

Report and decisions of the 55th meeting of the Standing Committee

Sunday 21 October 2018

10.15 – 14:00 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;
 - His Excellency Mr Mohamed Al Afkham, Director General Fujairah Municipality, the United Arab Emirates, the representative of the Host Country.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda

2. The **Chair** introduced document SC55 Doc.2 *Provisional agenda*.

Decision SC55-01: The Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda.

Agenda item 3: Admission of Observers

3. The **Secretariat** referred to document COP13 Doc.7 *Admission of Observers*, noting that, with regard to the list of organizations requesting to be represented by observers under paragraph 7, the Secretariat was still clarifying some documentation issues. It suggested the provisional acceptance of this list for the purposes of admitting observers at SC55.

Decision SC55-02: The Standing Committee provisionally accepted the list of bodies and agencies listed in paragraphs 6 and 7 of document COP13 Doc.7 for the purposes of admitting observers at SC55.

Agenda item 4.1: Arrangements for COP13 - Review of the provisional agenda and working programme

4. The **Chair** introduced documents COP13 Doc.3.1 Rev.1 and COP13 Doc.3.2.
5. In response to a query from the **Republic of Korea**, the Secretariat clarified that the Wetland City Accreditation would be discussed under item 11 of the SC55 agenda.

Decision SC55-03: The Standing Committee approved documents COP13 Doc.3.1 Rev. 1 and COP13 Doc.3.2 to be forwarded to COP13, subject to any proposals that might arise under agenda item 11 of the present meeting.

Agenda item 4.2: Arrangements for COP13 - Process for reviewing draft resolutions

6. The **Chair** introduced document SC55 Doc.4.2, which had been prepared in response to Decision SC54-11.
7. In response to points raised by **Senegal** and **Sweden**, the Secretariat confirmed that a proposed running order for the consideration of draft resolutions would be submitted to the Conference Bureau.
8. The **United States of America**, supported by **Australia**, and by **France on behalf of the European Union**, agreed with the principle that minor edits could be dealt with by the Secretariat and concurred with the suggestion that the Conference Bureau could delegate some of this work to working groups or “friends of the Chair” groups.
9. The **Secretary General** noted an absence of support for amending the Rules of Procedure (as proposed in paragraph 21 of document SC55 Doc.4.2). She emphasised the importance of the timely delivery of revised texts of draft resolutions, and urged Parties to meet the deadline of 26 October in order that documents might all be translated in good time prior to their final consideration.

Decision SC55-04: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a process for the consideration of draft resolutions by Parties at COP13, taking into accounts the comments made.

Agenda item 5: Nomination of COP13 President and Vice-Presidents

10. The **Chair** recalled Rule 21.1, and invited nominations for President, Alternate President and two Vice-Presidents, noting the need to bear in mind regional balance.
11. As host country, the **United Arab Emirates** nominated: as President His Excellency Dr Thani Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Climate Change and Environment; as Alternate President His Excellency Eng. Mohamed Saif Al Afkham, Director General Fujairah Municipality; and as Vice-President Mr Eric Alvares of the **United States of America**.
12. Following further discussion, the **Chair** recognized that it would be desirable to enable the regions to discuss nominations for the second position of Vice-President.
13. **Australia**, in its capacity as Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee, suggested that the Standing Committee discuss this issue when it reconvenes on Tuesday morning as the Conference Bureau, to receive nominations for the second position of Vice-President.

Decision SC55-05: The Standing Committee agreed to forward to the Conference Bureau the three nominations received, and to complete discussions when it reconvene on 23 October to receive nominations for the second position of Vice-President.

Agenda item 6.1: Establishment of COP13 committees - Committee on Finance and Budget

14. The **Secretariat** noted that at past COPs the Committee on Finance was composed of the members of the Subgroup on Finance, with additional regional representation. It suggested

that each region should propose a representative for this purpose, for the Secretariat to forward to the Conference Bureau.

15. **Switzerland**, supported by **Australia, Japan, Mauritania** and the **United States of America**, requested that membership of the Committee be kept open to all Parties as at previous COPs.

Decision SC55-06: The Standing Committee agreed to propose to the Conference Bureau that membership of the Committee on Finance be open to all Parties, and encouraged all regions to ensure appropriate representation.

Agenda item 6.2: Establishment of COP13 committees – Credentials Committee

16. The **Secretary General** recalled that, under Rule 19 of the Rules of Procedure, each region is required to make a nomination for election to the Credentials Committee, for consideration by the Conference Bureau.

Decision SC55-07: The Standing Committee agreed that the regional groups would share their nominations for the Credentials Committee, for the Secretariat to forward to the Conference Bureau.

Agenda item 7: Review of the financial implications of COP13 draft resolutions

17. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document COP13 Doc.17.
18. **Switzerland** noted that a revised version of draft resolution 18.2, which it had transmitted to Contracting Parties, was now cost neutral. The **United States of America** welcomed the document but suggested that a more neutral form of words, such as “Resources required”, might be appropriate for the header of the last column in Table 1.
19. The **Secretary General** clarified that the time estimates given in Table 1 were additional to the time already allocated by the Secretariat.

Decision SC55-08: The Standing Committee took note of document COP13 Doc.17.

Agenda item 8.1: Financial and budgetary matters - Budget update for 2018

20. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document SC55 Doc.8.1. The Committee was asked to review and approve the proposed reallocation of 2018 core budget, and to approve the use of the remaining non-core balances.
21. The **United States of America** welcomed the document.

Decision SC55-09: The Standing Committee approved the reallocation of the 2018 core budget and the use of remaining non-core balances as proposed in document SC55 Doc 8.1.

Agenda item 8.2: Financial and budgetary matters - IUCN review of non-core finances

22. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document SC55 Doc.8.2, which had been prepared by IUCN’s Oversight Unit in line with the discussions and decisions of SC54, and which included the Secretariat’s management response. The Standing Committee was invited to consider the report as an input to COP13; further follow-up might be considered at SC57.

23. The document was welcomed by **Australia, Japan, Switzerland and the United States of America**. The Secretariat was commended for its efforts to ensure greater transparency; something that would reassure both Parties and donors.
24. **Japan** suggested that the Secretariat should pay particular attention to pursuing recommendation 9 of the report.

Decision SC55-10: The Standing Committee welcomed and took note of document SC55 Doc 8.2.

Agenda item 9: Review of the legal status of Ramsar Regional Initiatives and the implications for the Convention

25. The **Secretariat** recalled that document SC55 Doc.9 had been prepared in response to Decision SC54-30.
26. The **Legal Adviser** presented the Executive Summary of document SC55 Doc.9.
27. **France** clarified that it was not the overall Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative that had national legal status, but rather the Initiative's secretariat.
28. **Australia, Honduras and Uruguay** broadly welcomed the review, noting that it raised a number of important issues requiring further consideration.
29. The **Secretary General** confirmed that the document was for information only; it was not being submitted for approval by the Standing Committee.

Decision SC55-11: The Standing Committee took note of document SC55 Doc.9.

Agenda item 10: Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly

30. The **Chair** reported on the steps taken so far and noted that this matter had been postponed for consideration at the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2019, since there was still no consensus among Contracting Parties.
31. The **Secretary General** briefly reported on the Secretariat's experiences, as part of the IUCN delegation at the July 2018 meeting of the High Level Political Forum, which discussed Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 15, and when attending the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, representing the Ramsar Convention in its own right. She recalled the various options that had been pursued to try to raise the visibility of the Convention within the UNGA.
32. **Switzerland** and the **United States of America** favoured furthering engagement through the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
33. **Switzerland** noted that independent legal status for Ramsar under Swiss law would require complete separation from IUCN and that this would have onerous financial implications.
34. **China** fully supported the goal of securing observer status for the Ramsar Convention within the UNGA.

35. **Finland** sought advice on whether the option of independent status for the Ramsar Secretariat might also require an amendment to the text of the Convention.
36. **Colombia** expressed commitment to finding a solution, but emphasized that the legal consequences of various options would need to be studied in detail, with input from the Legal Adviser. It was important that the Ramsar Convention should be able to participate at the UNGA under its own name.
37. **Mauritania** called for Ramsar Contracting Parties to make this issue a priority within the UN system and suggested that an *ad hoc* group of Parties might be established to support the Secretariat.
38. The **Chair** informed the Committee that Uruguay was interested in working to identify alternative solutions, in order to ensure the participation of the Secretariat in relevant international events within the United Nations system.

Decision SC55-12: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, with support from an informal group of interested Contracting Parties, to bring forward a structured proposal, taking into account the various options, for consideration at SC57.

Agenda item 11: Wetland City Accreditation process
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39. The **Secretariat** briefly recalled decision SC54-24 and introduced document SC55 Doc.11, noting that the Standing Committee was expected to report to COP13 with regard to: (a) the names of the cities nominated for Wetland City Accreditation; and (b) progress in implementation of the Wetland City Accreditation (WCA) scheme and financing.
40. The **Republic of Korea**, supported by **Cambodia, China, France, Mauritania, Switzerland** and **Tunisia**, strongly recommended that the Wetland City certificates be presented by the Secretary General directly to the representatives of the accredited cities.
41. In response to a proposal made by the **Republic of Korea** that COP13 address both items 15.1 and 15.2 on 25 October, the **Secretariat** noted that this would provide limited opportunity to respond to any requests for further information that might arise under item 15.1; it would nevertheless communicate to COP13 the proposed amendment to the provisional working programme.
42. **China** considered that final approval of the nominations for the Wetland City Accreditation should be made by the Conference of Contracting Parties at COP13.
43. **Switzerland** suggested that in future the Conference might delegate approval to the Standing Committee, as was already the case with the Ramsar Awards. Inserting a paragraph into the draft resolution contained in document COP13 Doc.18.7 might be one way of addressing this issue.
44. **France** called for improvements in the WCA process prior to COP14.
45. The **Secretary General** remarked that it would be helpful to clarify the various aspects of the Wetland City Accreditation scheme to ensure a clear mandate for the Secretariat and to overcome some of the difficulties and ambiguities encountered in implementing the decisions adopted at COP12 and SC54.

Decision SC55-13: The Standing Committee took note of the discussion concerning Wetland City Accreditation, and instructed the Secretariat to bring forward a proposed amendment to the working programme for COP13, with a view to addressing agenda items 15.1 and 15.2 on 25 October. The Committee confirmed that WCA certificates should be received by the relevant city representatives present at COP13.

Agenda item 12: Agenda for the 56th meeting of the Standing Committee

46. The **Chair** tabled document SC56 Doc.2.
47. The **United States of America** observed that at SC56 the Standing Committee might also wish to consider the establishment of any subgroups required to respond to final COP13 resolutions.

Decision SC55-14: The Standing Committee noted the observations and adopted document SC56 Doc.2.

Any Other Business

48. The **United States of America** thanked the outgoing Chair of the Standing Committee for his stewardship of the Standing Committee since COP12.
49. The **Chair** recalled that the Standing Committee would reconvene on the morning of 23 October to finalize the nomination of a second COP Vice-President.
50. In response to a question from **Senegal**, the **Secretariat** confirmed that the draft resolution contained in document COP13 Doc.18.10 would take into account the fact that Ramsar Site no. 139, Réserve Spéciale de Faune de Ndiaël, was being removed from the Montreux Record, further to the conclusions of a recent Ramsar Advisory Mission.
51. The **Secretary General** reported that, subsequent to the decision of the Standing Committee at SC54 to present the Ramsar Award for Wetland Innovation to Pro Natura, Mexico, it had emerged that this organization was experiencing legal issues. She therefore proposed deferring presentation of this Award for up to six months, pending clarification of the situation.

Decision SC55-15: The Standing Committee confirmed that presentation of the Ramsar Award for Wetland Innovation should be deferred for six months, pending clarification of legal issues affecting the recipient.