewing the 2016 and 2017 audited accounts; and
 - Reviewing document Doc. 7.1 Rev.1 *Financial and budgetary matters – Report on financial matters 2016-2018*, including the proposed core budget for 2018.
61. The Subgroup had requested that the Secretariat revise Annex 4 to document Doc. SC54-7.1 Rev.1 and this had now been circulated as Doc. SC54-7.1 Rev.1 Addendum *Annex 4 (revised): Proposed Core Budget 2018 (without 2017 carry-forwards)*.
 62. **Finland, Japan and Switzerland** noted that the Subgroup had not yet concluded its work and considered that elements of the interim report would benefit from clarification.
 63. **Canada** and the **United States of America** supported continuation of the Subgroup's discussions.
 64. The **Chair** requested that the Subgroup on Finance continue its deliberations and report to plenary on 27 April.

Agenda item 8: Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention

65. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-8 *Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Convention*. This included a draft COP13 resolution, and an associated annex, detailing the proposed scope, modality and indicative timeline and budget for the review.
66. Specific comments and proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by **Canada, Estonia, Finland, Oman, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland** and the **United States of America**.
67. The **Secretariat** responded to a number of the points raised.
68. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** requested that those Parties that had proposed amendments submit them in writing to the Secretariat so that a revised document could be prepared and submitted for the Standing Committee's further consideration.

Agenda item 14: Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other institutions

69. This item was chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee (Australia).
70. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-14 *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other institutions*. This comprised a covering note and draft resolution text.
71. Specific comments and proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by **Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, Senegal, Slovenia, Switzerland**, the **United Arab Emirates**, the **United States of America** (including in certain cases in its capacity as the co-Chair of the Facilitation Working Group) and **Wetlands International**.
72. As an addition to the background information, **UNEP** noted that the Ramsar Secretariat had participated in the seventh meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators (IAEG-SDG) held from 9 to 12 April 2018, in Vienna, Austria. The

SDG indicator 6.6.1 methodology submitted by UNEP to the IAEG-SDG had been approved and reclassified as a Tier II indicator. The IAEG-SDG members had decided that UNEP would be responsible for the internationally comparable methodology with national data, and regional and global aggregations, for indicator 6.6.1. They had also decided that the Ramsar Secretariat would have a separate reporting line in the global SDG database hosted by the UN Statistics Division, with the national reporting from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands based on Ramsar definitions and requirements. The two separate reporting lines to the SDG Global Data base for indicator 6.6.1 would have a clear delineation of the type of data in each stream. Each co-custodian would be responsible for its respective reporting line and they would jointly contribute to the SDG target 6.6 storyline.

73. **Switzerland** supported the proposed amendments tabled by the observer from Wetlands International.
74. The **Secretary General** considered that all of the points raised could readily be accommodated in a revised text of the draft resolution, but sought guidance on whether the amendments tabled by the FWG should be incorporated by the Secretariat or by the FWG itself.
75. The **co-Chair of the FWG** (United States of America) asked the Secretariat to include the amendments but to share the revised draft with the FWG for confirmation, prior to circulation to the full Standing Committee.
76. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** requested that Parties that had proposed amendments submit them in writing to the Secretariat so that a revised document could be prepared and submitted for the Standing Committee's further consideration.

The **Chair** closed the session at 13.20.

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

77. The **Chair** called the session to order at 15.12. He noted that he would prioritize time for substantive discussion of documents rather than the introduction of background information previously provided to Contracting Parties and regional groupings.

Agenda item 19: Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance

78. The **Chair** opened the floor to discussion on document Doc. SC54-19 *Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, which included the Draft Report of the Secretary General to COP13 pursuant to Article 8.2 (Annex 1) and the outline of an associated draft resolution (Annex 2).
79. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by the **United States of America**.
80. **Finland, France** and the **Islamic Republic of Iran** referred to the sub-Annexes of Annex 1 and requested that these be updated to reflect the most recent information available ahead of COP13.
81. **Senegal** and **South Africa** provided additional information on the status of specific Ramsar Sites mentioned in the sub-Annexes.

82. The **Secretariat** recalled that Annex 1 and its sub-Annexes covered the period August 2014 to November 2017 but that the online Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) was continually updated. The document currently provided for SC57 in 2019 to review an update to the end of 2018.
83. The **Secretary General** undertook to look into the feasibility of updating the sub-Annexes ahead of COP13, taking into account Contracting Parties' comments. The Secretariat would be pleased to engage bilaterally with Parties that wished to raise issues related to specific Ramsar Sites.

Agenda item 11: Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA)

11.1: Report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel

11.2: Report of the CEPA Implementation Working Group

84. The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel (Australia)** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-11.1 *Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) – Report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel*, noting that he had met the previous day with the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation (South Africa).
85. The **Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation (South Africa)** recalled the group's mandate as established by Resolution XII.9 and briefly summarized the progress made. This included:
- Development of the CEPA Action Plan and its incorporation into the Secretariat's work plan. That work was done.
 - Development, with the advice of STRP, of a new approach to supporting CEPA in the Convention to be submitted to COP13.
- The group was now proposing that the Standing Committee should disband the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and that the CEPA Oversight Panel should complete its work on the new approach to CEPA. This work might not be concluded by COP13, but could be submitted to COP14, taking into account the review of the Strategic Plan and following further consideration at SC57.
86. **Finland** noted that text on CEPA for possible inclusion in a COP13 draft resolution had been discussed with the Chairs of the CEPA Oversight Panel and CEPA Implementation Working Group. This had resulted in agreement on five paragraphs proposed for insertion into an appropriate draft resolution.
87. The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel** confirmed the Panel's agreement to the points made by the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and welcomed the text referred to by Finland. The Panel would help finalize the text and consult with the Secretariat on which would be the most appropriate draft resolution for its inclusion.

Decision SC54-05: The Standing Committee approved the reports of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel and the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation.

Agenda item 11.3: Update on the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”

88. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-11.3 *Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness – Update on the MAVA project “Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands”*. The Standing Committee was specifically requested to make a recommendation for a COP13 decision on the way forward with respect to the Ramsar Culture Network.
89. The **Secretary General** underlined that the Secretariat had neither the mandate nor the resources to support the Network following the conclusion of the MAVA project. This situation would need to be addressed should Contracting Parties decide to maintain the Network.
90. **Slovenia** considered that the Network had fulfilled an important role and called for its continuation, with a clear mandate and direction and perhaps an amended title. The draft COP13 resolution dealing with cultural values (Doc. SC54-21.2) might provide a suitable context for this.
91. **Senegal** welcomed document Doc. SC54-11.3, which responded to concerns raised at SC53.
92. **Switzerland** called for inter-regional work on the issue of cultural values of wetlands and suggested that Contracting Parties could identify examples of such values to be used in communications materials associated with COP13.
93. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** requested that Slovenia work with the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-21.2 and other interested Contracting Parties to bring forward a specific proposal for further consideration by the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 17: Ramsar Convention Resource Mobilization Work Plan

94. The **Chair** opened the floor for comments on document Doc. SC54-17 *Ramsar Convention Resource Mobilization Work Plan*. Among points raised were the following:
- The non-core budget priorities for the next triennium had yet to be set by Contracting Parties (**Canada**, the **United States of America**).
 - Inclusion of a corresponding draft COP13 resolution would strengthen the document (**Botswana**).
 - The document required greater depth and detail to be a fully developed resource mobilization strategy and would benefit from taking greater account of previous work undertaken by the Ramsar Secretariat on this topic, the experience of other institutions and fora, as well as post-2020 global goals (**France**, **Senegal**, **Switzerland**).
 - The issue of reputational risk to the Convention should be considered when contemplating engagement with private sector companies (**France**).
 - A well-developed resource mobilization strategy would be valuable for Contracting Parties in Oceania and the Caribbean (**Australia**, **Cuba**).

- Resource mobilization opportunities would be offered by the 20th anniversary of support from the Danone Group in 2018 and the Convention's 50th anniversary in 2021 (**WWF**).
95. The **Secretariat** responded to the comments of Contracting Parties, clarifying that the document under discussion was a Secretariat workplan for the remaining months of the current triennium. Previous Secretariat documents dealing with resource mobilization had been consulted and the experience of others would certainly be valuable in developing plans beyond COP13. It was acknowledged that detailed work would need to await priorities to be established by Contracting Parties at COP13, but this should not preclude preparatory work on the basis of anticipated resource needs, such as for delegate travel, Ramsar Advisory Missions or CEPA.
96. The **Chair** concluded that the Secretariat had taken note of all of the comments made and would prepare an updated version, reflecting the decisions of COP13, for consideration at SC57.

Decision SC54-06: The Standing Committee noted the Resource Mobilization Work Plan and confirmed that it should be further developed by the Secretariat, taking the Standing Committee's comments and COP13 decisions into account, and a revised text tabled for consideration by SC57.

Agenda item 20.1: Ramsar Regional Initiatives: Update for 2018
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97. The Chair opened the floor to comments on document Doc. SC54-20.1 *Ramsar Regional Initiatives – Update for 2018*.
98. **Seychelles** recorded its thanks for support received from the Africa regional team in planning for a possible new Ramsar Regional Initiative for Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, especially during the pre-COP regional meeting.
99. The **Secretary General** noted that the Standing Committee was invited to allocate start-up funds for the four newly established Ramsar Regional Initiatives, and that this would be considered by the Subgroup on Finance.
100. The **Chair** requested that the Standing Committee make a decision on this allocation following the final report of the Subgroup on Finance.

Agenda item 20.2: Ramsar Regional Initiatives: Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and operational framework

101. The Chair opened the floor to comments on document Doc. SC54.20.2 *Ramsar Regional Initiatives – Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and operational framework*.
102. Specific comments and proposed amendments were tabled by **Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, France, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Sweden** on behalf of the European region, the **United States of America, Uruguay** and the **Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia**.
103. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that Contracting Parties should submit their comments in writing to the Secretariat by the end of the day. Many of the points raised could readily be accommodated in the document. Some proposed amendments, however, did not command consensus and would require further consideration by the

Standing Committee or COP13. He instructed the Secretariat to prepare a revised text, using square brackets where necessary to indicate alternative positions for the points where there were significant differences of view, for further consideration at SC54.

Agenda item 15: Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly

104. **Uruguay** introduced document Doc. SC54-15 Rev.1 *Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly*.
105. The **United Arab Emirates** undertook to work with the Secretariat to develop a proposal on this issue for endorsement by COP13.
106. **Colombia** underlined the importance of exploring all possible options to ensure that the Secretariat had access to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) deliberations on SDG 6.
107. **Brazil** suggested that the Secretariat should make a written submission to the HLPF in case physical participation was not possible.
108. The **United States of America** also highlighted the need to look for creative solutions, since a recent United States legal review had concluded that treaty secretariats did not qualify as intergovernmental organizations and were therefore not eligible for Permanent Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). She noted that IUCN had expressed commitment to the continuing participation of the Ramsar Secretariat in IUCN delegations.
109. **Chile** broadly concurred with the United States of America.
110. In response to a point raised by South Africa, the **United States of America** confirmed that there were no multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) on the list of Permanent Observers at the UNGA and that the reasons for this were unrelated to the issue of which institution hosted any particular MEA.
111. **Switzerland** suggested making an approach to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
112. The **Secretariat** advised that the UN Office of Legal Affairs in New York had already suggested contacting the President of ECOSOC directly. Such an approach had proven unsuccessful during the 1990s, but might be worth trying again.
113. The **Legal Adviser** provided further context and analysis, noting that there remained some scope for arguing that the Secretariat qualified as an international organization, thus meeting the criteria for admission as a Permanent Observer.
114. The **Secretary General** expressed her concern that the work that the Parties had mandated the Secretariat to undertake depended on access to the relevant high-level fora. The Secretariat was ready to explore all options, but if these efforts failed, it would affect the Secretariat's ability to deliver.

Decision SC54-07: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, in conjunction with interested Parties, to continue exploring options for gaining access to meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and related high-level fora.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme (continued)

115. The **Secretariat** provided information on the timings and venues for meetings of the Facilitation Working Group and Subgroup on Finance, and confirmed that the sequence for draft resolutions that had not yet been considered remained as indicated in the working programme.
116. **Estonia**, on behalf of the European region, and **Switzerland** requested the establishment of a stand-alone contact group to examine the draft resolution in document Doc. SC54-21.8 on *Improving the efficiency of structure and processes of the Convention*.
117. The **Chair** recalled that the Standing Committee had tasked the FWG with consideration of issues related to agenda items 9, 10 and 21.8. This matter was now closed.

The **Chair** closed the session at 18:28.

Thursday 26 April 2018

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

The **Chair** called the session to order at 10.10.

118. The **Standing Committee** concurred with a recommendation of the Executive Team, communicated by the Chair, that the present session should conclude at 12:00 to enable working groups to continue their work.
119. The **Chair** requested that Parties and observers take the floor no more than twice on each agenda item and respect the previously agreed limits on speaking time. Specific comments and proposed amendments to draft resolutions should be submitted in writing to the Secretariat.
120. **Austria**, on behalf of the European region, reiterated the request made the previous day for a contact group to be established to consider the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-21.8.
121. Following discussion, during which views were expressed by **Japan, Senegal** and the **United States of America**, the **Standing Committee** endorsed a suggestion from the Chair that an informal group be established to find an agreed way forward, with the participation of European regional representatives, Japan, Senegal, the United States of America and other interested Parties. The FWG would also be invited to report back to a plenary session concerning the progress of its discussions on governance-related matters.

Agenda item 21.1: Draft resolution on the rapid assessment of wetland ecosystem services (Submitted by the Republic of Korea – document Doc. SC54-21.1)

122. Statements of general support for the draft resolution were made by **Argentina, Kenya, Oman**, and the **Chair of STRP**.

123. Minor comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by the **Plurinational State of Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Finland, Senegal, Switzerland**, the **United States of America**, and **WWF** (supported by Switzerland).

Decision SC54-08: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-21.1 for consideration at COP13, with revisions reflecting the amendments proposed.

Agenda item 21.3: Draft resolution on conservation and management of small and micro wetlands (Submitted by China – document Doc. SC54-21.3)

124. **China** tabled two amendments to the draft resolution. These had been made in response to feedback from interested Parties.
125. Statements of general support were made by the **Czech Republic**, the **Republic of Korea** and **Oman**.
126. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Argentina**, the **Plurinational State of Bolivia, Canada, China, Estonia** (on behalf of the European region), **France**, the **Islamic Republic of Iran** and the **United States of America**.
127. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat to be compiled and forwarded to China; and that China should prepare a revised text for further consideration by the meeting.

Agenda item 21.4: Draft resolution on Ramsar Advisory Missions (Submitted by Burkina Faso – document Doc. SC54-21.4)

128. **Senegal**, speaking on behalf of Burkina Faso, briefly introduced the draft resolution.
129. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria** (on behalf of the European region), **Canada, Cuba, Finland, Japan**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States of America**.
130. The **Chair of the STRP** provided further contextual information.
131. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat to be compiled and forwarded to Senegal; and that Senegal, with the support of the United Kingdom and other interested Parties, as appropriate, should prepare a revised text for further consideration by the meeting.

Agenda item 21.7: Draft resolution on wetlands in West Asia (Submitted by Iraq – document Doc. SC54-21.7)

132. **Iraq** made a statement on the conservation of the Mesopotamian Marshes and introduced the draft resolution.

133. Specific comments and proposed amendments were made by the **Islamic Republic of Iran, Senegal** (on behalf of the African region) and the **United States of America**.
134. **UNEP** presented information concerning Resolution 72/225 on *Combating sand and dust storms* adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017.
135. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat to be compiled and forwarded to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq; and that these two Parties should prepare a revised text for further consideration by the meeting.

Agenda item 21.9: Draft resolution on promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems (Submitted by Australia – document Doc. SC54-21.9)

136. Statements of general support were made by the **Republic of Korea, Indonesia** and **Oman**.
137. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Canada, China, Colombia, Finland, France, Senegal, the United States of America, Uruguay, the Chair of the STRP** and **Wetlands International**.
138. **Australia** welcomed the contributions received and confirmed that it would consider the proposals made by Wetlands International.
139. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat, to be compiled and forwarded to Australia; and that Australia should prepare a revised text for further consideration by the meeting.

The **Chair** closed the session at 12:05.

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

The **Chair** called the session to order at 15:05.

140. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** agreed that the meeting should deal with the remaining four draft resolutions submitted by Parties and then receive progress reports from working groups.

Agenda item 21.11: Draft resolution on World Wetlands Day (submitted by the United Arab Emirates – document Doc. SC54-21.11)

141. A general statement of support for the draft resolution was made by **Oman**.
142. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Kenya, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Senegal** and the **United States of America**.
143. **UNEP** assured the meeting of its readiness to collaborate closely with the Convention to enhance the visibility of World Wetlands Day.

Decision SC54-09: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-21.11 for consideration at COP13, with revisions reflecting the amendments proposed.

Agenda item 21.13: Draft resolution on promoting the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats (submitted by the Philippines – document Doc. SC54-21.13)

144. The **Philippines** briefly introduced the draft resolution. A number of comments had already been received from other Parties and these would be taken into consideration.
145. Further specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were tabled by **Brazil, Canada, France, Senegal, the United States of America** and the **Chair of the STRP**.
146. The **Philippines** responded to a number of the comments made.
147. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat, to be compiled and forwarded to the Philippines; and that the Philippines should prepare a revised text that evening for further consideration by the meeting on 27 April.

Agenda item 21.10: Draft resolution on the enhanced protection and management of sea turtle breeding, feeding and nursery areas and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites (Submitted by France and Senegal – document Doc. SC54-10)

148. Specific comments and proposed amendments to the draft resolution, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Argentina, Australia, Colombia** (speaking on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), **India, Japan, the United States of America** and **Uruguay**.
149. In response to a question from the Islamic Republic of Iran, **France** confirmed that the Annex would ideally be a comprehensive list of relevant Ramsar Sites.
150. Confirming that it would be able to assist with updating the Annex, the **Secretariat** suggested that it might be helpful to clarify the nature of the Annex in the text of the draft resolution itself.
151. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat, to be compiled and forwarded to France and Senegal; and that these Parties should prepare a revised text that evening for further consideration by the meeting on 27 April.

Agenda item 21.16: Draft resolution on gender and wetlands (submitted by Colombia – document Doc. SC54-16)

152. General statements of support were made by **Cuba** and **Uruguay**.

153. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Brazil** (also tabling a comment on behalf of **Chile**), **France** (concerning linguistic issues in the French text), **Kenya**, **Slovenia** (on behalf of the European region), the **United States of America** and **Wetlands International**.
154. At the invitation of the Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that proposed amendments should be sent to the Secretariat, to be compiled and forwarded to Colombia; and that Colombia should prepare a revised text that evening for further consideration by the meeting on 27 April.

Progress reports from working groups

155. On behalf of Canada in its capacity as Chair of the Working Group on staffing issues, the **Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee** reported that the Working Group's report would be included in the report of SC54 (see Annex 3).
156. Brief progress reports were made by the **co-Chair of the Facilitation Working Group** and by **Austria** on behalf of the informal group established to consider the draft resolution in document Doc. SC54-21.8.
157. There followed extensive discussion concerning the way forward to COP13 with regard to governance matters, during which contributions were made by **Austria**, **Colombia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Kenya**, the **Russian Federation**, **Senegal**, **Switzerland** and the **United States of America**.
158. The **Chair** and **Vice-Chair** welcomed the efforts made by Parties to seek a consensual way forward, but recognized the limited time available for achieving this at the present meeting. They suggested a possible two-part process whereby the draft resolutions submitted by the Facilitation Working Group (Doc. SC54-9) and by Switzerland (Doc. SC54-21.8) would both be forwarded to COP13 as one document with the two elements each in square brackets, and that discussions between interested Parties would continue after SC54 with a view to enabling the COP to make progress as efficiently as possible.
159. This proposal enjoyed a measure of support among some Parties, but others considered that it raised significant procedural and practical challenges.
160. The **Chair** deferred further discussion until 27 April, when the Legal Adviser would be asked to provide her advice on interpretation of relevant provisions of the Rules of Procedure, taking into account precedent, concerning (a) the submission of draft resolutions by working groups and (b) the submission to COP of draft resolution texts that are square-bracketed in their entirety.

Agenda item 22: Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)

161. The **Chair of the STRP** briefly presented document Doc. SC54-22 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)*.
162. The **United States of America** welcomed the report, noting that the STRP had accomplished a great deal with its more focused mandate and workplan. It was particularly encouraging to see the Panel leveraging the use of social media and working with other entities such as IPBES. It

would be important to ensure that regions had equal opportunities to participate in STRP meetings.

163. **France** also welcomed the STRP's report and expressed the conviction that, whatever the outcome of deliberations on governance issues, the STRP needed to remain at the heart of the Convention.
164. In response to questions from the United States of America, the **Chair of the STRP** provided further details of (a) the communication strategy planned for the Global Wetland Outlook and (b) the availability of Policy Briefs and Briefing Notes arising from the STRP's work.
165. **Austria** paid tribute to the work of the outgoing STRP Chair Professor Royal Gardner, and led a standing ovation in acknowledgement of Professor Gardner's contribution to the Convention.

Progress reports from working groups

166. **Sweden** reported from the contact group established to consider the draft resolution on the polar and subpolar regions (document Doc. SC54-21.14), in which advantages and disadvantages with having the Antarctic included had been discussed. Sweden asked if the Standing Committee could accept that a revised version, taking into account all the comments made, would be prepared during May and June and sent to the Secretariat in good time for translation before COP13, since there was not sufficient time to finalize a full Rev.1 version before the close of the present meeting, and that this procedure would result in less work for the Contracting Parties at COP. Written comments had been received from Canada, France, Japan, the United States of America, the STRP and BirdLife international. Comments raised during the SC54 plenary discussion of 24 April and during the European pre-COP regional meeting would also be taken into account.
167. The **Secretary General** enquired how a text that was only finalized after SC54 could be endorsed by the Standing Committee for forwarding to COP13, as was required by the Rules of Procedure.
168. The **Legal Adviser** presented her advice on relevant provisions of the Rules of Procedure. She noted that under Rule 34.3, it is technically possible for the Standing Committee to recommend that editing of a Draft Resolution continue after the Standing Committee meeting, in accordance with any specific directions provided by the Standing Committee in a Decision. However, she noted that such a course of action would preclude the possibility of the Standing Committee officially approving – via a decision – the draft text to be finalized by the Secretariat.
169. **Australia** indicated that it would be uncomfortable with endorsing a draft resolution that potentially raised important international legal questions without the Standing Committee having reviewed and agreed the text prior to submission.
170. The **United States of America** suggested that those parts of the draft resolution that did not enjoy consensus should be square bracketed and that Sweden could focus its consultations on agreeing how such paragraphs should be handled going forward.
171. The **Chair** invited Sweden to take up this suggestion and to provide a revised text to the Secretariat for further consideration by the Standing Committee on 27 April.

Agenda item 23: Draft resolution on future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2019-2021 (document Doc. SC54-23)

172. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Austria** (on behalf of the European pre-COP regional meeting), **Brazil, Finland, France, Senegal** and the **United States of America**.
173. At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that the Chair of the STRP should work with the Secretariat to prepare a revised text reflecting the amendments proposed, and forward this for consideration at COP13.

Agenda item 24: Draft resolution on guidance on identifying Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) for global climate change regulation as an additional argument to existing Ramsar criteria (document Doc. SC54-24)

174. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Argentina, Austria, Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, the Russian Federation, the United States of America** and **Uruguay**.
175. At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that the Chair of the STRP should work with the Secretariat to prepare a revised text reflecting the amendments proposed, and forward this for consideration at COP13.

Agenda item 25: Draft resolution on restoration of degraded peatlands to mitigate and adapt to climate change and enhance biodiversity (document Doc. SC54-25).

176. Specific comments and proposed amendments, to be sent to the Secretariat in writing, were briefly summarized by **Argentina, Austria, Canada, Finland, France, the Russian Federation, Thailand** and **Uruguay**.
177. At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that the Chair of the STRP should work with the Secretariat to prepare a revised text reflecting the amendments proposed, and forward this for consideration at COP13.

Agenda item 12: Work plan of the Secretariat for 2018 and proposed format for 2019-2021

178. The **Secretary General** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-12 *Work plan of the Secretariat for 2018 and proposed format for 2019-2021*. This included a suggested revised structure for the work plan. Parties were invited to provide comments on both the current workplan and the suggested format for the next triennium.
179. Interventions were made by **France, Senegal** and the **United States of America**. Both France and the United States indicated that they would provide comments in writing to the Secretariat.
180. The Secretary General thanked Parties for their input and undertook to refine the 2018 work plan, in particular by seeking to make the CEPA elements more visible, and to develop further the format of the workplan for the forthcoming triennium.

Decision SC54-10: The Standing Committee took note of and approved the Secretariat's 2018 work plan and endorsed the proposed format of the Secretariat's work plan for the 2019-2021 triennium, subject to account being taken of the points raised by Parties.

Progress reports from working groups

181. The **Secretariat** reported that the groups tasked with revising the following documents had now completed their work:

- Language strategy (Doc. SC54-13)
- Small and micro wetlands (Doc. SC54-21.3)
- Culture-related matters, including the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands" (Doc. SC54-21.15 and Doc. SC54-11.3)
- Peace, security and biodiversity (Doc. SC54-21.2 and Doc. SC54-21.6)

Iraq had indicated that it would be submitting a revised text of the draft resolution on West Asian wetlands (Doc. SC54-21.7) by 21.00 that evening.

Work had not yet been completed on:

- Governance issues (Doc. SC54-9, Doc. SC54-10 and Doc. SC54-21.8)
- Wetlands in polar and subpolar regions (Doc. SC54.14).

The sequence for discussion on 27 April would be dependent on the availability of revised texts in all three languages, which in turn depended on timely submission of revised drafts to the Secretariat.

The **Chair** closed the session at 18:20.

Friday 27 April 2018

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

The session was called to order at 10.05.

182. The delegation of **Uruguay** explained that, owing to illness, the Chair of the Standing Committee, Mr Jorge Rucks, would be unable to preside over the last day of the meeting. Uruguay therefore asked the Vice Chair, Australia, represented by Mr Mark Taylor, to preside.
183. The **Vice Chair** announced the proposed running order for consideration of agenda items. He further proposed to follow the working methods employed during the previous days, and urged all participants to be mindful of time constraints.
184. The **Standing Committee** concurred with the Vice Chair's proposals.
185. In response to a point of order raised by **Senegal** on behalf of the African region (supported by the **Republic of Korea** on behalf of the Asian region), and at the invitation of the Vice Chair, the **Standing Committee** confirmed that, in the event of over-running the scheduled finishing time of 18.00, the meeting would close as soon as interpretation was no longer available.

Agenda item 16: Review of current and proposed cooperative agreements

186. The **Vice Chair** recalled that this item had been dealt with when the Standing Committee accepted the report of the MWG.

Agenda item 18: Preparation of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties

18.1: Report of the Secretariat

18.2: Report of the Subgroup on COP13

187. The **Vice Chair** recalled that item 18.1 *Report of the Secretariat* had been considered during the meeting of the Subgroup on COP13 held on 23 April and would therefore be covered by the Subgroup's report under item 18.2.

188. The **United Arab Emirates** (host of COP13) made a presentation covering the following points:

- The logo adopted for the COP;
- The Memorandum of Understanding between the host country and Secretariat, signed in January;
- The Secretariat's visit to the COP13 venue and hotels;
- The formation of three host-country committees for the COP: a Higher Committee, a Scientific Committee and a Logistical Committee;
- A change of venue as a result of the change of COP13 dates, as agreed at SC53, to the Dubai Festival Arena, a more exclusive venue which would be configured especially for the event, and which was closer to budget-friendly hotels (starting at approximately USD 65), just two kilometres from Dubai International Airport, and also close to wetlands;
- The availability of a special discount code for all flight bookings with Emirates;
- Arrangements for the Ministerial meeting scheduled for 22 October (Day 2 of the COP), focusing on the importance of wetlands in urban areas, with the main proposed outcome being a declaration, a draft of which would be circulated to all Parties three months in advance; and
- Information on the host's COP13 Communication Plan.

189. The **Standing Committee** endorsed the report of the United Arab Emirates by acclamation.

190. Statements of appreciation were made by **Oman**, the **United States of America** and **Uruguay**.

191. In response to questions from **Finland**, the **United Arab Emirates** noted that:

- The Ministerial meeting had been scheduled to enable guests to attend the COP opening ceremony and presentation of the Ramsar Awards on 22 October;
- The Ministerial meeting would consist of a round-table session of three to four hours during the afternoon;
- The COP13 communications team was preparing messages of both global and regional focus for the greatest possible visibility.

192. The **Secretary General** confirmed that the Secretariat's Director of Resource Mobilization and Outreach and his team were working closely with the host country's communications team, for example, on website development and the launch of the Global Wetlands Outlook.

193. Responding to a question from South Africa, the **Secretary General** reported that, in conformity with established practice under other conventions, organization of the Ministerial meeting would be the responsibility of the host country, with the Secretariat playing a supporting role as appropriate.
194. In response to questions from the Czech Republic and Senegal, the **United Arab Emirates** recalled that the overall theme and sub-themes for the Ministerial meeting had been agreed at SC53. Information on side events would be posted on the COP13 website, which would be launched as soon as possible.
195. At the invitation of the Vice Chair, the **Standing Committee** marked with further warm applause its appreciation of the ongoing efforts of the United Arab Emirates to prepare for COP13 in the best possible way.

Agenda item 18.3: Preparation of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties: Process for review of draft resolutions (document Doc. SC54-18.3)

196. At the invitation of the Vice Chair, the **Secretariat** briefly summarized the background and key points of document Doc. SC54-18.3 and requested guidance from the Standing Committee.
197. The **Vice Chair**, commending the Secretariat for a document that showed adaptive management in its best form, opened the floor to comment. The following points were raised:
- There might be simpler solutions, including through surgical changes to the Rules of Procedure (**United States of America**);
 - The Standing Committee was not empowered to adopt changes to the Rules of Procedure and so the document should be considered as an information paper only (**Senegal**);
 - There was already a great deal of work to do in preparing COP13; possible revisions to the Rules of Procedure should be deferred to a later date (**France**);
 - The paper provided very useful guidelines that would help to avoid a number of difficulties encountered during COP12 (**Uruguay**).
198. The **Secretariat** clarified that the document was based on the existing Rules of Procedure and its endorsement by the Standing Committee did not entail any change to the Rules; the intention was simply to ensure that the Secretariat had clear guidance for its work in the run-up to COP13.
199. At the invitation of the Vice Chair, the Standing Committee decided as follows:

Decision SC54-11: The Standing Committee: took note of document Doc. SC54-18.3 *Preparation of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties – Process for review of draft resolutions*; invited Parties with comments on the document to communicate these in writing to the Secretariat; and decided that the Committee should review a revised version at SC55, taking any such comments into account.

Agenda item 26: World Wetlands Day 2018, 2019 and 2020 (document Doc. SC54-26)

200. The **Secretariat** presented the highlights of World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2018, which had included:

- 1,500 registered WWD events in 118 countries, which were tracked and mapped in real time (leading Parties, by number of events, in the six Ramsar regions, had included Australia, Colombia, France, India, Mexico and South Africa);
- Participation in WWD events by senior Secretariat staff;
- 200,000 visits to the WWD website at <http://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>;
- More than 1,800 online articles mentioning WWD;
- Social media outreach extending to almost 9 million people; and
- Collaboration with IOPs and other partners.

201. **Senegal** observed that the Convention's long-standing partnership with Danone had provided significant financial support for WWD, and that efforts should be made to secure ongoing funding at the same level.

202. The **Secretary General** reported that Danone was still very supportive of the Convention although it had changed priorities. She stated that the Secretariat would continue to make every effort to secure the necessary funding. She noted that WWD was an excellent example of where the Secretariat could be facilitative, to support Parties in their implementation activities.

203. **Finland** asked France, as the Party that had held the most WWD events in 2018, to consider organizing and hosting a COP13 side event to share experience and examples of best practice.

204. The **Vice Chair** opened a discussion of the themes for WWDs during the forthcoming 2019-2021 triennium, which included contributions from **Finland, France, Senegal, South Africa, the United States of America** and the **Secretary General**.

Decision SC54-12: The Standing Committee decided that the themes for World Wetlands Day during the 2019-2021 triennium would be:

- **2019: Wetlands and climate change**
- **2020: Wetlands and biodiversity**
- **2021: Wetlands and water**

Agenda item 27: The Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards 2018 (partly in closed session)
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205. The **Standing Committee** met in closed session to consider the recommendations of the Subgroup on COP13, which in turn had resulted from the Subgroup's deliberations (also in closed session) on 23 April, and to make the final selection of the laureates.

206. After reconvening the Standing Committee in open session, the **Vice Chair** invited the United Arab Emirates, host of COP13 and Chair of the Subgroup on COP13, to announce the winners of the 2018 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards.

207. The **United Arab Emirates** announced the laureates, and further announced that the Standing Committee had also decided to recognize 20 years of support from the Danone Partnership, particularly with regard to World Wetlands Day and the Evian Special Prize.

208. On behalf of the Standing Committee the **Vice Chair** conveyed warm congratulations to all of the laureates.

Decision SC54-13: The Standing Committee decided that the 2018 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards would be presented as follows:

- **The Ramsar Convention Award for Wetland Wise Use: Mr Eduardo de Miguel, Fundación Global Nature, Spain**
- **The Ramsar Convention Award for Wetland Innovation: Pronatura, Asociación Civil, Mexico**
- **The Ramsar Convention Award for Young Wetland Champion: Youth Climate Action Network, Samoa**
- **The Ramsar Merit Award: Mr Ma Guangren, China.**

Agenda item 28: Wetland City Accreditation (partly in closed session)

209. The **Standing Committee** met in closed session to consider the recommendations of the Independent Advisory Committee.
210. After reconvening the meeting in open session, the **Vice Chair** advised that the Standing Committee had determined as follows:

Decision SC54-14: The Standing Committee decided that the report of the Independent Advisory Committee on Wetland City Accreditation would be taken forward for further consideration and announcement at COP13, and that the Wetland City Accreditation list would be under embargo until then.

Agenda item 29: Dates and venues of the 55th and 56th meetings

211. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **Secretariat** recalled that, in line with established practice, SC55 and SC56 would be held immediately prior to and after COP13.
212. In response to a request from Finland and at the invitation of the Vice Chair, the **Secretariat** advised that it had provisionally identified three possible dates for SC57 in June and July 2019 that appeared not to clash with other major events in the international environment calendar. These were 3-7 June, 24-28 June, and 1-5 July.
213. Whilst **Finland** and **Senegal** suggested that the dates for SC57 could be decided at COP13, the **Secretary General** observed that it would be desirable to fix the dates as soon as possible to avoid potential clashes later on as the international calendar filled up.

Decision SC54-15: The Standing Committee decided that its 55th meeting would be held on 21 October 2018 from 10:00 to 13:00, and its 56th meeting on 29 October 2018 from 18:30 to 19:30, both in the Festival Arena, Dubai.

Agenda items 9, 10 and 21.8 (continued)

Progress reports from working groups

214. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **Legal Adviser** read in full the advice she had been asked to prepare when this matter had been discussed during the afternoon of 26 April. The full written advice, which is included as Annex 4 to this report, concluded that the Facilitation Working Group was neither precluded from drafting proposals nor from submitting them to the Standing Committee for consideration. In the preparation of this advice it had been

necessary to consider not only the Rules of Procedure, but also customary international law, which governed the establishment of customary rules under the Convention.

215. In response to points raised by **Senegal** and **South Africa**, the **Vice Chair** expressed his strong wish to avoid entering into a lengthy legal debate and urged all interested Parties to take sufficient time to read and digest the full written advice. However, in the interests of absolute clarity, he invited the Legal Adviser to take the floor again.
216. The **Legal Adviser** confirmed that the advice she had given was broadly applicable to all working groups established under the Standing Committee. The suggestion in her written submission that relevant provisions of the Rules of Procedure might usefully be clarified should not be interpreted as a concession on the substance of the rest of her advice.
217. The **Vice Chair** recalled that considerable time had already been devoted to discussion of the governance-related agenda items (items 9, 10 and 21.8), not only in plenary session, but also in meetings of the Facilitation Working Group and the informal group established to consider item 21.8. These had not been easy discussions and there had been a great deal of heartfelt discussion. He did not believe it would be in anyone's interests to reopen such discussions in plenary. He therefore proposed a draft decision of the Standing Committee, which he invited the meeting to consider and support as a mutually agreeable way forward, reflecting a spirit of respectful and positive engagement.
218. Following further discussion, with contributions from **Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, Senegal, Switzerland**, and the **United States of America**, the **Vice Chair** invited interested Parties to work with him during the lunch break to conclude a mutually agreeable form of words for a draft SC54 decision on this matter.

The session closed at 13.15.

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

Agenda items 9, 10 and 21.8 (continued)

Progress reports from working groups

The **Vice Chair** called the session to order at 15.08.

219. The **Vice Chair** tabled text for the Standing Committee's consideration, on behalf of the group of interested Parties that had met during the lunch break on 27 April to find a way forward in relation to agenda items SC54-9 and SC54-21.8. The text was projected on the plenary hall screen.
220. There were no requests from the floor to amend the text and the **Vice Chair** gavelled the following decision:

Decision SC54-16: The Standing Committee decided to submit both the draft resolutions in documents Doc. SC54-9 and Doc. SC54-21.8, as originally drafted, for consideration at COP13. The Standing Committee noted that both proposals were based on the recognition of a need to review the mechanism for providing governance and guidance for the Convention. The Committee discussed both proposals without reaching a conclusion on how to bring them together. The Committee encouraged interested Parties to continue multilateral discussions on this issue in preparation for COP13 to seek mutually agreeable solutions to achieve a common goal. The

Committee also noted that COP 13 could benefit from considering these two draft resolutions together.

221. **Switzerland** thanked the Vice Chair and all of the team that had worked on drafting the decision text.
222. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **co-Chair of the Facilitation Working Group** reported that the FWG had devoted its time to consideration of items SC54-9 and SC54-21.8. It had not been able to consider SC54-10, although the group had worked intersessionally and had been ready to bring forward text at SC54.
223. At the invitation of the Vice Chair, the Standing Committee decided as follows:

Decision SC54-17: The Standing Committee decided to forward the text of the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-10 *Roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee*, as drafted, for consideration at COP13.

Agenda item 13: Language strategy – document SC54-Com.1

224. The **United Arab Emirates** thanked all those who had worked to produce an agreed text regarding a proposed language strategy in document SC54-Com.1. The United Arab Emirates would prefer it to be submitted to COP13 as a stand-alone draft resolution.

Decision SC54-18: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.1 for consideration at COP13, without further substantive amendment.

Agenda item 21.2: Draft resolution on cultural values, indigenous peoples and local communities, and climate change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands – document SC54-Com.2

225. **Senegal**, speaking on behalf of Slovenia, reported that comments received from a number of Parties had been incorporated in the draft resolution text presented in document SC54 Com.2. In addition, Senegal wished to table a new preambular paragraph 7bis, concerning the support received from the MAVA Foundation for the Ramsar Culture Network, and read out the proposed text, to be provided to the Secretariat.
226. In response to an enquiry from the Secretariat concerning possible clarification of the status of the Ramsar Culture Network in the operative part of the draft resolution, **Senegal** considered that this was a matter for further discussion at COP13.

Decision SC54-19: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.2 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the further amendment tabled by Senegal.

Agenda items 21.6 and 21.15: Draft resolution on Importance of wetlands for peace and human security – document SC54-Com.3

227. Reporting on the outcome of the Contact Group established by SC54 to consider this draft resolution, **Senegal** noted that document SC54-Com.3 was not the most recent version of the draft resolution.
228. The **Secretariat** confirmed that a further revision had been received two hours previously, was currently being translated, and would be posted online as soon as possible.
229. At the invitation of the Vice Chair, **Senegal** briefly summarized the additional amendments (subsequently tabled as document SC54-Com.3 Rev.1 – see below).
230. Referring to SC54-Com.3, a number of Parties, including **Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Panama, Peru and Uruguay**, raised concerns that the text addressed matters beyond the remit of the Ramsar Convention.
231. The **United States of America** indicated that it was also uncomfortable with some of the text and suggested that it might be submitted to COP13 with a note explaining that some Parties had concerns.
232. **Wetlands International** considered that the draft resolution covered matters that were central to wetland conservation, given that the consequences of conflict directly threatened wetlands.
233. **South Africa** supported Wetlands International and urged that compromise text be found to avoid a situation where Parties opposed submission to COP13 of the entire draft resolution.
234. The **Vice Chair** suspended discussion, pending circulation of the most recent text.

Agenda item 21.3: Draft resolution on conservation and management of small wetlands – document SC54-Com.4

235. There being no interventions, the **Standing Committee** decided as follows:

Decision SC54-20: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.4 for consideration at COP13, without further substantive amendment.

Agenda item 21.7: Draft resolution on wetlands in West Asia – document SC54-Com.5

236. The **Islamic Republic of Iran** reported that it had engaged in extensive negotiations with Iraq. Whilst a number of Iran's proposed amendments had been incorporated, some elements of the text remained unacceptable. This being understood, the Islamic Republic of Iran requested that the draft resolution be forwarded to COP13 for further discussion.
237. There being no further interventions from the floor, the **Standing Committee** decided as follows:

Decision SC54-21: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.5 for consideration at COP13, without further substantive amendment, noting that some Parties would raise concerns during COP13.

Agenda item 21.9: Draft resolution on promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems – document SC54-Com.6

238. **Switzerland**, speaking on behalf of Finland, recalled that during initial discussion of this draft resolution in the present meeting, Finland had tabled an amendment to insert a reference to indigenous communities in operative paragraph 12. This appeared not to have been included.
239. The **United States of America** noted that the square brackets in paragraph 16.b could be removed.
240. **Brazil** requested that the phrase “as a matter of urgency” in paragraph 14 be placed in square brackets for further consideration at COP13.

Decision SC54-22: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.6 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the further amendments tabled by Brazil, Switzerland (on behalf of Finland) and the United States of America.

Agenda item 8: Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention – document SC54-Com.8

241. In response to a point raised by **South Africa**, the **Standing Committee** endorsed a suggestion from the Vice Chair that text on resource mobilization for implementation of the Strategic Plan should be accommodated in the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (document SC54-Com.7).
242. **France**, speaking on behalf of Finland, tabled an additional line to be inserted at the end of paragraph 21, requesting that the Panel review the implementation of the CEPA Action Plan, in coordination with the CEPA Implementation Working Group; the text to be provided to the Secretariat.

Decision SC54-23: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.8 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the further amendment tabled by France (on behalf of Finland), and accommodation of South Africa’s proposal on resource mobilization in the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (SC54-Com.7).

Agenda item 21.16: Draft resolution on gender and wetlands – document SCC54-Com.9

243. There being no interventions from the floor, the **Standing Committee** decided as follows:

Decision SC54-24: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.9 for consideration at COP13, without further substantive amendment.

244. In response to a question from the Vice Chair, the **Standing Committee** agreed to consider the remaining revised draft resolutions based on the English texts, recognizing that, owing to time constraints, it had not yet been possible for translations to be completed for all documents. The **Vice Chair** thanked Parties for their understanding and commitment to the timely completion of the work of the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 21.10: Draft resolution on the enhanced protection and management of sea turtle breeding, feeding and nursery areas and the designation of key areas as Ramsar Sites – document SC54-Com.10

245. **France**, in its capacity as proponent of the draft resolution, summarized the amendments that had been introduced in response to inputs received from Parties, and highlighted a number of other cases where France considered that proposed amendments were not desirable.
246. In response to a request made by the **United States of America**, the **Vice Chair** confirmed that the attribution of amendments to specific delegations would be removed.

Decision SC54-25: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.10 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion in square brackets of the amendments listed by France as not having consensus support, and removal of the attribution of amendments.

Agenda item 7: Report of the Subgroup on Finance

247. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance** presented the Subgroup's report. This had been posted on the SC54 in-session webpage and is appended to the present report as Annex 5.
248. The **Vice Chair** thanked the Chair and members of the Subgroup on Finance for their hard work.
249. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance** responded to requests for clarification by **Canada** and **France**. He also drew attention to time constraints, which meant that the Subgroup had been unable to consider agenda item 7.4 on the financial implications of COP13 draft resolutions.
250. Referring to document Doc. SC54-7.2 *Status of annual contributions*, **Argentina** confirmed for the record that it had now paid its annual contribution for 2017.

Decision SC54-26: The Standing Committee approved the Report of the Subgroup on Finance and the recommendations it contained.

Agenda item 7: Financial and budgetary matters: Budget scenarios for 2019-2021 and draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters – documents SC54-Com.7 (7.3) and SC54-Com.7 Addendum (version with annexed tables)

251. Referring to earlier discussion concerning the review of the fourth Strategic Plan, **South Africa** tabled the following additional paragraphs:

“RECALLING Resolution XII.7, ENCOURAGES Parties, other governments, financial institutions, IOPs and other implementation partners to allocate resources for the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 and CEPA Programme 2016-2024.

“REQUESTS the Secretariat to develop a resource mobilization strategy for the Ramsar Convention and to make it available for consideration during SC57.”

252. **Brazil**, speaking on behalf of Parties from Latin America and the Caribbean, requested that part of paragraph 23 and all of 15ter be placed in square brackets.

Decision SC54-27: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.7 and its Addendum for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the further amendments tabled by South Africa and Brazil.

Agenda items 21.6 and 21.15: Draft resolution on wetlands, peace and security – document SC54-Com.3 Rev.1

253. The **Vice Chair** confirmed that the most recent version of the draft resolution had now been posted on the SC54 webpage.
254. **Senegal** briefly outlined the differences when compared with the text that the Standing Committee had discussed earlier in the afternoon.
255. The **Vice Chair** invited those Parties that had been unable to support the previous draft to indicate whether their concerns had been addressed by the amendments outlined by Senegal.
256. **Panama** felt that it was unusual to be discussing a further revision at the present stage of the meeting and indicated that it remained unable to support the draft resolution, given its use of terminology that Panama considered was not appropriate in a Ramsar context.
257. In response to a proposal from the **Vice Chair** that the draft resolution might be submitted to COP13 with a note clarifying that a number of Parties still had suggestions for further development of the text, **Cuba** requested that any such note should make very clear that some Parties did not support the current text.
258. **Brazil** asked that the record of the meeting reflect clearly that Brazil was unable to support the current text.
259. The **Central African Republic**, as one of the submitting Parties, called on the Standing Committee to support the draft resolution, recalling that large numbers of internally displaced people took refuge in wetlands because they had no other choice, with severe impacts for birds and other animal species there.
260. **Colombia** requested clarification of the proposal made by the Vice Chair.
261. **Senegal** observed that the majority of comments had come from Parties in one Ramsar region, most of whom had not attended the final session of contact group discussions. Senegal was nevertheless able to accept inclusion of an explanatory covering note, when the text was forwarded to COP13.
262. Following further discussion of the way forward, with contributions from **France, Senegal, South Africa** and the **United States of America**, the **Standing Committee** endorsed a suggestion from the **Vice Chair** as follows:

Decision SC54-28: The Standing Committee noted that a number of Parties had concerns about the draft resolution contained in document SC54.Com.3 Rev.1, and would seek its further development at COP13; and instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution, subject to the addition of an explanatory note making these reservations clear and referring to the positions taken by individual Parties in the record of SC54.

Agenda item 21.14: Draft resolution on wetlands in polar and subpolar regions – document SC54-Com.15

263. The **United Kingdom** thanked **Sweden** for its efforts to revise the draft resolution, but noted that, following consultation with Australia, the United Kingdom remained uncomfortable with references to the Antarctic and the Antarctic Treaty. As Sweden was no longer present, the United Kingdom suggested placing all of these references in square brackets.
264. **Argentina** and **Uruguay** supported the position of the **United Kingdom**.
265. In response to a request by **France** for clarification, the **Vice Chair** confirmed that only references to the Antarctic and the Antarctic Treaty and region would be square-bracketed, and noted that this approach was consistent with the Rules of Procedure for considering a draft resolution when the party proposing it was absent.

Decision SC54-29: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.15 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the amendment tabled by the United Kingdom, supported by Argentina, Australia and Uruguay.

Agenda item 20.2: Draft resolution on Ramsar Regional Initiatives 2019-2021 and their Operational Framework – document SC54-Com.11

266. **France** enquired about the origin of amendments made to the Annex containing the Operational Framework. The revised Annex did not work for MedWet, which involved both governmental and non-governmental partners, and France therefore wished to see the original text restored.
267. **Argentina**, speaking in its capacity as coordinator of La Plata Regional Initiative, and supported by **Brazil** on behalf of the Latin America and Caribbean region, reiterated the concern expressed by Uruguay at SC53 as a representative of the same Regional Initiative. The Parties concerned requested that the Secretariat provide information on the legal status of the governing bodies of Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) and the significance of these bodies for the Convention. It would be important to have this information in good time for COP13.
268. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **Secretariat** signalled that it would be able to provide such information.
269. Referring to the point raised by **France**, **Senegal** observed that the Secretariat had been asked to prepare a draft resolution on RRIs. Senegal had been surprised to see the Annex and suggested that it either be integrated into the text of the draft resolution itself or placed in square brackets.

270. **France** reiterated that its concern related to the amendments made to the Annex in document SC54-Com.11; the original text of the Annex had been acceptable to France in the context of MedWet.
271. **Australia** shared concerns over amendments to the Annex and asked that the paragraph concerning the repeal of previous COP decisions be placed in square brackets so that the full implications of such a repeal could be properly assessed ahead of further discussion at COP13.
272. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **Secretariat** explained that it had included all of the amendments received by email following initial SC54 discussion of the draft resolution. There had been no contradictory comments.
273. **Senegal** suggested that the draft resolution should be placed in square brackets and the Secretariat invited to continue to find ways and means of strengthening the legal status of RRI's.
274. **France** stated its position that both the draft resolution itself and the Annex should be square bracketed.
275. **Uruguay** stated for the record that its SC53 request, as supported by **Argentina** and **Brazil**, had been for the Secretariat to review the legal status of RRI's and the implications for the Convention; not to advise on strengthening the legal status of RRI's as had been suggested by Senegal.

Decision SC54-30: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to conduct a review of the legal status of Ramsar Regional Initiatives and the implications for the Convention; and to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.11 and its Annex for consideration at COP13, with both the text of the draft resolution and the Annex placed in square brackets, but otherwise without additional amendment, noting that Parties held a range of views requiring further discussion at the COP.

Agenda item 21.4: Draft resolution on Ramsar Advisory Missions – document SC54-Com.12

276. There being no interventions from the floor, the **Standing Committee** decided as follows:

Decision SC54-31: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.12 for consideration at COP13, without further substantive amendment.

Agenda item 14: Draft resolution on Enhancing the Convention's implementation, visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions – document SC54-Com.13
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277. The **Secretary General** sought a mandate from the Standing Committee to update the operative paragraph referring to the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, specifically with regard to SDG Indicator 6.6.1, taking into account recent developments that had been brought to the attention of the Committee at an earlier session.
278. **Switzerland** recalled that it had supported an earlier intervention of UNEP on this topic and requested that a corresponding reference be inserted in the preamble to the draft resolution.

279. In response to a point raised by Senegal, the **Vice Chair** invited the Secretariat to review the drafting of paragraph 49 for clarity of meaning.
280. The **United States of America** recommended combining paragraphs 11, 13 and 19, all of which addressed similar matters.
281. **Peru** requested that the text be reviewed to ensure that correct reference was made to the full, formal name of UNEP, i.e. United Nations Environment Programme.
282. The amendments tabled by the Secretary General and by Switzerland were projected on the plenary hall screen as follows:

Preambular paragraphs (after paragraph 18):

“NOTING the decision of the IAEG-SDG at its 7th Meeting to reclassify Indicator 6.6.1 and to approve a reporting line to the global SDG database hosted by the UN Statistics Division with the National Report from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands based on Ramsar definitions and requirements;

“FURTHER NOTING that the Ramsar Secretariat as co-custodian would be responsible for its respective reporting line and would contribute with UNEP to the SDG target 6.6 storyline.”

Operative paragraphs (to replace 42 of the 'clean' version):

“INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to continue working actively with the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDG), as well as with other relevant United Nations agencies, on water-related indicators, and in particular Indicator 6.6.1 on wetland extent; and

“FURTHER REQUESTS the Secretariat to continue working with Contracting Parties on the completion of National Wetland Inventories and wetland extent to report on Indicator 6.6.1.”

283. **Switzerland** suggested inclusion of an additional amendment to make it clear that Ramsar was not the only reporting line under SDG Indicator 6.6.1 and that there was also a reporting line under UNEP.
284. The **Secretary General** confirmed that the Secretariat would work with **Switzerland** and **UNEP** to make sure there was a correct reference to the UNEP reporting line.

Decision SC54-32: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.13 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the further amendments tabled by Switzerland and the Secretary General, wording of which would be finalized in consultation with UNEP.

Agenda item 21.5: Draft resolution on agriculture in wetlands – document SC54-Com.14
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285. **Canada** recalled that it had earlier raised a concern in relation to what was now the second paragraph number 11 in the preamble to the draft resolution. The paragraph currently implied that all agricultural expansion could have detrimental effects. Canada therefore proposed amending the start of the paragraph to read: “CONCERNED that expanding agriculture can have an adverse impact on landscape and species...”

286. The **Vice Chair** noted that as the submitting Party (Czech Republic) was no longer present, this amendment should be placed in square brackets.
287. The **Russian Federation** advised that it had submitted minor amendments but that these did not appear in the revised text. The Russian Federation would follow up with the Czech Republic.
288. **Brazil** requested that the whole of the paragraph referenced by Canada be placed in square brackets for further discussion at COP13.

Decision SC54-33: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.14 for consideration at COP13, subject to inclusion of the additional amendments tabled by Canada and Brazil and the minor amendments previously submitted by the Russian Federation.

Agenda item 21.13: Draft resolution on intertidal wetlands - document SC54-Com.16

289. In response to a suggestion from **Canada** that it might now be possible to remove some of the square brackets from a number of paragraphs in the operative text of the draft resolution, the **Philippines** (speaking as the proponent) advised of its intention to show all proposed amendments in square brackets until they had been reviewed by the capital, following which a fully revised text would be circulated.
290. The **Vice Chair** explained that a further review as proposed by the Philippines would not be possible, since there was no provision for an additional revision and approval stage between the close of SC54 and the opening of COP13.

Decision SC54-34: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to edit, finalize and publish the draft resolution contained in document SC54-Com.16 for consideration at COP13, with the amendments already introduced, shown in square brackets.

291. The **Vice Chair** confirmed that the Standing Committee had now considered all of the revised draft COP13 resolutions.
292. The **United States of America** reiterated its previous request that all references in draft resolutions to work to be undertaken by the STRP should be compiled and reviewed together, so that implications could be properly assessed and priorities for the forthcoming triennium identified.
293. The meeting endorsed the suggestion of the **Vice Chair** that the resource and financial implications of draft resolutions for the STRP should be considered in the context of the STRP's future work programme when this matter is considered at COP13.

Agenda item 30: Adoption of the report of the meeting

294. At the invitation of the **Vice Chair**, the **Secretariat** advised that draft summary reports for the first two days of the meeting had been posted on the SC54 webpage in the three official languages. The draft summary report for the third day had been posted in English and was currently being translated. Minor amendments could be sent to the Secretariat by email in the

coming days, but more substantive amendments and major comments should be tabled during the present agenda item. The Standing Committee was invited to authorize the Chair of the Standing Committee to approve the report of the final (fourth) day of the meeting, in line with the Convention's usual practice.

295. Following discussion of the exact procedure to be followed in relation to the draft summary report of Day 4, during which interventions were made by **Australia, France, Senegal, Switzerland** and the **United States of America**, the **Standing Committee** agreed as follows:

Decision SC54-35: The Standing Committee approved the draft summary reports of the first three days of SC54, subject to the inclusion of any minor amendments to be communicated to the Secretariat in writing; and decided that the draft summary report for the final (fourth) day would be reviewed by the Vice Chair, and, once approved by him, circulated in the three official languages of the Convention to Standing Committee members. Any final comments could be made at this stage, to be communicated to the Secretariat, in writing, within a specified deadline.

Agenda item 31: Any other business

296. **Senegal** recalled that 2021 would mark the 50th Anniversary of the Convention and, noting that it would be the turn of the African region to host the COP in that same year, enquired about the deadline for submitting invitations.
297. The **Secretariat** confirmed that, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure (Rule 3, paragraph 1), invitations to host COP14 would need to be submitted to the Secretariat at least one month prior to the close of COP13 (i.e. by 29 September 2018 at the latest).

Decision SC54-36: The Standing Committee, in closed session, approved the report of the Working Group on Staffing and accepted its recommendations, contained in Annex 3.

Agenda item 32: Closing remarks

298. The **Secretary General** renewed her deep appreciation to the Chair of the Standing Committee and wished him a full and prompt recovery. She also conveyed her sincere thanks to the Vice Chair for his work throughout the meeting, but especially for stepping in to chair the final day. Thanks were also due to all Standing Committee members, other Parties, observers, IOPs, and to the whole Secretariat team, all of whom had been working diligently, as well as to the interpreters, translators and the rapporteur. She assured the meeting of the Secretariat's continued commitment and hard work in preparing for COP13 and furthering the Convention's shared goal of conserving wetlands.
299. The **Vice Chair** paid tribute to the work of the Secretariat and to all participants, who had assisted him enormously in discharging his unexpected additional responsibilities during the final day. He signed off with an Australianism: "G'donyas!", which, he explained, translated as "Well done everyone!"

The **Vice Chair** closed the meeting at 18.15.

Annex 1

Report of the Chair of the Management Working Group

The Secretary General welcomed participants and drew their attention to Document SC54-3 Rev.2 *Adoption of the provisional working programme*. Following revision by the previous day's meeting of the Executive Team, the agenda now covered:

- CEPA Implementation Working Group
- Language Strategy (Doc. SC54-13 Rev.1)
- Review of current and proposed cooperative agreements (Doc. SC54-16 Rev.1)

CEPA Implementation Working Group:

The Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation (South Africa) reported that the Group's role is to support the Secretariat's implementation of the CEPA Action Plan.

The Secretary General confirmed that, following SC53, the Secretariat had integrated the CEPA Action Plan into its triennial work plan. It would report further on this to the Standing Committee under agenda item 12 *Work plan of the Secretariat for 2018 and proposed format for 2019-2021*.

Language Strategy:

The Secretariat referred the meeting to document Doc. SC54-13 Rev.1 and outlined the process until now, respecting the decisions of SC52 and SC53, leading to a draft resolution for the Standing Committee to consider at agenda item 13.

Review of current and proposed cooperative agreements:

The Secretariat referred to document Doc. SC54-16 Rev.1 on Secretariat actions in response to Decision SC53-03, which includes a decision tree and criteria for establishing a formal cooperative agreement. The Secretariat looks to the Standing Committee for guidance on the appropriateness and utility of the decision tree.

Contracting Parties welcomed the decision-making tool and raised several issues:

- Inclusion in the decision tree of a test of whether a formal agreement is necessary for effective partnership (United States of America)
- Creation of a more transparent form indicating outcomes for each criterion (Senegal)
- The source of the mandate to apply the criteria (Canada) and whether a final decision is made by COP or Standing Committee (South Africa) or the Management Working Group in line with Decision SC52-11 (Senegal)
- Use of a template to reduce workload and ensure standards, with Parties having an opportunity to review the draft template (United States of America, Senegal)
- The process for terminating agreements that do not meet the criteria (Canada, Senegal, Switzerland)
- Agreements with IOPs and their standardization (Canada)
- Exceptional agreements, which do not meet the criteria but may support Convention implementation (e.g. United States of America, Colombia [on behalf of regional Chair Argentina] re. Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Sea Turtles, Finland re. Society for Ecological Restoration)
- Inclusion of a risk management test in the decision tree, particularly addressing reputational risk to the Convention in partnering with private companies (Australia)
- The need to keep the process light and agile.

The Secretariat reported that the concerns would be incorporated into the proposed process, and confirmed that a single Memorandum of Cooperation for all IOPs was now in place. For current agreements that do not meet the criteria, as suggested by Parties, the Secretariat would contact the partners concerned to find the best approach, whether to renegotiate the agreement with value added, or let it end without renewal.

The Secretary General noted that agreements with donors fell outside of this process. She invited a decision instructing the Secretariat to apply the criteria, taking account of the comments of Australia, Canada and United States of America, and then report the results.

The Management working Group recommends that the Standing Committee take the following decisions:

- The Standing Committee decides to use the decision tree, as amended, found in Annex 2 to SC54-16 as a tool for the Secretariat and the Management Working Group to evaluate whether it is appropriate to consider entering into a cooperative agreement with an interested entity.
- The Standing Committee decided to request the Secretariat to reach out to the six organizations listed within Annex 1 of SC54-16 that have current agreements but which have been found not to meet the criteria for MOUs that Parties have agreed to use in order to explore whether there is interest by the organization in question in amending or concluding the agreement.
- The Standing Committee decided to accept the evaluation of current and expired agreements found in Annex 1 of SC54-16 and, based on views expressed by the Management Working Group, requested the Secretariat to engage representatives from the Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Sea Turtles and the Society for Ecological Restoration to explore the possibilities of re-engaging in collaboration, and in so doing to determine whether a formal cooperative agreement would be necessary, and to report the outcomes of its efforts to the Management Working Group at a future meeting.

Other business: 360-degree evaluation of the Secretary General

Austria proposed that the Standing Committee should decide to implement a 360-degree evaluation of the Secretary General's performance before the COP, following past practice.

The Chair confirmed that the Executive Team had addressed the matter and taken decisions in accordance with IUCN rules.

The Secretary General reported that her annual evaluation for 2017 had been carried out according to IUCN policy. Regarding an internal 360-degree evaluation, she was consulting with IUCN Human Resources on how to apply it. Further questions should be directed to them.

Parties proposed an external performance evaluation before COP13 (Switzerland, South Africa).

The United States of America noted doubts as to the value of the tool for evaluation, and supported the use of IUCN rules and processes.

Australia recalled the support of the Facilitation Working Group and SC53 in decision SC53-23 for the work of the Secretary General, and suggested further evaluation after COP13.

Japan proposed that IUCN staffing rules be posted on the website for full transparency.

Finland requested that the mandate, tasks and responsibilities of the Executive Team be shared.

The Chair proposed to continue the discussion in the Standing Committee with IUCN Human Resources present at a later session.

Annex 2

Report of the Facilitation Working Group to SC54

The Facilitation Working Group (FWG), Co-Chaired by Uruguay and the United States, and currently composed of representatives from Australia, Colombia, Finland, Japan, Kenya, Romania, Senegal, and Switzerland, would like to thank the Standing Committee for entrusting the group to work on Parties' behalf to explore means to improve the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention's governance structure and the functioning of the Secretariat. The Co-Chairs would also like to thank the FWG members for their robust participation and thoughtful contributions throughout the group's intersessional work, and the Secretary General for continuing to provide the group with relevant information to inform its work.

At its 53rd meeting the Standing Committee gave the FWG additional tasks on communication and governance.

Several Parties made statements during SC53 regarding communication between the Secretariat and Parties or other interlocutors. One such request was captured in Decision SC53-23:

The Standing Committee approved the report of the Facilitation Working Group (FWG), and took note of...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.

In response, the FWG requested the Secretariat to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide communications with Parties, NGOs, media, and other external groups under varying scenarios including with respect to Article 3.2 cases, and inform the FWG when the SOPs are in place. SOPs are anticipated to help ensure consistent messaging, timely and equitable service to Parties, transparency, accountability, and protection of sensitive information, while also helping to manage workload and workflow within the Secretariat.

In addition, the Standing Committee decided to expand the original mandate of the FWG and requested it to undertake additional work, as indicated in Decision SC53-04:

The Standing Committee agreed to review the effectiveness of the Convention's governance in order to optimize 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.

In response, the FWG first sought to identify aspects of the Convention's governance that are working well, and any aspects where there might be opportunities for improvement. Key issues and common themes expressed by FWG members included improving the effectiveness of the Convention bodies and the Secretariat by clarifying and streamlining roles, mandates, and reporting structures; optimizing the use of financial resources through enhanced transparency, accountability, and prioritization; more disciplined management of time and processes at meeting sessions to maintain focus on agenda items and allow more time for discussion of strategic issues; and leveraging technology and exploring innovative, low-cost ways to create more opportunities for Parties to interact and engage. Based on the extensive input from FWG members, the Co-Chairs developed and the FWG agreed to a suite of 14 distinct multi-stage tasks organized into three baskets (resource optimization, strategic issues, and participation/representation) to help the group better understand the potential opportunities to address these issues. Many tasks included

contributions of relevant information from the Secretariat, distilling the information received into discrete concrete elements that could help Parties accomplish their goals, and a number led to the preparation of draft resolution text where the FWG determined it was appropriate to do so. This comprehensive work plan resulted in the following outputs:

- Draft resolution text on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention to clarify and streamline working groups (found in SC54-09 draft resolution on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention).
- Draft resolution text on returning to normal levels of Standing Committee oversight (found in SC54-10 draft resolution on The Responsibilities, Roles and Composition of the Standing Committee and Regional Categorization of Countries under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands).
- Draft resolution text on enhancing Parties effective participation in the Standing Committee (to be proposed at SC54 for insertion into SC54-10 draft resolution).
- Draft resolution text on rules of procedure review, reviewing and potentially retiring outdated resolutions, and incorporation of strategic discussions into the work of the Convention (found in SC54-14 draft resolution on Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other MEAs and other international institutions).
- Draft resolution text on fostering subject matter expertise within the Secretariat and on leveraging technology and written submissions (to be proposed at SC54 for insertion into SC54-14 draft resolution).
- Recommendations to the Subgroup on Finance for consideration at its next meeting regarding potential modifications to the budget structure to enhance transparency and flexibility in the Secretariat's management of funds and improve the way Parties determine budget priorities.

In conclusion, the FWG believes it has responded to the mandates from Decisions SC53-04 and SC54-23 and requests Standing Committee members' support for the text generated by the FWG, and also continues to be at the service of the Parties if the SC considers there are additional issues that the FWG could usefully address in further service to the Parties.

The Facilitation Working Group recommends that the Standing Committee:

- Take note of and welcome the working group's efforts to facilitate clarification of the Secretariat's mandate and means of communication between the Secretariat, Parties and the public in response to Decision SC54-23.
- Take note of and welcome the draft resolution text and other outputs completed and submitted by the FWG to optimize the use of resources, create more opportunities for discussion of strategic issues, and increase the participation and representation of the Parties in response to Decision SC54-04.

ANNEX

FWG Tasks		
Theme	Nr	Task
Resource Optimization	1	<p>1. Building on SC53-05, catalogue existing Ramsar bodies, their origins, reporting structures, composition, (s)election procedures, mandates, terms of reference, and terms to the extent they exist/are known.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's findings related to Ramsar bodies in conjunction with outcome of FWG's near-term discussion on leveraging opportunities, and identify any opportunities for better leveraging such groups to delegate complex/time consuming tasks, as well as de-conflicting/concluding them as appropriate.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to rationalize the bodies of the Convention with a view to leveraging the bodies to enhance the effectiveness of the governance of the convention, de-conflicting and concluding bodies.</p>
	2	<p>1. Review Conference of the Party (COP) resolutions and SC decisions, identifying those, if any, that impact day to day performance, management, or optimization or resources of the Secretariat team.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's findings related to resolutions and decisions impacting the Secretariat team and identify any opportunities for de-conflicting/retiring them as appropriate.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to resolve conflicts/restore normal relationships while maintaining accountability between the Parties and the Secretariat with respect to day-to-day operations, de-conflicting and/or retire previous resolutions and decisions.</p>
	3	<p>1. Identify elements, if any, of the current Rules of Procedure that impact the efficiency of the work of the Convention or which might usefully be amended to optimize resources/increase efficiency.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's findings regarding the current Rules of Procedure.</p> <p>3. As appropriate, collaborate with the Secretariat to recommend modifications to the text of the Rules of Procedure for consideration by the Parties.</p>
	4	<p>1. Advise whether the Secretariat has or is considering the applicability of elements of the UN Agency Internal Control Framework to the Secretariat's existing internal practices and procedures in order to optimize resources and increase efficiency.</p>
	5	<p>1. Identify potential optimization of resources and/or efficiencies that could be gained, if any, by fostering thematic issue specialization responsibilities within the Secretariat team.</p> <p>2. Consider the Secretariat's findings regarding optimization of resources/efficiencies that could be gained by fostering thematic issue specialization responsibilities within the Secretariat team and make recommendations as appropriate regarding any further action.</p>
	6	<p>1. Engage the IUCN Executive Director to request IUCN's support for facilitating the Ramsar Secretariat's participation in UN bodies where IUCN is currently accredited and Ramsar is not.</p>
	7	<p>1. Draft text for inclusion within a relevant draft resolution to request the Secretariat review resolutions, recommendations, or other decisions, identifying those, if any, (not related to Secretariat function) that may no longer be valid or applicable, contradict each other, or are otherwise</p>

		inconsistent, and report back on its findings at SC57 (one year post-COP), with a view to Parties at COP-14 establishing a process for the Convention to regularly review and retire outdated resolutions / recommendations / decisions.
	8	1. Identify changes to the structure of the budget or to the prioritization of budget elements to address near term challenges or opportunities, if any, which might be recommended to the Subgroup on Finance for its consideration at its next meeting.
Strategic Issues	9	1. Identify potential strategic issues for Parties' consideration at SCs and/or COPs, including possible modalities for inclusion in agendas. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions for strategic issues. 3. As appropriate, draft text for inclusion in an appropriate draft resolution to set out a path to explicitly incorporate strategic discussions into the work of the Standing Committee and/or the Conference of the Parties.
	10	1. Building on materials such as SC51 Inf.Doc.03 and others, identify/recommend potential briefings/guidance/other information that could be provided to Parties to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities as members of bodies of the Convention, as well as the elements of the Rules of Procedure relevant to their work. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions for potential briefings/guidance/other information that could be provided to Parties to increase understanding of roles and responsibilities and the Rules of Procedure and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: includes input from Task 13)</i>
	11	1. Consider ways other conventions use written submissions to support their work and recommend approaches, if any, which could be possibilities for use in Ramsar, along with any estimated associated costs. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions regarding means to leverage technology and written submissions and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: Task 11 and Task 14 are combined for step two)</i>
	12	1. Explore how Parties could systematically use working groups and/or other informal groups (e.g., Friends of the Chair/Presidency) to delegate complex tasks in order to facilitate time management during meetings with a view to increasing opportunities for strategic discussions. <i>(Note: generates input into Task 1)</i>
	13	1. Explore means by which Parties could be more disciplined in the use of their time during sessions to ensure that, while allowing for full participation of participants, discussions remain focused on the agenda item under discussion, and that once issues are concluded they remain so, and make recommendations as appropriate. <i>(Note: generates input into Task 10)</i>
Participation / Representation	14	1. Explore options and costs associated with leveraging internet and other communication technologies with a view to increasing participation and representation of the Parties as well as optimizing resources. 2. Consider the Secretariat's suggestions regarding means to leverage technology and written submissions and make recommendations as appropriate for any further actions. <i>(Note: Task 11 and Task 14 are combined for step two)</i>

Annex 3

Staffing Working Group to Standing Committee

The Staffing Working Group (SWG) met April 24, 2018.

Members present were: Austria, Canada (chair), Finland, France, Japan, Romania, Senegal, Slovenia, Switzerland, and United States of America.

The working group discussed 3 topics. They are as follows:

1. Regional Officer for Africa
2. Vacancies at the Ramsar Secretariat
3. The Ramsar Secretariat's organizational chart

Regional Officer for Africa

1. The SWG reminds the Standing Committee of Annex 4 of Resolution XII.1 and the amendment to this Annex that was approved by Standing Committee at SC52 in June, 2016 noting that this amended Annex identifies the number of staff and their position (according to the IUCN Human Resources Function Group) for the Secretariat during the current triennium. The SWG would like it noted that the previous COP decision was respected despite a change in the Terms of Reference for the Regional Officer for Africa. Similarly, other staffing actions that have occurred since COP12 have respected the COP12 decision.
2. The SWG recognizes that the Secretariat often has challenges in meeting the needs and demands of Contracting Parties due to its limited size and resources. The SWG further recognizes that to facilitate efficiency gains, tap into expertise, offer opportunities to learn new skills, breakdown silos, promote teamwork, assist colleagues in times of increased workload, and enable better implementation of the convention, all staff, not just Regional Officer for Africa, may be called upon to assist with other tasks outside the scope of their normal day to day activities. The SWG recommends that the Standing Committee ask the Secretariat to ensure that all Terms of Reference to reflect this need to be flexible in their activities.
3. Specific to the Regional Officer for Africa, the SWG reminds the Standing Committee of the Staffing Working Group report (Annex 3 of the Report and Decisions of the 52nd Meeting of the Standing Committee) accepted by the Management Working Group (MWG) presented and noted by the Standing Committee in June 2016, namely:
 - The SWG recommends to the MWG in terms of where a regional officer is located, that for all core-funded regional officers the region, in discussion with the Secretariat, determines the best location for their respective regional officer. This will be in line with IUCN employment processes and rules and considers Ramsar's financial constraints; and
 - The SWG requests that the MWG ask the Secretariat to review the job description of the Regional Officer for Africa to ensure it reflects their primary focus on the geographic region of Africa.
4. In terms of next steps for the Regional Officer for Africa, the SWG recommends to the Standing Committee that it requests the Secretary General to revert the title of the position back to Regional Officer for Africa from the Regional Capacity Building Officer. At the same time, the Terms of Reference for the position should be amended, taking into account the previous discussions on this position from SC52, noted above, and also reflecting that the majority of the time of the Officer will be dedicated to the Region; however, to varying degrees the position will support the Secretariat as a whole, across all regions. This support will include, but is not limited

to providing coordination within the Secretariat for capacity building to support Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Convention and the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024.

5. The SWG recommends to the Standing Committee that the revised Terms of Reference for the Regional Officer for Africa serve as a model for the Terms of Reference of other Regional Officers to avoid similar concerns raised in the future by other regions.

Vacancies within the Ramsar Secretariat

1. The SWG recommends to the Standing Committee to ask the Secretariat to post all vacancies, in a timely manner, on the Ramsar website in addition to the IUCN website. This will facilitate attracting high quality candidates with an interest in wetland conservation.
2. The SWG further recommends to the Standing Committee to ask the Secretariat to post its HR staffing/ recruiting rules and regulations on the Ramsar website to ensure clarity about all staffing-related rules and procedures.

Secretariat Organizational Charts

1. Recognizing the need to keep all Contracting Parties and external partners up to date on who's who in the Secretariat, the SWG requests that the Standing Committee ask the Secretariat to post its organogram on the website along with who is in each position. The SWG suggests that a modification to the current section on the Ramsar website dedicated to staff could be modelled after the IUCN organogram and would meet this request.

Annex 4

Facilitation Working Group – drafting and submitting Draft Resolutions

1. Advice has been sought in relation to the Draft Resolution entitled ‘Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention’ which was drafted by the Facilitation Working Group (**FWG**). Specifically, advice has been sought as to whether the FWG may draft and submit a draft resolution.

Introduction

2. This advice considers two issues: first, whether the FWG can draft a Draft Resolution and second, whether the FWG can submit a Draft Resolution. Each of these matters will be dealt with in turn.
3. Before doing so, it is useful to point out that this Convention is governed by international law. Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice sets out the sources of international law. They are as follows: treaties, customary international law, the general principles of law accepted by ‘civilized nations’ and finally the decisions of highly qualified jurists and the opinions of highly qualified scholars. I have drawn on these sources as necessary to assist with the preparation of this advice.

Part 1: Can the FWG draft a resolution?

Rules of Procedure

4. In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to examine the Rules of Procedure (**RoP**). Rule 2(g) defines a proposal as ‘a draft resolution or recommendation submitted by one or more Contracting Party or the Standing Committee or the Conference Bureau.’
5. Rule 5.1 of the RoP further state that, *inter alia* that ‘Only Parties, the Standing Committee and the Conference Bureau shall be entitled to submit proposals.’
6. Relevantly, Rule 2(g) defines a proposal (in this instance a draft resolution) in terms of who it is submitted by, not who has drafted it. Similarly, Rule 5.1 does not state that a proposal submitted by a Party, the Standing Committee or the Conference Bureau must be *drafted* by a Party, the Standing Committee or the Conference Bureau. Rather, for the purposes of Rule 5.1, the validity of a proposal turns on who submitted the proposal, not on who drafted it.
7. For the sake of completeness, I note that Rule 34, which is entitled ‘Proposals and amendment to proposals’, contemplates the possibility of proposals being drafted by an entity other than a Party, the Standing Committee or the Conference Bureau. Specifically, ‘[t]he Standing Committee may also decide that differences of opinion on a proposal **drafted by a subsidiary body or the Secretariat** may be shown in brackets and if appropriate with explanatory comments.’: Rule 34.2 (My emphasis).
8. In summary, the RoP do not prohibit the FWG from drafting resolutions and in fact assume that a subsidiary body other than the Standing Committee may draft resolutions for consideration by the Standing Committee.

CoP Resolution

9. The FWG arose pursuant to Resolution XII.3 paragraph 58. The functions to be carried out by the group formed as a consequence of this resolution may be divided into the following 2 areas:
 - a. Facilitate discussions between the Ramsar Secretariat and IUCN in order to seek ways of improving the current operations of the Secretariat and enhancing the implementation of the Convention.
 - b. Provide the Standing Committee with a report of these discussions at each Standing Committee Meeting.
10. The functions of the group are therefore not limited to producing a report, and do not preclude the possibility – consistent with Rule 34.2 of the RoP and any subsequent direction provided by the Standing Committee – of the group drafting a resolution designed to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

Part 2: Can the FWG submit a resolution?

11. Rule 5.1 of the RoP state *inter alia* that:

...the notification shall include the draft agenda for the meeting and the deadline for submission of proposals by the Contracting Parties, which normally shall be 60 calendar days prior to the opening of the Standing Committee meeting at which recommendations are made for documents for consideration by Contracting Parties at the Conference of the Parties. Only Parties, the Standing Committee and the Conference Bureau shall be entitled to submit proposals.

12. However, the final sentence does not specify to whom these three entities are entitled to submit proposals. That is, it doesn't specify if it is to the Conference of the Parties or the Standing Committee for consideration prior to the next CoP.
13. This being the case, it is necessary to closely examine the words 'submission' and 'to submit' and the context within which these words sit. First, the word 'submission' is employed in the context of submitting proposals to the Standing Committee at the Standing Committee Meeting immediately before the CoP. Second, it logically follows that the verb 'to submit' also relates to the three eligible entities submitting proposals to the Standing Committee at this same meeting.
14. Relevantly, Rule 25.5 states that the RoP 'shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the proceedings of subsidiary bodies', which is defined in Rule 2(k) to include the Standing Committee.
15. The expression *mutatis mutandis* is of course Latin and generally means 'with the necessary changes'. In their book entitled 'Guide to Latin in International Law' (published by Oxford University Press in 2009), Fellmeth and Horwitz indicate that the term denotes minor adjustments that do not result in substantive changes to the text. This would therefore preclude any substantive changes to the text of Rule 5.1.
16. I shall now move on to SC Decision 53-04, which instructs the FWG as follows:

The outcomes this review and corresponding proposals should be submitted for approval to the next meeting of the Standing Committee for subsequent submission to the Conference of the Parties.

17. It is clear that there is a conflict between Rule 5.1 of the RoP and SC Decision 53-04. Ordinarily, the RoP – having been adopted by the full CoP – would take precedence over a decision of the

Standing Committee.

18. Relevantly, I note that more than one Draft Resolution has been submitted to the Standing Committee by entities other than the Standing Committee, Conference Bureau or a Contracting Party. I also understand that it is common practice for the Secretariat – under instructions – to draft and submit Draft Resolutions to the Standing Committee for final approval by the Standing Committee.
19. This being the case, I have therefore considered the application of customary international law to these particular circumstances.¹ In the *North Sea Continental Shelf Case*, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) held that for a customary rule to emerge, it needed to satisfy two elements: (1) State practice, that is widespread and representative participation and (2) *opinio juris*, which the ICJ described in the Nicaragua case as States ‘behaving so that their conduct is evidence of a belief that the practice is rendered obligatory by the existence of a rule of law requiring it.’
20. No objections have been raised in relation to the Draft Resolutions submitted by the Secretariat and STRP for consideration by the Standing Committee. Further, it appears that it has been common practice for entities other than the Standing Committee, Conference Bureau or Contracting Parties to submit Draft Resolutions to the Standing Committee for its consideration and adoption. I am therefore of the view that on balance this practice is likely to reflect a customary rule or norm and to that extent is acceptable.
21. The Standing Committee may still wish to make a decision to submit to itself all of the Draft Resolutions that do not strictly comply with Rule 5.1. This would include any Draft Resolutions submitted by the Secretariat, the FWG and the STRP.
22. Finally, I would recommend that the Contracting Parties consider amending the RoP to make it explicitly permissible for entities other than the Standing Committee, Conference Bureau or Contracting Parties to submit a Draft Resolution. While customary international law is binding, it would assist Parties if the customary rule identified in this advice were codified in the RoP.

¹ In doing so, I note the Draft Conclusions of the International Law Commission entitled the ‘Identification of Customary International Law’ indicate that resolutions of intergovernmental conferences ‘may provide evidence for establishing the existence and content of a rule of customary international law, or contribute to its development’ (Conclusion 12.2).
<http://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/reports/2016/english/chp5.pdf&lang=EFSRAC>

Annex 5

Report of the Subgroup on Finance

The Subgroup on Finance, in its meetings on 23, 25, 26 and 27 April 2018, discussed the following items and recommends the following:

1. Update on the financial/management review of non-core funds (undertaken by IUCN Oversight Unit):
 - i. The Oversight Unit reported that, following their review, they were able to provide a reasonable assurance on the accuracy of non-core funds balances. The recommendation of the Subgroup on Finance is to not undertake further work on the non-core balances already analysed such as the admin project, except the Swiss Grant for Africa, as well as to do more work on other project balances such as the African Voluntary Contributions and SGF.
 - ii. To assist with the second phase of the management review of non-core funds, it will be necessary to hire a management consultant to further look at and assess internal controls.
 - iii. The Subgroup on Finance recommend that Appendix A, of the 2016 and 2017 audits, containing an overview of non-core funding should be – in future – excluded from the financial statements and published in separate reports to the Standing Committee.

2. Report on financial matters for 2016-2018 (Doc. SC54-7.1 Rev1):
 - i. It is recommended to accept the 2016 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2016.
 - ii. It is recommended to accept the 2017 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2017.
 - iii. Core budget results for 2017 and carry-forward of 2017 surplus: The core budget results for 2017 were noted. The subgroup would like Standing Committee to take note of the following change in categories, the Communications and Partnership functions were merged to create a Resource Mobilization and Outreach category.

The Subgroup on Finance recognizes the large surplus and recommends that the Standing Committee authorises the use of the 2016 and 2017 surplus of CHF 90K for 2018; and conditionally recommends that the Standing Committee authorizes the use of 2016 and 2017 surplus for the next triennium activities of CHF 600K as per table 1 below (depending on the outcome of the decision on the triennium core budget):

Table 1: Proposed use of 2017 surplus (in '000 CHF)

Overall 2017 surplus (I)	825
Pre-committed (see table 1, SC54-7.1 Rev.1; as per decision SC53-29)	
RAMs	77
Capacity-building	26
Interpretation pre-COP	32
Executive Team*	0
Total pre-committed (II)	135
Surplus after pre-commitments - proposed for allocation (III = I - II)	690

Proposed use of surplus:*	
Management consultant (internal controls / phase 2 of management review)	20
<i>Activities</i>	
Initial analysis and fundraising proposal for inventories, analysing data (SDG monitoring 6.6.1) - 2018	70
<i>Budget under budget scenario A (2019-2021) reduced compared to SC54-7.3</i>	
Communications (2019-2021)	120
Staff travel (2019-2021)	60
Regional Initiatives (2019-2021)	60
Web / IT support(2019-2021)	30
STRP implementation (2019-2021)	15
RSIS (2019-2021)	15
<i>Additional costs to be covered in 2019-2021 triennium</i>	
Roll-out new IUCN competency framework and promotion guidelines	110
Staff travel	60
Planning and capacity-building	130
Total proposed for re-allocation (IV)	690
Remaining surplus to be allocated (V = III - IV)	0

* Previously CHF 8K allocated but not used

To cover the costs of a full-time Accounting Assistant, budget in the following lines were reduced (compared to the Secretariat's proposal): Communications, Web/IT support and development, Support to Regional Initiatives and Ramsar Sites Information Service maintenance. STRP implementation was reduced to allow for a travel line of the STRP Chair. To cover these gaps, the Subgroup on Finance recommends the use of surplus.

- iv. The Subgroup on Finance noted the status of non-core funding status and voluntary contributions for 2017.
- v. The Subgroup on Finance noted the status of African voluntary contributions being CHF 50K, including CHF 20K located within WACOWET, subject to further analysis of the oversight unit whose report is expected end of June 2018 and minus CHF 1K to reflect a correction in the reporting of Madagascar's voluntary contributions (move CHF 1K to assessed contributions received, changes to be done in the financial system in 2018).

The recommendation of the Subgroup on Finance is to not discuss the use of the balance at this stage but to await the outcome of the review undertaken by the IUCN Oversight Unit providing the final balance by end of June 2018. It requests the Secretariat to inform the Ramsar regional initiatives in Africa on an annual basis the available balance of the African voluntary contribution fund and invites those regional initiatives to submit requests to the Secretariat to access available funds using the rules of regional initiatives found in Resolution RRI;

- vi. 2018 Core budget: The Subgroup on Finance recommends approving the adjustments to the COP12-approved core budget for 2018 presented in Annex 1.
- vii. Pre-COP meetings: The Subgroup on Finance acknowledges all Contracting Parties who have provided funding to the pre-COP meetings, namely from Australia (CHF 7K), Canada (CHF 33K), Germany (CHF 12K), New Zealand (CHF 19K), Norway (CHF 7K) and Switzerland (CHF 100K) and notes that the pre-COP meetings were fully funded due to authorisation by the Subgroup on Finance for using certain identified balances for covering the funding gap.
- COP13: The Subgroup on Finance notes the status of funding and encourages additional voluntary contributions. It recommends that balances proposed below be authorised to be used as a back-up option whilst fundraising efforts should continue.
- viii. Small Grants Fund: The Subgroup on Finance recommends discontinuing the Small Grants Fund upon using up the balance of CHF 137K for its intended purpose. The Ramsar Secretariat should put out a call for proposals in this respect. For the future, the Ramsar Secretariat should continue looking for funding opportunities to leverage activities on the ground and report back to the Contracting Parties.
- ix. Decide on use of non-core balances: The Subgroup on Finance recommends not to translate any documents pertaining to the working group of the Strategic Plan 2019-2021, budgeted at CHF 6K and recommends the use of non-core balances as per table 2 below.

Table 2: Proposed use of balances of non-core funds

Name of project	Balance as at 31 December 2017 (in '000 CHF)	Revised (Subgroup on Finance)** (in '000 CHF)	Proposed use of balance
WACOWET Regional Initiative*	49	29	Funding of sponsored delegates to COP13
East Africa Centre	27	27	Funding of sponsored delegates to COP13
Balance in admin project earmarked for COP priorities	116	116	Funding of sponsored delegates to COP13
Balance African Voluntary Contributions**	31	50	Balance to be kept awaiting outcome and report of IUCN Oversight unit.
Small Grants Fund***	137	137	Use balance for intended purpose (new call for proposals to be done by Ramsar Secretariat)
Total	360	359	

* CHF 20K (out of balance of CHF 49K of WACOWET reported in SC54-7.1 Rev1 Annex 3) to be transferred to African voluntary contributions

** CHF 50K arrived at as follows: CHF 31K balance as per Annex 3 of SC54-7.1 Rev1 minus CHF 1K Madagascar + CHF 20K from WACOWET

*** Upon checking the ancestry for the past 10 years and confirming the balance (by IUCN Oversight Unit)

Note: A total of CHF 108K was authorized inter-sessionally by the Subgroup on Finance to be used for pre-COP meetings, thereof the following funding from non-core funds: CHF 49K from COP-balances and CHF 32K from SC balances; and CHF 27K from 2016 core surplus set-aside for Regional Initiatives

- x. Approach for managing non-core funds: The Subgroup on Finance recommends that the Standing Committee instructs the Secretariat to use IUCN policies and procedures as well as guidelines for the management of non-core funds, especially in regards to the capacity

to implement projects and the use of management fees and that the corresponding text be put into the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters.

It further recommends postponing any decision on the use of the “old” balance of accumulated management fees of CHF 298K within the non-core admin project previously reported by the Secretariat until the IUCN Oversight Unit has finished its work and shared its report.

3. Status of annual contributions (Doc. SC54-7.2):

- i. The Subgroup on Finance takes note of the status of annual contributions.
- ii. The Subgroup on Finance takes note of the proposed Secretariat actions for 2018 to keep engaging with Contracting Parties on contributions not received, especially those older than three years, and to keep publishing the updated status of contributions on the Ramsar website.
- iii. Highlights the increase in assessed annual contributions receivable and in the annual provision against contributions receivable.
- iv. African voluntary contributions: The Subgroup on Finance asks the Ramsar Secretariat to correct, in their 2018 accounting, the numbers in the African voluntary contributions by moving CHF 1K received from Madagascar from African voluntary contributions to assessed contributions received in 2017. This correction follows the practice where contributions received are applied first against assessed contributions. With this, the Subgroup on Finance notes the current status of the voluntary contributions of Contracting Parties in the African region. The Subgroup on Finance asked that it the last column in Annex 2 be deleted in future documents.
- v. The Subgroup on Finance discussed the possibility of “sanctions” for Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions and concluded to not recommend this action but to recommend that the Secretariat make contact with the permanent missions in Geneva of Parties that have not paid contributions for three years or more and to recommend that the Regional Representatives in the Standing Committee be encouraged to reach out to the countries in their regions with outstanding contributions to encourage them to pay their contributions.

4. Budget scenarios for 2019-2021 and draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (Doc. SC54-7.3)

- i. Budget scenarios: The Subgroup on Finance recommends that 2 budget scenarios, one at 0 % increase and one at 1.5% increase be presented at the 13th meeting of the conference of the Contracting Parties. These budget scenarios are presented in Doc. SC54-Comm.7 (7.3).

Compared to the Secretariat’s proposal, the subgroup recommends including a full-time Accounting Assistant at A2 level in budget scenario A and further recommends that the costs of the travel implant of CHF 20K per year be borne by a reduction in staff travel of CHF 20K per year. To cover the costs of a full-time Accounting Assistant, budget in the following lines was reduced (compared to the Secretariat’s proposal): Communications, Web/IT support and development, Support to Regional Initiatives and Ramsar Sites

Information Service maintenance. STRP implementation was reduced to allow for a travel line of the STRP Chair.

In Budget Scenario B (1.5% increase), the reductions (compared to the previous triennium budget) in staff travel, communications and STRP implementation were put back in. In addition, some budget was allocated to planning and capacity-building.

The Subgroup on Finance further recommends that, depending on which budget scenario will be approved, surplus be used to partly finance activities such as communications, staff travel and regional initiatives. Should the surplus be finished and/or not enough surplus be available, it asks the Secretariat to re-balance the budget and look for economies.

- ii. Draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters: The draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters discussed by the Subgroup on Finance (SC54-Com.7 (7.3)) is recommended to be presented at the 13th meeting of the conference of the Contracting Parties.

5. Regional Initiatives

- i. The Subgroup on Finance takes note of Doc. SC54-20.1 and confirms the 2018 core budget allocation of CHF 120K. The subgroup further notes the un-allocated 2016 surplus of CHF 33K set-aside for Regional Initiatives (see Annex 1 below).
- ii. As per Table 2 of SC54-20.1, the requested Ramsar 2018 budget contribution is CHF 132K. The Subgroup recommends the Standing Committee to authorize the full CHF 132K and to allocate the following for Regional Initiatives in 2018: CHF 42K to Senegal Basin, CHF 30K to Amazon Basin, CHF 30K to Central Asia and CHF 30K to Indo-Burma.

**Annex 1 (SC54-7.1 rev1 Addendum, revised Annex 4):
Proposed Core Budget 2018 (without 2017 carry-forwards)**

CHF 000'S	Budget 2018 (COP12- approved)	Authorised use of 2016 surplus in 2018*	Proposed re-allocation 2018	Proposed budget 2018 after re-allocation
INCOME				
Parties' Contributions	3,779			3,779
Voluntary contributions	1,065			1,065
Income Tax	225			225
Income Interest	12			12
TOTAL INCOME	5,081	0	0	5,081
EXPENDITURES				
A. Secretariat Senior Management	798	0	0	798
Salaries and social costs	674			674
Other employment benefits	79			79
Travel	45			45
B. Resource Mobilization and Outreach**	250	0	0	250
Salaries and social costs	188			188
Other employment benefits	52			52
Travel	10			10
C. Regional Advice and Support	1,342	0	0	1,342
Salaries and social costs	1,201			1,201
Other employment benefits	56			56
Travel	85			85
Ramsar Advisory Missions				0
D. Support to Regional Initiatives	120	33	0	153
Regional networks and centers	120	33		153
E. Science and Policy	212	44	180	436
Salaries and social costs	110		180	290
Other employment benefits	2			2
Travel	10			10
STRP implementation	40			40
STRP meetings	50			50
Strategic Plan (2019-2021)		44		44
F. Communications**	569	0	(180)	389
Salaries and social costs	434		(180)	254
Other employment benefits	0		0	0
Travel	5			5
CEPA Program	30			30
Comms, Translations, Publications and Reporting Implementation	100			100
G. Administration/RSIS/Web	896	57	(20)	933
Salaries and social costs	629	57		686
Other employment benefits	5			5
Staff hiring and departure costs	25			25
Travel				0
Web/IT support and development	120		(10)	110
Ramsar Sites Information Service (maintenance and develop)	117		(10)	107
H. Operating Costs	94	55	0	149

General	80			80
Equipment/Office Supplies	14			14
Planning and Capacity building		55		55
I. Standing Committee Services	150	0	0	150
Standing Committee delegates' support	45			45
Standing Committee meetings	10			10
SC translation	60			60
Simultaneous interpretation at SC Meetings	35			35
Other meetings				0
J. IUCN Administrative Service Charges (maximum)	540	0	20	560
Administration, Human Resources, Finance & IT services	540		20	560
K. Miscellaneous - Reserve Fund	110	0	0	110
Provisions	50			50
Legal Services	60			60
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	5,081	189	0	5,270

* See SC53-29. Out of CHF 510K 2016 surplus, CHF 294K allocated to 2017, CHF 189K allocated to 2018; CHF 27K authorized by Subgroup on Finance for pre-COP meetings.

** Name change from Partnership Coordinator to Resource Mobilization and Outreach reflecting the merger of the functions of Partnership Coordinator and Communications. Categories proposed to be combined in next triennium.