

## Follow up to COP13 and preparation of COP14 Report of the Secretariat on COP13

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the present report; and
- ii. provide feedback to the Secretariat regarding lessons learned from COP13 and consider as appropriate suggestions raised in relation to potential improvement of processes established by Contracting Parties.

### Overview of COP13

1. The 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP13) was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), from 22 to 29 October 2018. Interventions made during the meeting and informal subsequent feedback from Contracting Parties and observers regarding the organization of the meeting were positive. The Secretariat echoes the gratitude to the host country already expressed by the COP, for generously providing the meeting facilities and for its support during COP13.
2. COP13 adopted 25 Resolutions on a wide range of subjects related to wetland conservation and the implementation and administration of the Convention.
3. There were a total of 1,360 participants representing Contracting Parties, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, the Convention's International Organization Partners and non-governmental organizations, excluding conference staff and local participants. This is a significant increase from the 930 participants at COP12, which may reflect an increase in the level of interest in conservation of wetlands, and perhaps in environmental issues more broadly.
4. Ninety-five side events were held on the margins of the COP. Twenty-five organizations provided exhibits. A press event was held announcing Jebel Ali Wetland Sanctuary as the UAE's eighth Ramsar Site. Participants participated in field trips to Al Wathba Wetland and Eastern Mangrove National Park in Abu Dhabi, Ras al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary in Dubai, Mangrove Al Hafiya and Wasit Natural Reserves in Sharjah, Al Zorah Reserve in Ajman and Wadi Wurayah in Fujairah.

## **Lessons learned and possible improvements in how the Secretariat manages meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties**

5. The Secretariat has organized an internal process including two meetings of all staff to identify lessons learned from COP13 and to continue strengthening its core function of supporting the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention. Detailed follow-up is being carried out in the different areas of work. The Secretariat presents some key highlights for Standing Committee's feedback.
6. The detailed organization and implementation of a large meeting requires thorough logistical arrangements. These include registration before and during the meeting, as well as a range of other services at the venue, including interpretation, production and translation of summary records and other documents, support for regional meetings and working groups and website management. The Secretariat had prioritized in this triennium the strengthening of its capacity to serve the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention, and thus had strived to improve its services to the Parties at COP13.

### *Logistics*

7. The overall coordination of logistics was enhanced through the revision of the job descriptions of the Deputy Secretary General and of an administrative assistant position. A conference planning and administration position was also recruited within the Secretariat. This new capacity and expertise resulted in streamlined coordination with the host country, travel providers and contracted services. This conference planning and administration position better allows the Secretariat to deliver on its core role of servicing Contracting Parties, particularly as it relates to the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies.
8. Planning sessions in which detailed guidance was provided were held with all staff in advance of the main meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies, further strengthening the capacities and coordination of staff.
9. The Secretariat uses a new customer relationship management (CRM) system to maintain a single database of contacts for all its work. The CRM was used to register COP13 meeting participants, successfully streamlining the registration process, and to facilitate the distribution of correspondence. It is now exploring how to extend the use of this platform to other aspects of meeting management such as onsite registration, badge production and management of the accreditation process, to better support Contracting Parties during future meetings of the COP. Onsite registration and badge production will be piloted at the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC57).
10. As it does after each meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat has taken note of items on which there was a lack of clarity or differing expectations and has updated the host country agreement accordingly. The agreement has also been updated to reflect a desire to ensure future COPs are more environmentally friendly (for example, through reduction in the use of paper and plastic) and to reflect changes in technology (for example, by responding to the need for greater wireless capacity). Opportunities for efficiencies, such as shared office space for staff, have also been identified and included in the updated agreement.
11. The utilization of a prepaid debit card to provide daily subsistence allowance (DSA) to eligible delegates enabled an improvement in support to sponsored delegates. The cards reduced the

risk of theft or loss and streamlined financial management of the DSA distributions. It is envisaged that prepaid cards will be used at future meetings.

12. The Secretariat is updating the COP manual and developing standing operating procedures to enhance institutional knowledge and further improve the efficiency of the processes for organizing and managing meetings of the COP on the basis of past experience, and taking into account best practices in meetings of other Conventions. The Secretariat also welcomes suggestions from Contracting Parties and observers regarding possible improvements.

#### *Documentation*

13. Regarding documentation, an important achievement was that the text of all draft resolutions was made available in the three official languages of the Convention prior to their adoption. This is a significant improvement after the documentation challenges experienced at COP12. Also, daily reports were produced and made available in the three languages.
14. The adoption of a process to discuss and manage draft resolutions by Standing Committee at SC55, immediately before COP13, was critical to ensure that the document process could be managed in an appropriate way.
15. Areas for improvement identified by the Secretariat include the management of comments on draft resolutions provided to the Secretariat and to the chairs and members of working groups. The Secretariat is considering options to enhance this process.

#### *Communications*

16. A communications plan and timeline for COP13 was developed in collaboration with the host country. The plan included the development of key messages, leveraging the release of the Global Wetland Outlook, COP13 website development, media outreach and social media. From 1 August to 30 October 1,794 articles were written on COP13, the Ramsar Convention and the Global Wetland Outlook. These articles had a reach of 1.2 billion people and an advertising value of EUR 10 million.
17. There was strong interest from the media in both the Ramsar Awards and the Wetland City Accreditation scheme. There is an opportunity to increase the visibility of the Convention and wetlands through actively leveraging and promoting these events at COP14.
18. Given that 2021 will be the 50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention, COP14 presents an important opportunity to celebrate this important milestone and the accomplishments of the Convention over the past 50 years, as well as to draw attention to the work and actions needed if the continuing loss of wetlands is to be halted. The Secretariat has already begun developing a 50th anniversary communications plan that includes COP14.
19. The primary lesson for communications is the importance of developing a joint communications plan between the Secretariat and host country that includes clear roles and responsibilities for key communications activities.

#### **Lessons learned and potential improvement of processes established by Parties**

20. One of the roles of the Standing Committee, as specified in Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities, roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of countries under*

*the Convention*, is to provide guidance and advice to the Secretariat on the preparation of meetings. The same Resolution foresees the establishment of a subgroup on the next COP. The Secretariat is therefore seeking the advice of the Standing Committee on matters related to future meetings of the COP and the establishment of the Subgroup on COP14 at SC57.

21. To facilitate more efficient management and decision making by Contracting Parties at future meetings of the COP, consideration could be given to:
  - a. Timing of the COP: Consideration could be given to holding future COPs in June or July. This would provide additional time after the COP for following established processes and ensuring that preparatory work is well completed in advance of the subsequent meetings of the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).
  - b. Timing and process for submission of proposals: In accordance with Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure, the deadline for submission by Contracting Parties of proposals to be considered by the COP is normally “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”. However, according to Rule 10, the Secretariat’s deadline for posting documents in advance of the Standing Committee is three months prior to the meeting. This incoherence in timing creates challenges for the Secretariat in preparing and making meeting documents available to Parties before all proposals have been submitted by Contracting Parties.
  - c. Schedule and sequence of meetings including regional pre-COP meetings: A considerable number of meetings were scheduled in 2018, namely the 21st meeting of the STRP (STRP21) in January, five regional pre-COP meetings in February and March, SC54 from 23 to 27 April, COP13 from 21 to 29 October, SC55 on 21 October and SC56 on 29 October. This was a result of the timeline established with the COP being held in October and the expectation that proposals for draft resolutions be considered in all these meetings, even if the Rules of Procedure only refer to consideration by the Standing Committee. This put a very heavy workload on the Secretariat, in terms of document preparation and meeting organization, but also in terms of fundraising for five regional pre-COP meetings and COP13 in the same year. In addition, the timing of the regional pre-COP meetings in 2018 did not allow for the subsequent timely submission of amended proposals to the Secretariat for publishing 60 days in advance of SC54. Consideration should be given to the timing and purpose of regional meetings as it is not clear if such meetings are the best way to consult on proposals for draft resolutions, given the deadlines for document preparation and distribution that the Secretariat is asked to follow as well as the experience at COP13 that most of the negotiation took place in working groups. The Secretariat has raised with the Facilitation Working Group (FWG) and the Standing Committee the need to review the sequence of meetings and timelines for submission of documents and proposals for draft resolutions to enable the Secretariat to meet the Parties’ expectations. Other options, suggested at the Group’s request and drawn from the operations of other Conventions, include: having full Standing Committee meetings only in the years in which the COP does not meet; and holding regional meetings immediately before the COP (and at the same venue) with the option of holding other regional meetings to share experience in implementation, for interested hosts to organize, including in the context of Ramsar Regional Initiatives.

- d. Length of meetings: At its first full meeting after a meeting of the COP, the Standing Committee establishes the exact dates of the next ordinary meeting of the Conference (in accordance with Rule 4.2) and the provisional agenda for that meeting (in accordance with Rule 8). The COP is generally seven or eight days in length. Consideration could be given to adding a day. In particular, consideration could be given to having a meeting of five days, followed by a break of two days to allow for all document processing and translation to be completed) followed by the final two days of adoption of Resolutions.
  
- e. Working programme: In establishing a working programme for the meeting, it may be preferable to have items that may need to be considered by a working group taken up early in the meeting so that working groups can be established and complete their work as early as possible.