

Provisional Report and Decisions of the 57th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Wednesday 26 June 2019

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

Agenda item 20: Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, including work plan for 2019-2021

1. The Chair of the STRP presented document SC57 Doc.20 Rev.1, detailing the process for appointing STRP members and containing the draft STRP work plan for the 2019-2021 triennium. He sought guidance from the Standing Committee on:
 - direction for any follow-up to the *Global Wetland Outlook*;
 - direction on the approach to sequencing the delivery of prioritized work;
 - possible ways of sourcing funding for the implementation of tasks contained in the approved STRP work plan (2019-2021), if necessary; and
 - guidance as to how the preliminary draft terms of reference for the Ramsar Culture Network set out in Annex 3 to the document should be taken forward.
2. Participants recognized the success of the *Global Wetland Outlook* and its value as a branding tool for Ramsar. Some advocated periodic updates covering areas where there was rapid environmental change; others believed that care should be taken not to dilute the brand by producing updates before significant new information was available. The suggestion was made that the forthcoming 50th anniversary of the Convention could serve as an opportunity to focus attention on the *Outlook*. Regarding priorities, some participants believed that a flexible approach could be adopted to allow the STRP to take advantage of funding opportunities that might arise while others indicated some of their priorities. Some expressed concern on the involvement of STRP National Focal Points to provide inputs to the STRP work and others indicated that previously submitted comments had not been fully taken into account and questioned the appropriateness of the STRP in developing terms of reference for the Ramsar Culture Network. They believed that proposed budget allocations for some activities were high.
3. Interventions were made by Algeria, Austria, Australia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Dominican Republic, France, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Panama, Switzerland, Uganda and the United States of America.
4. The Chair of the Standing Committee asked all interested Contacting Parties to submit comments so that a revised work plan could be produced for consideration at a later session.

Agenda item 18: Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly

5. The Secretary General noted that in Decision SC55-12 the Standing Committee had instructed the Secretariat, with support from an informal group of interested Contracting Parties, to bring forward a structured proposal regarding the possibility of the Convention obtaining observer status at the United Nations General Assembly, taking into account the various options, for consideration at SC57.
6. The Secretariat had contacted all Parties to determine if any were interested in pursuing the process. As a result a small informal group had been convened, comprising Bolivia, Chad, Colombia, Guinea, Uruguay and the United States of America. Four of the members participated in a teleconference on 17 May 2019.
7. Bolivia presented the report of the informal group included as Annex xx to this report, with three recommendations for Standing Committee consideration for the way forward on the observer status:
 - a) Endorsement by SC57 of the continuity of the observer status informal group;
 - b) Analysis of the different options and other options that might have not yet been addressed including the inputs from the legal advisor;
 - c) Recommendation to allocate funds from the surplus for the independent analysis to be presented to SC58.
8. During interventions, participants noted that the question of the legal status of the Secretariat had been addressed at length in document Ramsar COP10 DOC.20 Addendum 1. In view of the difficulties likely to be encountered in obtaining observer status for the Secretariat, several participants advocated undertaking a creative approach, including working through ECOSOC and permanent missions at the United Nations headquarters. It was noted that observer status would be of particular value in helping the Convention engage effectively in global fora and processes such as UN-Water, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals; however concerns were expressed regarding the financial implications of pursuing the process.
9. Interventions were made by Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mexico, Switzerland, Uganda and the United States of America.

Decision SC57-12: The Standing Committee agreed the following way forward on the observer status:

- a) **Endorsement by SC57 of the continuity of the Observer Status Working Group (previously informal group) with the inclusion of Mexico, the Russian Federation and Switzerland;**
- b) **Analysis of the different options and other options that might have not yet been addressed including the inputs from the legal advisor and the ones received from Parties during the meeting;**
- c) **(Recommendation to allocate funds from the surplus for the independent analysis to be presented to Standing Committee 58) subject to the approval of the sub group of finance and the availability of resources.**

Agenda item 21.1: Follow up to COP13 and preparation of COP14 - Report of the Secretariat on COP13

10. The Secretariat summarized document SC57 Doc.21.1 and noted key findings from the review of COP13 and its preparation and implementation, observing that the Secretariat had benefited from and continued to benefit from:
 - a better Secretariat structure to manage meetings, both of the Conference of Contracting Parties and of subsidiary bodies;
 - more formal procedures and working groups to plan for COP13, and follow-up actions such as a review of the model hosting agreement, and the ongoing update of the Secretariat's COP Handbook; and
 - the new CRM system to manage contacts and registration processes.
11. The Secretariat highlighted new processes applied and results achieved during COP13.
12. Relevant findings included that:
 - the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Convention provides an opportunity for coordinated messaging at COP14 and World Wetlands Day in 2021;
 - holding COP14 in July 2021 would enable timely preparation and follow-up, and better sequencing of lead-up events, so as not to concentrate the demands on funders and the Secretariat in the COP year;
 - the deadlines for Contracting Parties to submit proposals for draft resolutions to the final full Standing Committee meeting of the triennium, and for the Secretariat to publish documents for that meeting, could be more coherent;
 - COP14 could be extended by one day, possibly dedicated to production of final draft resolution texts.
13. Participants welcomed the progress of the Secretariat and the achievements noted above to facilitate a successful Conference, while underlining the need to limit the number of draft resolutions and ensure faster sharing of inputs on draft resolutions. Protocols for including commitments for third parties in resolution texts, such as those used for GEF resolutions, could be considered in advance. The added cost of an extra day was noted, but its potential value recognized. Engagement with STRP members, events related to the 50th anniversary and youth events were noted as possible opportunities.
14. The significance and awareness-raising potential of the 50th anniversary were acknowledged along with the need for a robust and structured response.
15. It was noted that the sequencing and mandate of pre-COP regional meetings fell within the mandate of the Effectiveness Working Group.
16. Interventions were made by Australia, France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of the Contracting Parties in Europe, and the United States of America.

Decision SC57-13: The Standing Committee requested that the Subgroup on COP14 include in its remit the identification of effective actions to mark the 50th anniversary of the Convention, and to engage with other Contracting Parties as appropriate to achieve this.

Agenda item 21.1 Bis: Follow up to COP13 and preparation of COP14 - Oral report of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Award on Innovation

17. The Secretariat recalled that through Decision SC55-15, the Standing Committee had confirmed that presentation of the Ramsar Award for Wetland Innovation should be deferred for six months, pending clarification of legal issues affecting the recipient. The legal issues had not been resolved in the interim period.

Decision SC57-14: The Standing Committee decided that the Ramsar Award for Wetland Innovation for 2018 should not be presented.

Agenda item 21.2: Follow up to COP13 and preparation of COP14 - COP14 Host and establishment of the Subgroup on COP14

18. The Secretary General outlined that, as no formal offer to host COP14 had been received by COP13, the Conference had set a new deadline for offers, of one month before SC57. The Secretariat received two formal offers by 24 May 2019; one withdrew, leaving an offer by China.
19. China informed the Standing Committee that its offer had been confirmed by the State Council on 6 May, and, after reading the letter of invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, formally passed it to the Secretary General. A video and a presentation introducing the proposed host city, Wuhan in Hubei Province, were presented.

Decision SC57-15: The Standing Committee accepted by acclamation the offer of China to host the 14th Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties in Wuhan.