

## Provisional 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 document 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. **Senegal, Chair of the Subgroup on Finance**, 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
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7. The **Secretary General** referred the meeting to 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 Doc. SC54-4 Rev.1.**

Agenda item 5: Report of the Secretary General
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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 received late (**United States**).
  - 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 moving forward.
  - 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. The **Chair** 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 the issues raised by Parties and to report back to a later plenary session.

Agenda item 6: Report of the Management Working Group
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14. The **Chair of the Management Working Group (Australia)** presented the summary report of their meeting on 23 April 2018, which is included presented 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.

Agenda item 9: Report of the Facilitation Working Group

Agenda item 21: Draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties:

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), 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** (including in its capacity as co-Chair of the FWG), and the **Chair of the 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;
  - Clarification of the implications for the roles and responsibilities of the Standing Committee, including the potential retirement of some working groups;
  - Clarification of the implications for the STRP; and
  - Clarification of financial implications.
27. The **Chair** tasked the FWG with further consideration of the issues raised and with preparing recommendations for submission to the Standing Committee in due course.

**05:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee**

Agenda item 21. Draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties (continued)

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

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 **Central African Republic** and by **Senegal**, respectively.
29. A number of Parties, including **Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa** expressed concern that some language used in the two draft resolutions could be perceived as straying beyond the mandate of the Ramsar Convention.
30. **France** supported the merging of the texts.
31. **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 UNEA2 and UNEA3.
34. **Wetlands International** felt that the link between wetlands, peace and security was missing.
35. The **Chair** 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, 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. The **Chair** 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 these could be made available to the group.

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**, **United States of America**, **Senegal**, **Slovenia**, **Uruguay** (supported by **Cuba**), the **Chair of the STRP** and **WWT**.
43. The **Chair** 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/or suggested amendments were tabled by **Colombia**, **Japan**, **United Arab Emirates** and **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. The **Chair** 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. Ramsar Regional Initiatives

20.2 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. Draft resolutions submitted by Contracting Parties (continued)

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. The draft resolution was supported by Uruguay.

52. During discussion, specific comments and/or suggested amendments were tabled by **Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Finland, France, Japan, Senegal, South Africa, 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)
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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, United Kingdom, 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. The **Chair** 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 18:00.