

Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of the report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel;
- ii. consider and provide direction on the draft Global Wetland Outlook (special edition); and
- iii. provide guidance regarding undertaking further work on the Blue Carbon task (task 5.1), in accordance with the terms of Resolution XIII.14, sub-paragraphs 15 b), c) and d).

Introduction

1. The present report covers the work of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), from the publishing of document SC57 Doc.20 *Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, including draft work plan for 2019-2021* on 6 June 2019 through to May 2020. The report provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed during this period.
2. In particular, this report of the Chair of the STRP covers:
 - a. The appointment of a new STRP Chair for the remainder of the 2019-2021 triennium;
 - b. The 23rd meeting of the STRP (STRP23);
 - c. Progress with the STRP work plan 2019-2021:
 - i. Highest priority tasks;
 - ii. Medium and lower priority tasks; and
 - ii. Ad-hoc advisory tasks and other requests;
 - d. STRP participation in global meetings; and
 - e. Information on the STRP's preparation of recommendations on the use of population estimates when applying Criterion 6 for the designation and update of Wetlands of International Importance.

Appointment of a new STRP Chair for the remainder of the triennium

3. On 13 March 2020, in line with the terms of Resolution XII.5 *New framework for delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance on the Convention*, the Management Working Group

appointed Lei Guangchun as new Chair of the STRP for the remainder of the 2019-2021 triennium, following the resignation of David Stroud on 21 November 2019. Professor Lei has served in the STRP since 2016, as a scientific member and currently as a technical member. During the transition period, Lisa-Maria Rebelo assumed the interim leadership of the Panel, with the support of the Secretariat, to ensure the continuity of work on the highest priority tasks.

23rd meeting of the STRP

4. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Management Working Group decided to cancel STRP23, which was scheduled to take place from 16 to 20 March 2020, in the interest of public health and safety. Accordingly the Secretariat, in consultation with the STRP Chair, is organizing a series of online conferences for each of the highest priority tasks with the working groups established at STRP22.¹ A number of conferences have been already held with the task leads for the highest priority tasks to revise timelines and organise the remainder of the work to ensure timely delivery of these tasks. The possibility of holding face-to-face workshops will be assessed later in the year.

Update on progress with the STRP work plan 2019-2021

Highest priority tasks

5. **Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) – special edition:** A working plan and annotated outline of contents have been developed and work is ongoing for different sections. The proposed outline has been built around the highest priority tasks and information from these will be integrated. Task leads will be holding a call and will circulate a revised timeline to the working group in the following weeks.
6. The Standing Committee at its 57th meeting (SC57) instructed the Panel to align the GWO with the theme of the 50th anniversary of the Convention. Given that a theme has not been determined as of May 2020, the STRP will continue to progress this task and find ways to align it with the theme once a theme is approved by the Standing Committee.
7. **Wetlands and sustainable agriculture (task 1.2):** A consultant (IHE Delft Institute for Water Education) has been engaged, after a tendering process in line with the Secretariat's procurement procedures, to assist with a meta-analysis of literature and case studies on the positive and negative impacts of agriculture practices on wetlands, and responses, including future scenarios. A progress report has been produced and will be circulated to the working group for feedback. A call will be scheduled with the working group in May 2020. A template for case studies, along with a draft outline for a policy brief and briefing note have also been drafted. A call for case studies, using the template, will be issued to the STRP Network.

¹ The four STRP highest priority tasks (as designated by SC57) are: (1) Global Wetland Outlook (GWO): Special edition for the 50th anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands; (2) Task 1.2 (Wetlands and sustainable agriculture): Compiling and reviewing positive and negative impacts of agricultural practises on wetlands including extent of changes in area from agricultural land conversion since 1970s, and how adverse impacts can be avoided in the future; (3) Task 2.2 (Peatland re-wetting/ restoration): Elaborating on practical experiences of restoration methods for tropical peatlands; (4) Task 5.1 (Wetlands and blue carbon): Desktop study of coastal blue carbon ecosystems in Ramsar Sites (consistent with relevant IPCC guidelines).

8. **Peatland rewetting/restoration (task 2.2):** A consultant has been engaged (Greifswald Mire Centre), after a tendering process in line with the Secretariat's procurement procedures. The consultant will draft a technical manual and a short guidance document focusing on practical restoration and re-wetting methods for peatland types not covered by Ramsar guidance, such as tropical peatlands. An annotated outline has been produced. The working group will be drafting a policy brief building on information from the technical report and guidance documents. The working group will hold a call in May or June 2020 when drafts from the consultancy are ready for consultation. Funds to help with the delivery of this task have been generously provided by the Government of Norway, for which the STRP is very grateful.

9. **Wetlands and blue carbon (task 5.1):** A consultant (Silvestrum Climate Associates) has been engaged, after a tendering process in line with the Secretariat's procurement procedures, to help with a desktop review of coastal blue carbon ecosystems in Wetlands of International Importance. The consultancy report is almost completed as of May 2020. The working group will hold a conference call in the weeks to come, and a call for information on extent of blue carbon ecosystems in Ramsar Sites will be sent to Contracting Parties. Funds to help with the delivery of this task have been generously provided by the Government of Norway, for which the STRP is very grateful.

10. Regarding phase two of this task (sub-paragraphs 15 b), c) and d) of Resolution XIII.14²), the Group recommends, as outlined in its work plan, developing terms of reference (TORs) for undertaking such work in the future, given the limited capacity, resources and time to do so this triennium. The consultancy report for Task 5.1 a) will help inform the TORs of these tasks, as follows:
 - 5.1 b): By completing Task 5.1a, a start will be made on compiling this database for carbon stocks. Once Task 5.1a is finalized, we will evaluate what needs to be done to accomplish this task using the IPCC guidelines and will continue to build the database, particularly for greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics. By the end of the triennium, TORs describing the plan for finalizing this task will be completed, with the expectation that Task 5.1b can be finished early next triennium.

 - 5.1 c): Detailed TORs will be developed for this task. This will also build on Task 5.1 a) and the information on the extent and condition of blue carbon ecosystems across Wetlands of International Importance. At the end of the triennium, the Panel will identify the possible suite of ecosystem services provided by blue carbon wetlands (including climate change and adaptation benefits) and begin a desktop evaluation of any methods (including rapid methods) currently in use that could be used to prioritize sites for conservation and restoration.

 - 5.1 d): Draft TORs will be developed for this task this triennium.

² The text from the tasks in the Resolution is as follows:

b) reviewing and analysing regional modelling of carbon stocks, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics in coastal blue-carbon ecosystems and providing information, as appropriate, to the IPCC to inform future updates to the Wetlands Supplement;

c) developing guidance for prioritizing coastal blue-carbon ecosystems for conservation and restoration that includes inter alia: climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits; the range of other potential ecosystem benefits and services; and assessment of costs relative to benefits; and

d) reviewing and, as appropriate, updating existing guidance on the preparation of plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue-carbon ecosystems at Ramsar Sites where such a review could include development of case studies with regional experts to illustrate how guidance has been applied.

Medium and lower priority tasks

11. Given that STRP members have reported having limited capacity, the Management Working Group instructed the Panel to focus its capacity and resources on the highest priority tasks.
12. It is worth noting that the Government of Finland generously provided funds to support the delivery of task 4.1, *Develop guidance on integrating gender issues in the implementation of the Convention*. However, the Management Working Group instructed the Panel to focus on its highest priority tasks and ask the Secretariat to assist with moving the task forward. The STRP is very grateful for the support of the Government of Finland.

Ad-hoc advisory tasks and other requests

13. **Criterion 6 – use of population estimates:** The Secretariat requested the STRP’s advice in October 2019 on the use of population estimates when applying Criterion 6 for the designation and update of Wetlands of International Importance, after receiving a request for advice from the Government of Australia on the matter. The former STRP Chair provided preliminary comments to the Secretariat. Given that the advice needs to be provided by the Panel, a working group led by Mr Stroud is being established to produce draft recommendations, which will be circulated to the full Panel and presented for the consideration of the Standing Committee once finalized.

Participation in meetings of technical bodies of other multilateral environmental agreements

14. **The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES):** The former STRP Chair represented the STRP at the 7th Session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES7) from 29 April to 04 May 2019, in Paris, France. He attended meetings of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and followed technical discussions throughout the meeting.
15. **The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA):** The former STRP Chair also attended the 15th meeting of the AEWA Technical Committee (TC15) from 09 to 11 April 2019.